

Dominican Volunteers International



Bulletin

july 2011

GOING BEYOND THE FRONTIERS



MEXICO



**DOMINICAN
REPUBLIC**

**TRINIDAD AND
TOBAGO**



CONGO

KENYA





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**GOD IS IN THE HEART OF AFRICA AND
AFRICA IS IN THE HEART OF GOD**

DOMINICAN MISSION IN THE HEART OF AFRICA

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This is the first time I visited Africa. Maybe because of that I feel powerfully attracted to its landscape, its people, their way of life, and their way of sharing all they have – even if they live in extreme conditions of poverty.

I would like to share with you all – our volunteers, brothers and sisters, laity, and friends of the Dominican Family – some brief notes from my trip to Kenya and Congo. My aim is to take you by the hand and to bring you on a journey into your own heart. I will do that by sharing with you what each of our missionary men and women experience as she/he gives his/her life to all those whom the Lord has placed in her/his path. In a nutshell, they experience a profound and rewarding kind of love for our brothers and sisters who live in the farthest places of our world.

First, we visited Kenya, Nairobi. We were invited to participate in the Annual Assembly of the Dominican Sisters of Africa (DSA). The assembly's theme was: "Preparing for the future in Africa with courage, realism and hope". This



theme made clear that the sisters are aware of the main needs of their continent. At the same time, they are looking for new and authentic ways to be open to all peoples and to find means to help them to improve people's lives. This is not an easy task, but something is clear: the sisters do not allow defeat to overpower their efforts – an attitude we certainly should learn from them.



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The sisters know that the power of the Word was not bestowed upon cowards. Now more than ever, the sisters feel compelled to work hard. They are like the father who hears his children's daily plea for bread and goes out to find food for them day in and day out. He will not let them die of hunger. He will not get tired. He knows that, should hopelessness overpower him or daily monotony defeat him, he would not be able to find food for his children and that would surely mean to watch his children die of hunger.

Another example of endurance and steadfastness I witnessed was that of a seven-year-old boy from Isiro. Every morning - very early in the morning, right after Mass - he carries a bucket in his head, which is filled with some kind of doughnuts that his mother made in the early hours of the day for him to sell before going to school. He earns some money this way to help sustain his family and to cover the small tuition he has to pay in order to go to school - a small sum by our standards, but hard to come by in his world and without that he would not be allowed to continue with his studies. This, my brothers and sisters, is the harsh reality faced not only to a small boy, but also by to many children and adults in Africa.

In this regard, the words of Sr. Petronila during the assembly's opening presentation invited us to open our ears and listen, to open our eyes and look at what is happening here and now. She challenged us to attend to the present needs in order to be able to change the future. In sum, we ought to look at the future in Africa by asking: What is needed in the here and now? We ought to look at the Continent with realism and with great hope, knowing that the Lord never ignores the pleas of the humble and the needy.

After leaving Kenya, and Kinshasa - the capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo - we went to Isiro, a city located to the north of Congo. I could see from the airplane the immense forests that populate this country, its few giant buildings,

and the solitary roads where very seldom a car goes by. We made this trip in a small airplane - of only 50 places! It all seemed somewhat strange to me, especially when our suitcases appeared alongside the airplane in less than five minutes after our landing. But it got even stranger when I discovered that the only means of transportation into the city were bicycles and motorcycles in which up to four people are accommodated in order to save extra trips and money. So, even though we were the only ones for whom an old jeep was waiting, we decided to give a ride to as many people as possible of those who could not find any other means of transportation to arrive at their final destination.

On our way through an unpaved road, we were able to contemplate not only the landscape, but also the people on both sides of the road. Apparently, everybody was trying to get home: Men pushing their heavy-loaded bicycles - so much so that they could not even ride on them; women with their babies strapped to their back or with bundles of wood - or of any other imaginable thing - tied to their foreheads while balancing in both hands whatever items they were trying to sell on their way home. I realized right away, however, that the biggest group was composed of children. They came from every path and dirt road and into the main road where they surrounded us on all sides. By circumstance, we even met a group of people who were coming in the opposite direction to our jeep. They were shouting and singing very loudly. It was a burial.

It did not take long for me to be filled with great admiration for this people. In spite of their great poverty, they always received us with big smiles; with dances and songs; and with a small gift - a hen, three oranges, three eggs, three avocados... three, since we were three guests. They gave us what they could, usually something small, which often turned to be all they had.

Afterwards, we visited all the many local Do-

minican communities of friars and sisters. We experienced the warm brotherhood and sisterhood proper of our Dominican family in all of them. We also visited the lay fraternities, whose membership ascends to more than 300. They received us with great enthusiasm and joy. We were profoundly moved when we were told that some of them had walked more than 64 kilometers to be with us.

A little bit later we visited Orphanages. I was shocked to find many children who were only some months old, and who were already orphaned. The sisters told us that many mothers contract malaria and due to their physical weakness they are not able to overcome the disease.

I was edified to confirm again and again that, even though extreme and oppressive poverty is striking in this place, the desire to overcome and to eradicate it from the entire continent is even stronger.

After witnessing such levels of poverty, I found it difficult to believe that Congo is the richest country in gold, diamonds and other minerals in Africa. I could not help but wonder who hoards all this wealth? At the same time, I felt anger at the unjust circumstances in which most people have to live: there is not running water; electricity operates only once a week and exclusively during three hours; the general population is constantly under attack at the hand of the rebel forces; there are almost no health services or Mass media; there are high levels of sexual violence; women have minimum or non-existent rights; etc. All these and many other factors have made of the Democratic Republic of Congo an unbearable

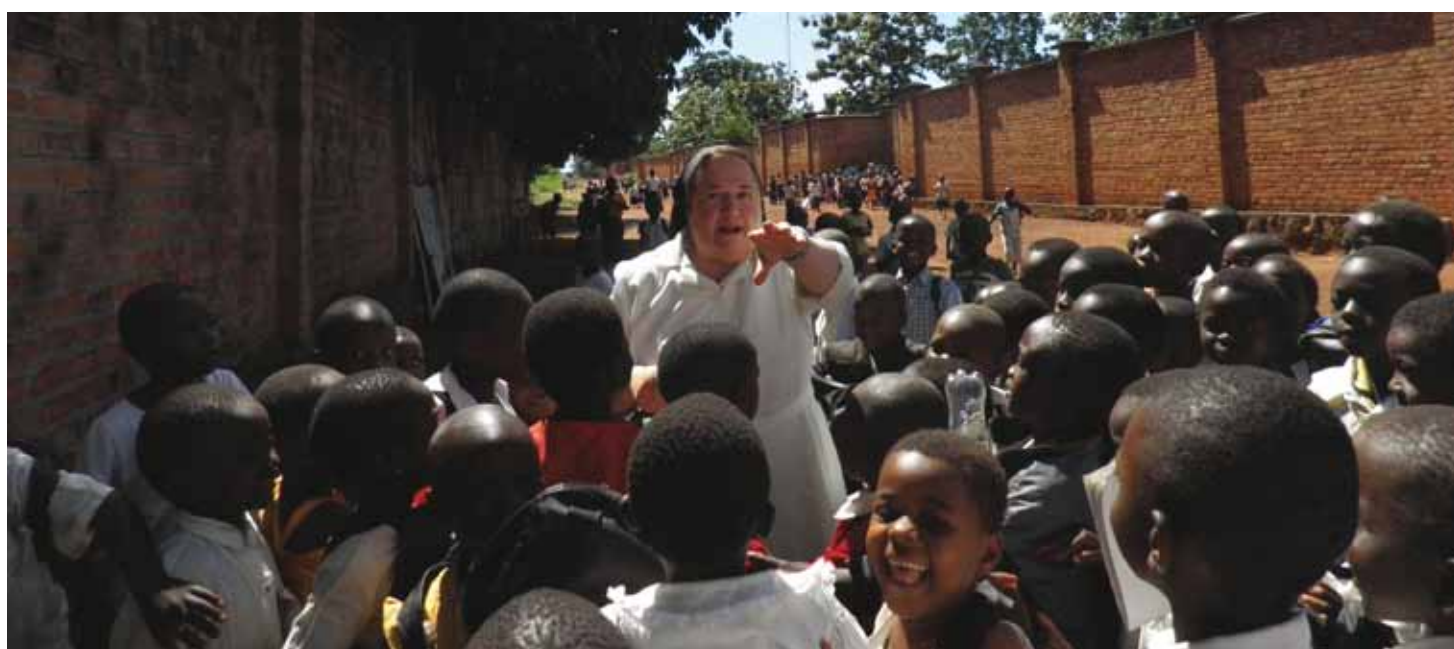
“Even though extreme and oppressive poverty is striking in this place, the desire to overcome and to eradicate it from the entire continent is even stronger

and punishing place – especially for women.

Because of my role as the directress of DVI (Dominican Volunteers International), I received many requests from our Dominican communities to send volunteers to our missions there. I certainly came back home with the names of all those who requested aid in my mind and in my heart.

For that reason, I would like to extend here and now an open invitation to all our young and not so young volunteers: Would you consider putting to the service of our sisters and brothers most in need the many gifts the Lord has given you? If you would like to say “yes,” but are not yet sure, just remember what Blessed John Paul II used to say to the youth: “Be not afraid!” It is to you that Jesus is calling, reminding you that “the harvest is plenty, but the laborers are few.”

lucía fernández, OP



M. Ángeles Advertidos

from México to Trinidad and Tobago

It has been almost two months since my arrival in Trinidad. This has been a very enriching experience, especially because everything is new and different for me. I have met a lot of people who have offered me their friendship and support, which I totally appreciate. I am convinced that we all share the Dominican charisma and a way of life rooted in love, in preaching, and in our apostolic mission. We build strong bonds and that makes us into a community based on



truth and charity towards our neighbor. We go to many different places in which we witness God's greatness and love. I have been adapting to my new circumstances and trying to give the best of me in order to fulfill the mission God has entrusted me.

Presently, I am involved in several projects. Some projects are directly related to the community's office and have to do with communications. For example, I update the St. Dominic's Children Home Web page, the Blog, each child's Genograms; etc.

I am starting to work with this community's

Arlene Greenidge, from her receiving community, writes:

"Maria is doing well. She helped in putting together the latest issue of Newsline: www.sdchnewline.webs.com. She has been spending time getting to know the children and youths. She has been very helpful in the office helping us update the children's database and other records. We look forward to working together in promoting the Young Dominicans' Movement and in building the Dominican ethos here at the Home as we work towards the transformation of this institution.

Maria has integrated well with the younger members of our community and with our social welfare team. She prays with our community and shares our table for meals and times of celebration. She has a lovely sense of humor and can be a lot of fun. But there is also depth and experience in her and this will emerge more and more as we get into our projects.

Maria also has good rapport with the older members of our community."

Dominican Youth Movement – young men and women from 11 to 16 years old. I am introducing them to the International Dominican Youth Movement's main ideas. They are excited about been a part of a great ministry called IDYM.

I am also teaching them Spanish once a week, since they are the ones going to the meeting of the World Youth Day in Madrid (Spain - August 2011). They are also really excited about this.

**We have a
New
DVI Brochure!**



Jorge Mestre

from Portugal to East Timor

Internet access here is very difficult. However, I would like to share with you a little bit of what I have experienced since my arrival.

The welcoming celebration that the sisters and girls prepared for me was very beautiful. It was like coming back home after a long absence. I saw again many of the faces I took with me, deep in my heart, as I went back home for the first time. That filled me with profound joy! Life continues to be very difficult here. Hardship is written all over the faces of the town's people and of the children.

We have already begun activities at the school. Sister Marcela is a true example of the missionary spirit of this Congregation. Unfortunately, the world very seldom hears news about the suffering poor in Timor. I am the only "westerner" living in this community at the moment and I realize that, in spite of our cultural differences, we have much in common. We have the same *raison d'être* to be here.

Oecussi is an astonishing place: its mountains are reflected on the sea and the vast and beautiful landscape makes us aware of our own smallness. Unfortunately, the human landscape is very different. I cross paths with many boys and girls during the day and all show signs of the same sadness and loneliness. Poverty here is not only about lacking material things; it is also about not having someone to share with. I am painfully aware that what is truly lacking here is love. It is really difficult to put into words the awesome change that happens when children enter our boarding school: there is no wealth here – in fact, we live in an "organized poverty;" however, what we offer here is love aplenty. Love feeds our *joie de vivre*. Love transforms a girl's bitter face into that of a graceful princess... a Dominican princess!

A big "thanks" to DVI for giving me the opportunity to be here. I would also like to greet all DVI's volunteers who are or will soon be on the missions. Do not forget that our legs may take us places, but only our heart will show the way.

Rocío Huamancondor Paz

from Perú to Dominican Republic

During her mission experience, Rocío has been able to visit Haiti. We offer here some of her comments:

A millionaire investment... in dignity



Haiti, the poorest country in America, has had to face the damage caused by an earthquake and an epidemic of cholera in the last year. Some days ago I had the opportunity to visit this land and travel through one of its border

communities named Cacaos. I have seen naked boys and girls walking under the inclement sun while loaded with buckets filled with contaminated water. I have seen women walk on foot for many kilometers on a dilapidated road to find some water to prepare some cookies made with mud and salt. I have seen under-nourished men who make tremendous efforts to go to work.

- "What you see now is nothing," told me a Brazilian Dominican missionary sister. "A few months ago I saw many Haitians drop dead because of the cholera epidemic. The Dominican hospital at the border was jammed packed. Sick people were dying on the streets and there was nothing we could do. How could we ask people to take precautions against the disease, if they did not even have potable water?"

Her words greatly distressed me. I thought about how fatal it must have been. Besides the striking poverty, they had to face a terrible

pandemic. To these scenes of dire need and desolation, other scene was singed into my mind: that of deforestation.

Unfortunately, there are some people who take advantage of situations of extreme need – like the one faced by Haiti – to benefit themselves. Regrettably, there are some who make profit with the needs of others. In this way, how can a country achieve progress? Besides the alarming economic problems faced by the Haitian people, they must put up with rampant corruption and impunity.

A deeper look only shows that there are several institutions that do not uphold the dignity of the Haitian people. It is worrisome to find people who think of Haitians as destitute and who find it meritorious to help them by feeding them some crumbs of bread. I think that we will be able to help Haitian only when we see them as people with great potential.

Rocío also wrote a letter regarding her mission in el Seibo:

I can say, without hesitation, that people from the Dominican Republic are welcoming by nature. They are also very close-knit and always ready to help you – even if they do not know you! The small town called El Seibo has offered me an opportunity to get involved with its challenges and potentialities through our news program in el Seibo Radio or through Our Lady of the Rosary School or through their Health Center or their Agricultural Project.

It is pleasant to go out for a walk through the streets of el Seibo and to hear people calling out your name to let you know that they have listened to the news reports and that they have some news for you! It is equally rewarding to hoop up in a “guagua” (minibus) and to be engaged by a mother who wants to know if her girl is doing well in the journalism club. It is amazing to be invited by a worker from the Agricultural Project to her girl’s graduation ceremony...

It is incredible that I feel so at home in el Seibo in such a short time. This is so much so that when I go to another part of the country and they ask me where I come from, I answer: “from el Seibo.” They, of course, look at me and reply: “but you are not from the Dominican Republic!” To which I reply: “no, but I live in el Seibo.” The relationship with the diocesan parishes in el Seibo has also been enriching, even though it is a very different religious reality from the one I am used to.

My adaptation to the place was and conti-



nues to be an interesting process. It was neither extremely difficult nor a walk in the park. I am, after all, dealing with a different culture. For example, it was very difficult for me to get used to the level of noise here. Noise levels here are very high. People speak really loudly here! Nevertheless, I have gotten used to it little by little, to the point that I do not longer find noise as bothersome as before. What I cannot get used to is to not having my Peruvian food!

My work in the mission furthers my personal growth. In one single day, I go from being a lawyer who conducts workshops with the members of Acción Verapaz or communication’s workshops in the radio station, to being a young woman who cleans the floor at the Health Center or plants red peppers in the Agricultural Project. I like the diverse nature of my work.

Through it all, I have learned to be tolerant and to listen because when one listens and observes without judging, one learns the most. I have also learned that, in spite of the surrounding poverty, there is great human wealth, welcoming and joyful here.

I have found many similarities regarding the economic realities of the Dominican Republic and Peru. I have also found some common potentialities shared by both nations, which I believe are about to bear fruit.

I realized that the Dominican Republic is an attractive country for tourists and because of that, food, transportation and lodging prices are very high. Nevertheless there is a different face, apart from that of the touristy Dominican Republic: the face of a huge sector of the population that does not share the benefits of the income generated through tourism and, on the contrary, is heavily burdened by the high costs of life.

Renessa Tang

from Trinidad and Tobago
to México

After an entire day of travelling from my home country Trinidad (a Caribbean island north of Venezuela) from early in the morning of Saturday May 14, 2011, through Miami, I arrived at my mission destination – the CCIDD the Cuernavaca Centre for Intercultural Dialogue and Development in Cuernavaca, Mexico around 11 PM. I departed from Piarco International Airport, Trinidad, at about 7:30 AM after getting only about three hours sleep that night due to all the excitement about leaving and spending time with my loved ones before my departure. I arrived at Miami International Airport at about 11:30 AM. This was my first time passing through Miami to get a connecting flight to Mexico City. I was overwhelmed at the sheer size of the airport and I underestimated the length of time it would take me to get to the different checkpoints, clear immigration, claim my baggage, clear customs and board my flight. There was an unusually large number of people travelling through the airport that day resulting in long lines to clear immigration and one could not easily just push ahead. At around 12:30 PM, close to my flight time of 1:00 PM I was clearing US immigration and being subjected to security checks. Due to my late clearing, by the time I reached the departure gate I missed my flight and was informed that I would have to get the later 3:30 PM flight. After calling CCIDD to inform them of this, I had two hours to kill and spent the time getting better acquainted with the enormous Miami airport and browsing through the airport stores.

One reflection I had during my plane ride to Mexico City was inspired by reading a homily by St. Gregory the Great, which homily on Christ the Good Shepherd was reprinted in that Sunday's Trinidad Catholic News. St. Gregory in his homily referred to a "foolish traveller who is so distracted by the pleasant meadows through which he is passing that he forgets where he is going". While St. Gregory uses this in the context of not allowing the charm of success (whether

“ Sr. Kathy Long, OP
says about her: "We
are enjoying Renessa
very much. She is doing
well with being immersed
into our life in Mexico."



fame or fortune) to seduce us, pilgrims on earth, from the focus of building and reaching the kingdom of heaven through the gate of Christ, his words spoke to me in my own travel context at the airport. At Miami due to circumstances of my flight delay, I was able to put myself in the shoes of the foolish traveler passing through the pleasant meadows of Miami, momentarily losing sight of the fact that Miami was not my final destination. My final DVI mission destination -CCIDD, Cuernavaca awaited and Sor Lucia of DVI and my hosts at CCIDD in Mexico would not be amused if I got lost and went astray. I had become distracted and overwhelmed by the many attractions Miami airport had to offer. After this distraction I regained focus in time and left the alluring sights of the airport and smells of the Miami restaurants to ensure that I caught my next flight and would not forever remain a lost sheep in the complex maze that was the Miami airport. After clearing the departure



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gate and boarding the plane to Mexico City, the flight was delayed for an hour and a half which resulted in me not arriving at Mexico City Airport until around 9:00 PM.

Isabel Reyes Armella, a program staff member at CCIDD kindly met me at Mexico City Airport and accompanied me on a two hour bus ride to Cuernavaca during which I mostly slept and chatted with Isabel. Upon reaching the Cuernavaca bus station I was warmly welcomed by Sr. Kathy of CCIDD and transported to the CCIDD – a five-minute ride from the Cuernavaca bus station. During my first night in the City of the Eternal Spring – nickname for the city, strangely enough, other than the need to adjust my ear drums to the change in altitude in this hilly city, I did feel comfortable as if I was at home.

All of the persons I have met so far have been so friendly and warm. On Sunday I officially meet the group of seven students here from University of British Columbia, Canada, who are here for three months to study immigration, which is a subject that interests me immensely. I was previously interested in the DVI Ciudad Juarez House of Immigrants’ project which was recently terminated due to the lack of viability of the program. So here is a new opportunity to delve into the topic!! For the three months that they are here I will be sharing my knowledge and ideas on immigration with them and I will also be enriched by their research and ideas. Also I met the retired Dominican Sisters of the Incarnate Word, Sisters Aline, Jacqueline and Rosa who reside at CCIDD

and the other persons on the CCIDD staff. Contrary to what I expected previously, I was eased into the program – so rather than being a Program Staff Member right away I was allowed to be a participant in my first ten-day cross cultural immersion experience to be exposed to what is entailed. During the first four days of this experience which started on Monday, two days after I arrived, I was exposed to the critical education philosophy of Paulo Freire, social analysis in a cultural context, field trips to an impoverished community in Mexico, an exciting Mexican history lesson by Professor Ross Gandy who is a History and Political Science professor at the UNAM, Base Christian Communities, United Artisans cooperative and the Zapatista movement.

For the next three days of the immersion program i.e. from Friday to Sunday I had to excuse myself to accompany Sr. Kathy and Sr. Rosa to Puebla for the 15th meeting of the Dominican Justice and Peace Commission in Mexico. I had an enjoyable time meeting all the members of the Dominican family-priests, nuns, sisters and laypersons and I believe they were equally pleased to meet someone from Trinidad and to be exposed also to the culture and religious contacts of my home country. I was exposed not only to understanding and sharing ideas in Spanish on how to move forward to implement justice and peace in Mexico but also tasted some delicious food central to the Mexican culture such as ‘pozole’ and ‘chalupas’.

After my three-day trip to Puebla I came back in time to do a service exercise, which

entailed assisting a poor family in Cuernavaca in building a wall of their home and meeting Ray Plankey, the founder of CCIDD. His personal life story inspired me and confirmed that I was following the right path in leaving my job and going on DVI mission. Interestingly, Ray Plankey, after quitting his boring yet very well-paying job as an engineer started off mission as a papal volunteer being sent by the Benedictines and making his life work that of a Catholic lay missionary. He eventually founded CCIDD in 1977 to sensitize North Americans and Canadians about social justice issues in Latin America. I also had the opportunity to listen to talks by Sr. Kathy Long, O.P. and Miguel Garcia and share from my own knowledge and spirituality about the central figure in Catholic Mexico - Our Lady of Guadalupe - who is the hope, strength and protecting mother of the Mexican people and a unifying aspect of their culture. My retreat ended on Tuesday and there was a final celebration with the program participants (from Loyola University). I believe that they go back to the United States definitely enriched by their time here at CCIDD and eager to spread the word to their family and friends about the reality of the poor and oppressed in Mexico. We were also enlightened as to the misrepresentation of the Mexican situation by the media and the need for critical thought. What stood out for me in my retreat experience was the concept of caracoles - snails - in the Zapatista movement in Chiapas where independent communities have been formed with their own education, health and communication systems related to their culture. Unlike modern democracies their rate of turnover of power is much faster - every three to six months they change leaders - who are elected by all the members of the community so that power does not become centralized in any one person for too long.

During my year on mission my responsibilities as a Program Staff Member at CCIDD will range from assisting in the planning and facilitating of cross cultural immersion experiences for university students, church groups and Dominican family members, conducting spiritual reflection sessions for some of the groups, being Editor of the CCIDD Newsletter and generally assisting at the Center. For the year I will also be assisting Sr. Kathy with the Dominican Justice

and Peace Commission here in Mexico and attending the various meetings. Also some of the students and staff at CCIDD have also taken up an interest in learning to play the guitar so there are also plans ahead here to formulate a guitar club which I hope to be a part of. I really do look forward to the rest of my year ahead with Sr. Kathy, Sisters Aline, Jacqueline and Rosa, and the rest of the CCIDD staff. (To find out more about CCIDD their website is (www.ccidd.org).

News... Former Volunteers

Geisson A Omaña Pinzon from Colombia, has spent a year in the Dominican mission in Baños, Ecuador, working with the Dominican friars. He writes to us from his country, where he returned at the end of May:

"To be honest, it was easier for me to leave Colombia to go to the missions than to leave



Ecuador and return to Colombia. I was wondering what happened to me and I reached the conclusion that I do not know if/when I will be able to see all those nice people again to whom I gave my

heart. They all asked me not to leave them. They all made sure that I did not lack anything while there. They all made sure that I was well. It was so nice! Without a doubt, it has been thus far the most beautiful experience that God has given me. I hope to be able to return to visit them someday. I am indebted with them and I am profoundly grateful for their affection, cordiality and love. Since my return, I have been home, enjoying my parents. I know I want to continue studying but there are many questions regarding my future professional life and work. I leave everything into the hands of God."

Gilda and Eddie Garcia

from Guatemala

We are anxious to know what is our following step; however, as the document you send us states, "we ought not to scape steps." We are very excited, however, as well as conscious about the importance of participating in a mission, especially in another country. Gilda and I are both in pursuit of holiness and we consider serving our fellow brothers and sisters a sure way to be on our way.

Luke Samy

from England to the Philippines



I am getting increasingly excited about going to Dagat-dagatan, and have been earnestly making preparations for the mission (learning Tagalog, studying the catechism and reading books on teaching children). All that is left for me to do is to place my trust in the Lord, Who governs all things and Who will lead

me in my mission to serve Him through the service of the poor of Manila.

Jemely Mesa

from the Philippines



She is a DVI former volunteer that most of you already know. She is applying again to be a DVI volunteer in Africa. Sr. Lucía said that this is Blessing of the Holy Spirit: DVI director visited Kenya and Congo and realized how great might be the collaboration of the Dominican Vol-

unteers for their needs.

Jemely writes: "Thanks again for accepting me as volunteer and will promise to live the ideals of St. Dominic and in following Christ.."

Africa is a challenging continent and poverty is sickening but in a way I want to share the love of God that even though one is poor there could be hope and joy.. I sensed that my desire to continue serving the Lord thru DVI is intense."

Leonardo Contreras

from Italy



We are looking for a welcoming community in Latin America. Leonardo – who has already had some years of experience as a volunteer – has been with another congregation in Colombia for four years. He was assisting there with boys and

girls daily responsibilities, as well as with organizing alphabetization and human formation courses.



dominicos

**What is the Dominican
Family offering during WYD
Madrid 2011?**

**MADRID
August 16-21, 2011**

**DVI will be there with Sr. Lucía
and our former volunteer
Stephanie Greenidge.**

**We will tell you more on our
next Bulletin.**