

# MISSION HONDURAS INTERNATIONAL



BREAKING THE CYCLE OF POVERTY ... ONE CHILD AT A TIME

NEWSLETTER • MAY 2010



## MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE UNTO THE LORD!

*Fr. Don Halpin, OFM Conv., is an MHI Board Member and Spiritual Advisor. He visited Liberia Mission for the entire month of February, where he provided a loving, healing Franciscan presence and served as advisor, spiritual director, priest and compassionate listener to the mission children and staff. His presence there is greatly missed and the children and staff can't wait for his return.*

"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord." That is a Scripture that comes to mind when I think of the Liberian Mission. The noises of life are there: talk, chatter, laughter, little arguments, friend-to-friend shouting, along with commands of the house parents or mission directors. Anyone visiting cannot help but be pulled into the fullness of the life of the mission.

There is a natural mixture among the children of the mission. In an atmosphere of comfort, conversation comes easily. The conversation can have its humor, and then a seriousness enters that creates trust, a need to talk, and discussion of concerns for the future. During the entire month of February 2010, I was at the mission; the children are loveable and loving in their interaction.

The weather was hot! At times I wanted to sit outside my room and have a moment of prayer and maybe solitude, including an opportunity to cool off. Some of the children would soon gather. At one point, Jerome Cabeen, co-director of the mission (with his wife Clarisa), asked if the children were bothering me. I laughed and said I was hoping to have this time in prayer. Jerome wondered if he should chase the children away. I said: "no, they are my prayer." Sounds like Gospel, really – "... let the little children come to me."

Liberia has come through a recent history of two civil wars. Trust and listening is important for the sake of healing a nation. That comes to the heart of the mission's goal of restoration, re-spiriting, and maybe even of a re-founding. There seems to be a longing for a spiritual life around the mission: they love celebrating the Eucharist, and song, drumming, dancing all become a central feature of any liturgy.

One Friday there was the evening prayer. This was Lent already. Benjamin, who is the oldest of the residents of the mission, was leading the prayer session. He introduced the session, saying Fr. Don will lead us in the Way of the Cross. This was a surprise to me, and in some ways I was not prepared. I had no prayer source with me, even to remind me which Station came after another. The children knew! I would announce: "Third Station... Fifth Station... Eighth Station," and they would announce as if in chorus the title of that Station. I simply needed to reflect in meditation style the story of each Station. They listened with attentive awareness, and of course, the storytelling mode became all the more intense as the session continued in prayer and song.

The month went by quickly. There were important events, even one as simple as going into the hills for a re-supply of charcoal. Trips into Monrovia became a weekly experience, maybe twice a week. The coadjutor Archbishop of Monrovia came to bless the Church of St. Michael the Archangel and give the sacrament of confirmation to twenty-five of the children. The school of the mission, named for the Franciscan St. Anthony of Padua, also needed some attention.

Three days before returning to the States, I was sitting again outside my room. This was to be prayer time again. Two girls came to visit and talk. Conversation included a favorite song I had taught them. Then one of them turned to me saying, "Fr. Don, are you leaving?" And I answered, "I have to leave and go back to where I live." "We don't want you to leave," she said. A minute later, she looked at me, asking, "Fr. Don, are you crying?"

If such a mission touches the heart with affection, bonding, empathy – a little emotion will follow! I hope that the mission is a little better place after a month of my getting to know a hundred and fourteen children. Somewhere in all of that is the definition Jesus might give in the Gospel: "...the kingdom of heaven is like..."

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Fr. Don Halpin, OFM Conv.

## WELCOME TO NEW BOARD MEMBERS AND LIBERIA MISSION LEADERSHIP TEAM!



*Fr. Don Halpin, OFM Conv.*



*Jennie Martin*

Mission Honduras International is pleased to welcome two new Board Members – Fr. Don Halpin, OFM Conv., and Jennie Martin.

**Fr. Don Halpin, OFM Conv.,** joins the MHI board after serving as Spiritual Advisor since the summer of 2009. In February 2010, he visited Liberia Mission for a month. Fr. Don's ministry as a Conventual Franciscan has taken him throughout the U.S. and eventually to Africa, where he lived for 12 years. He presently resides at a retreat center at Mount St. Francis, Indiana, where his retreat work continues. Fr. Don is the director of Loftus House, where private and directed retreats are offered. MHI is deeply blessed to welcome Fr. Don to the board, as he brings many gifts to our collective mission.

**Jennie Martin** joins the board after many years of tireless volunteer work on behalf of the mission and its missionaries. Jennie and Ed Martin have been married for 32 years and own two small businesses. They are members of St. John the Evangelist in Prairieville, Louisiana, where they are involved in numerous parish ministries, including the Mission Outreach Team. Jennie is passionate about life issues and mission work, which she and Ed have been involved with for the past eight years and will do so "until God calls us home". MHI is deeply blessed to welcome Jennie to the board, as she brings her amazing passion and energy to the mission's work.

We are also pleased to introduce you to the new Liberia Mission leadership team. As you know, Jerome and Clarisa Cabeen, who have served at Liberia Mission for nearly 2 years, will be leaving this summer. We are pleased to welcome four new staff members. **Bernardine Ileto**, the new Liberia Mission Director, brings a breadth of experience in education, pastoral ministry, international mission work, and education administration. Bernardine's husband, **Brian Chan**, will serve as Medical Director, caring for the mission children, staff, and volunteers, and coordinating community projects. **Amy Spelz** joins the team as Program Coordinator for Community Development, and **Matthew Travis** will serve as Program Coordinator of Organization Development. This summer we will share detailed profiles on each of our new leaders and the many gifts they bring to Liberia Mission.

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## CELEBRATING EASTER AT LIBERIA MISSION! A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTORS

Dear friends, supporters and family  
of Mission Honduras International,

Clarisa and I would like to extend deep wishes of health and newness to you and your loved ones as we faithfully move through the Easter Season. In this season of renewal, redemption, and resurrection we celebrate the risen Christ and His glorious defeat of death and sin. As I am sure you and your family followed Christ's footsteps, it was no different for us here at Liberia Mission Incorporated. We celebrated a glorious week with prayer, song, Stations of the Cross, finally culminating in a beautiful Easter Sunday Mass that was as alive as the risen Christ. Monsignor Robert Tikpor, still strong and dedicated at the age of 84, reminded all of us of the importance of the stone being rolled away that ushered in the beginnings of life and ushered out the dominion of death.

After the Easter Mass, Monsignor Tikpor joined us at the mission for Easter lunch, and the children took part in our annual Easter egg hunt on the mission grounds. After they had finished their somewhat raucous hunt, all of the mission children enjoyed a very delicious Easter lunch of okra soup and rice with sweet cornbread, a typical Liberian dish. It was a very beautiful day that was enjoyed by all of those involved.

But our joy and celebration at Liberia Mission Incorporated didn't end with Easter Sunday. Just two days later, we welcomed into our midst Amy Spelz and Mat Travis, two new volunteers who selflessly volunteered at least a year of their lives to serve the children at our mission. The children quickly took both Amy and Mat in as one of our own, and they have already made such a huge impact in the lives of the children and Liberian work staff here at the mission. In just two more weeks we will celebrate again as Bernardine Ileto and Brian Chan arrive for the next two years. Bernardine will be the new director of Liberia Mission Incorporated while her husband Brian, who is an MD, will care for all the children, workers and volunteers at the mission. To say we are going through a re-birth and resurrection this Easter Season at Liberian Mission Incorporated would be an understatement. The hand and grace

*Continued on page 3*





## Mission Honduras International + Liberia Mission Inc.

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May 5, 2010

Dear Supporter,

All of us at Mission Honduras International/Liberia Mission Inc. remain focused on our mission to help the poor in Liberia, Honduras, and elsewhere. Please read the enclosed newsletter and learn about the life-saving work of Liberia Mission. We also feel obligated to write this letter.

Most of you on our mailing list have recently received one or more letters from APUFRAM International requesting donations on behalf of Fr. Cook and APUFRAM in Honduras. You should know that those letters were full of misinformation and against the wishes of the Catholic Church.

For clarity sake we, therefore, want you to know the position of the Conventual Franciscan Order:

- First and foremost, Fr. Emil Cook has not complied with the "Letter of Obedience" issued by his Franciscan superiors ordering him to a) report to Saint Joseph Cupertino Friary in Comayagua (Tegucigalpa) by 1 February 2010; and b) to cut himself off from APUFRAM. Because Fr. Emil has remained with APUFRAM in Flores and has not moved to Comayagua, he therefore stands in defiance of his vow of obedience to his superiors.
- APUFRAM has not demonstrated to the Franciscans' satisfaction a safe child protection program for the sites they manage, nor have they implemented agreed upon policies to ensure the protection of victims and witnesses who speak with independent investigators. Without sufficient safeguards for victims and witnesses, the Franciscans feel it is not possible to accurately and conscientiously conduct the investigations.
- Fr. Cook has been denied permission to raise funds for APUFRAM or APUFRAM International in the United States. This decision by the Conventual Franciscan Order is in compliance with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (see letter on reverse side). APUFRAM has now sidestepped Church restrictions by ignoring the prohibition from using Fr. Emil's name and then by asking you and me to send donations to Special Missions Foundation, which is not a Catholic organization and is therefore not bound by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The letter from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) sent this past December to all bishops in the United States is still in effect. If you have any questions concerning this letter, we strongly encourage you to consult with your parish priest about the nature and importance of such letters from the USCCB, especially concerning the protection of children.

We also want to briefly explain why the serious and broad-ranging problems surrounding APUFRAM's response to child abuse are not resolved by the recently touted child protection policy. We have tried ever since the multiple abuse incidents came to light to be open with supporters. For this reason, we share with you this additional information.

First, APUFRAM International just sent out a letter claiming that APUFRAM has put in place a child protection policy. This policy varies significantly from what was agreed upon in October by Fr. Emil,

APUFRAM International, Mission Honduras International and the Conventual Franciscans. Here is one example why. A key feature of any effective child protection policy is an independent review body that can ensure a fair investigation and protection for victims and witnesses, a necessity anywhere, but especially where poverty makes people extremely vulnerable. The independent review board that they have set up, according to the APURAM International letters, will be comprised of two members from the business community appointed by APUFRAM, two appointed by the Catholic Church, and one appointed by the Special Missions Foundation, which is the same group that is accepting donations on APUFRAM's behalf.

We believe that it is essential that any independent review board, especially one charged with investigating accusations of child abuse, be 100% truly independent, and that its members should not have any possible conflicts of interest. Victims, witnesses, and whistleblowers must be assured of confidentiality and protection. This is not the case with the APUFRAM proposal, and it is certainly not what we demanded of them.

Second, there was not just one crime in Liberia involving APUFRAM, there were many. The investigation by the Conventual Franciscans confirms serious and repeated abuse and misconduct by APUFRAM employees. Further still, this misconduct includes Fr. Emil's efforts to distort information about the horrible rape of a student by the APUFRAM director. For the complete report and findings, including an analysis of the present situation at Liberia Mission, please go to this link: [www.missionhonduras.com/Franciscan\\_Investigation\\_Report\\_IntroLetter.pdf](http://www.missionhonduras.com/Franciscan_Investigation_Report_IntroLetter.pdf), or call us to request a copy.

Third, the problems are not isolated to Liberia. We continue to receive reports documenting years of neglect and abuse at APUFRAM sites in Honduras.

Therefore, Mission Honduras International has decided that we must discontinue working with Fr. Emil and APUFRAM, but at the same time we are blessed with a wonderful mission in Liberia, where we are successfully repairing the damage done by APUFRAM. We are focusing our energies on this important work.

We look forward to partnering with you to bring hope and a brighter future to the poorest of the poor around the world.

God Bless,

Bob O'Dwyer, President  
On behalf of the Board of Directors of Mission Honduras International  
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### Memorandum

To: All Bishops

From: Msgr. Ronny Jenkins *Jen*

Date: December 22, 2009

Subject: **FR. EMIL COOK, AND "APUFRAM".**

The Office of the Minister Provincial of the Conventual Franciscan Friars has asked that the bishops of the United States be advised of the situation of Fr. Emil Cook, OFM Conv., and ministries he is related to which operate under the organizational names "APUFRAM" ("Asociación Pueblo Franciscano de Muchachos y Muchachas") and its fundraising arm, APUFRAM International.

APUFRAM has not demonstrated, to the Minister Provincial's satisfaction, that adequate safe environment programs have been enforced at locations it operates. As a result, Fr. Cook's Major Superior has denied him permission to raise funds in the United States. Thus, the Conventual Franciscan Friars do not endorse any fundraising whatsoever in the United States by APUFRAM, Fr. Cook or APUFRAM International.

If further information is needed, contact may be made with the Office of the Very Rev. James D. Kent, OFM Conv., Vicar and Acting Provincial, at 812-923-8444.

## MASS OF DEDICATION AND BLESSING CELEBRATED AT LIBERIA MISSION!

On February 24th, Coadjutor Archbishop Lewis Jerome Zeigler and Monsignor Andrew Karnley from the Archdiocese of Monrovia celebrated a Mass of dedication and blessing at our Liberia Mission church, Saint Michael The Archangel. Fr. Don Halpin, OFM Conv., celebrated.

Before the Mass began, a ribbon-cutting ceremony was held to signify healing and rebirth at Liberia Mission – a truly powerful experience for all. The church was packed with people for the beautiful celebration, filled with song and dance and prayer. During the Mass, the Archbishop confirmed twenty-five of our students in the Catholic faith. At the end of Mass, many people offered personal remarks and Monsignor Karnley shared these words:

***“Liberia Mission Incorporated is the greatest thing to happen to Liberia since the end of the second civil war in 2003. There is simply no other way to state it. Its impact on the past, its impact now, and its impact in the future cannot be overstated.... We are a blessed country because of this mission.”***

Special thanks to all of YOU who make this possible. You are truly helping to build a brighter future for children, families, communities, and a nation!



### CELEBRATING EASTER... continued from page2

of God has blessed us so much and continues to lead us to places we never thought attainable.

Our mission school, Saint Anthony of Padua, just underwent a facelift when it received a beautiful new paint job by art instructor Dominic Bah and his art class of mission boys. They worked hard all Easter weekend to make sure the faculty, staff, and students had a beautiful building to return to on Monday morning. We now have our sights on our church, Saint Michael the Archangel Catholic Church. It will be even more beautiful than the school when we have completed its transformation. As I alluded to before, this Easter Season is truly bringing many new resurrections for all of us involved with Liberia Mission Incorporated.

I would like to send each and every one of you who support us financially, and/or prayerfully, or both, the most humble “thank you.” The impact you have made and continue to make can’t be measured in words or deeds. You are absolutely saving lives and making an immediate impact in the lives of children who had no future before you became involved with the mission.

I recently sat down for lunch in downtown Monrovia with Monsignor Andrew Karnley of the Archdiocese of Monrovia. When the conversation turned to the mission he became very quiet and looked at me and said, “The supporters you have in the United States will never know how many lives they have already changed, I just pray that more hear the call because your mission is the cornerstone for all the other programs in Liberia.”

These are very powerful words from a very well-respected priest in Africa. And they are true.

YOU MAKE THE DIFFERENCE EVERY DAY. We love you for this. And, keeping with the Easter theme, I want to say that each of you has helped resurrect a very necessary mission in a very needy part of the world.

Things are only going to get better for Liberia Mission Incorporated. With Bernardine, Brian, Amy and Mat charting the course here in Liberia, I can only imagine the incredible plans our loving savior has for the mission and its children. We love you!

Peace and Prayers,  
Jerome and Clarisa, Directors  
Liberia Mission Incorporated  
Blacktom Town, Lower Careysburg  
Liberia, Africa

### CHILDREN OF HOPE: THE LIBERIA MISSION STORY

*Children of Hope: The Liberia Mission Story* is an inspiring and deeply moving look at the way that Liberia Mission truly saves and transforms lives. This six-part documentary web-series tells the story of Liberia Mission through some of its most remarkable children. The film also explores the history of Liberia, its unique ties to the United States, the country’s brutal 14-year civil war and its drive to rebuild. Ultimately, the series illustrates the improbable founding, rapid growth, and success of Liberia Mission, Inc. Through the lives of these children we see the mission’s role in re-building a country for a peaceful future ... and we recognize the work yet to be done. Watch the complete video series here: [www.liberiamission.com/video.html](http://www.liberiamission.com/video.html) If you would like to purchase a DVD of the complete set of eight videos, please call or email us at: [info@missionhonduras.com](mailto:info@missionhonduras.com)



[www.liberiamission.com/video.html](http://www.liberiamission.com/video.html)

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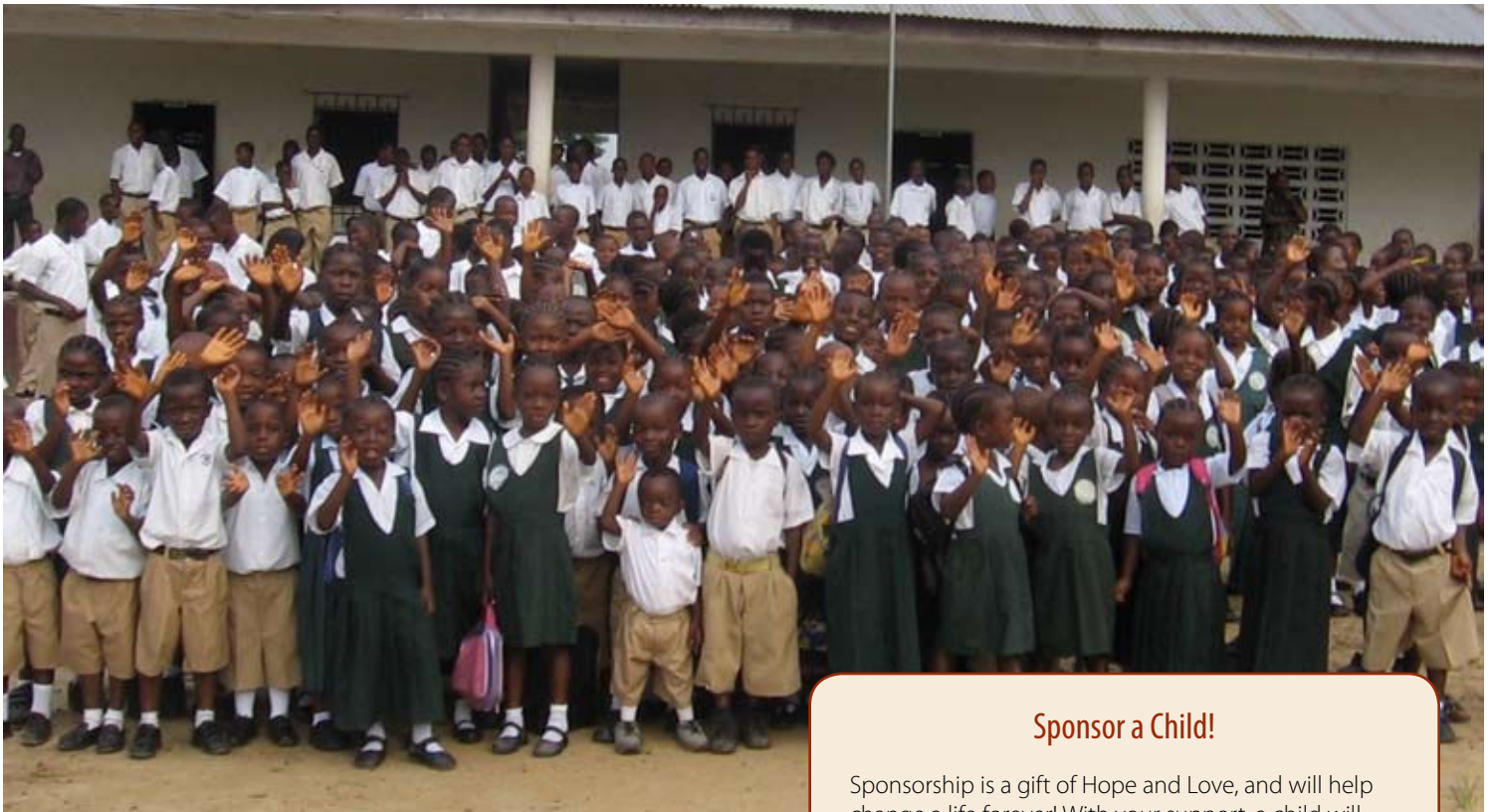
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**ABOUT MISSION HONDURAS  
INTERNATIONAL / LIBERIA MISSION INC.**

Mission Honduras International is dedicated to breaking the cycle of poverty for children and families through material and spiritual support and a Catholic education. Learn more on our website at: [www.missionhonduras.com](http://www.missionhonduras.com)

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