Chiapas Mission Welcomes Clinic-In-A-Can

Most of our readers know that for more than 25 years, the Sisters of St. Francis have coordinated a bi-annual medical mission in Chiapas, the southernmost state of Mexico. Serving as many as 750 patients in a week’s time, medical professionals have given their time and expertise delivering desperately needed care to indigenous people in the remote villages surrounding Palenque. Time and again the medical missions would emphasize the need for a more permanent solution to providing a continuum of care for the people.

After much research, the sisters discovered what appeared to be the best solution: “Clinic-in-a-Can!” Already in use throughout the world, the units are tractor trailer storage containers that are specially designed mobile clinics capable of being moved anywhere. Each container is turn-key ready, including being fully-outfitted with state-of-the-art medical equipment. The units are durable to withstand extreme conditions, climate controlled with super efficient technology for extreme temperatures and off-the-grid capabilities, environmentally friendly and infection-control compliant -- meeting or exceeding all US and EU standards.

“This is not to be my doing.
I am quite unable to carry out such a thing or even to think it out.
It is God who inspired me with the thought.
It is His work, and He will provide.”

Mother Magdalen
The idea took years to develop. Claudia Sierra was hired as Interim Clinic Director to work with the sisters at the mission in formulating a business plan and establishing the partnerships needed to move forward. By 2019, initial plans were in place. After the funding was secured, 11 Clinic-in-a-Can containers were ordered. After this, all the background business matters were also wrapped up: a Tax ID number obtained, the legal-corporate-financial relationship between the Clinic and the Sisters of St. Francis formalized, an HR person selected and business policies developed.

Claudia and the sisters worked diligently to meet the constant requests for information about the containers from Mexico’s Federal Commission for Protection against Sanitary Risks (COFEPRIS). Two teams of consultants meticulously prepared the paperwork required by various agencies, and our own team met multiple times with officials in Mexico City. Time and again the required permits were denied! The grueling and frustrating experience was prolonged due to COVID-19 closures, miscommunication between various government agencies, and suspected corruption. Despite it all, the sisters’ firm belief that “God will provide” never wavered.

Despite these delays, the site work moved forward. A 3-acre permaculture project to provide organic gardens of vegetables, fruits and medicinal plants was completed. This includes a greenhouse, composting area and, most impressive of all, a large pond made up of two natural springs. To the Mayan people an “Ojo de Agua” (water hole) is a sign of Blessing!

The muddy Palenque soil was amended to create a solid foundation by excavating the existing soil, compacting a gravel fill and placing the steel girders on which the containers would finally rest.

By June 2020, the sisters received the good news that the units were on their way from the factory in Wichita, Kansas to a port in Houston, Texas! However, no one anticipated the units would be held in storage for nearly seven months before being cleared by Mexican customs authorities. Toss in a hurricane, a few tropical storms, a world-wide pandemic and government bureaucracy - it truly was God’s Providence at work when, shortly before Christmas 2020, news was received that the containers had clearance to be transported to Palenque!

The saying “many hands make light work” was never more true than when the entire community came together to transform 11 shipping containers into a magnificent clinic! The local people were amazed upon realizing that this was for their benefit, saying, “We have never seen anything like this! There are still good people in the world who care about us.”
Crews leveled and cleared obstructions along the road to prepare for the tractor trailers. Villagers gathered to watch and help. There were men who transported the containers from the Port in Merida to Palenque, men who worked the large crane that lifted the containers onto the prepared foundation, City Police and Patrols who escorted the 11 containers through the streets of Palenque, local women who came to clean the interior of the containers, and laborers who provided strong hands of support.

At the end of January, a Clinic-in-a-Can crew arrived from Kansas to put the final touches on the 11 containers. Utility and water supply lines were connected, medical equipment and furniture were secured to the floors and walls, solar panels installed on the rooftops, and final cosmetic touches were completed. The transformation was like magic!

Everyone marveled over the well-equipped containers that housed a laboratory, x-ray room, advanced mother-infant unit, four consultation rooms and a double surgical suite that has two surgery units, a dressing room, bathroom, shower area, and lockers.

Thank you for being part of this, for your encouragement and belief that this could happen...

...for this was God’s work and God provided!

COVID-19 Postpones Medical Missions

Things were full steam ahead for the February 2020 medical mission when our last complement of medical volunteers made their way to Palenque. Subsequently, both the November 2020 and 2021 medical missions were canceled because of COVID-19.

It’s too early to determine when our medical mission will resume. However, even with the clinic-in-a-can in place, there will always be a vital need to provide health care to the indigenous people in the most outlying villages who are unable to obtain transportation to our clinic. When they cannot come to us, we will go to them.

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, our sisters continue to be a Franciscan presence to others by continuing their pastoral ministry. They do faith formation, liturgical celebrations and pastoral visits for the community of believers in both urban and rural areas.
Mission Integration
Front and Center

Patricia McMahon, osf
Mission Integration Minister

For several years the sisters of Holy Name Province have contemplated initiating a ministry of mission integration. The need presented itself as the number of sisters involved in our sponsored ministries on a daily basis began to diminish. It was recognized there would be great value in having someone available as a resource to support the boards, leadership, staff members and other constituents in living out the Franciscan charism and values which have always been at the heart of our ministries.

The provincial council and I worked together to develop a description for the position of minister of mission integration. Some of the responsibilities include serving as a resource for each sponsored ministry as they implement our Franciscan values; making an understanding of the history and overall mission of the province available in employee/volunteer/board member orientation; and providing retreat opportunities for the same groups and other constituents.

Each of our sponsored ministries, Stella Niagara Education Park, Buffalo Academy of the Sacred Heart, the Center of Renewal, Francis Center and the Women’s Respite Program, are already mission oriented. They have personnel and programs which reflect the values of the province. My opportunity will be to collaborate with them in maintaining what they have and finding new ways of expressing and living out our Franciscan mission. My first specific task is to develop the annual board convocation for all of our trustees.

I am delighted to begin and explore the opportunities of this ministry. My office is located on the campus of Stella Niagara. As COVID restrictions allow, I will be spending time developing relationships at, and getting to know more about, each sponsored ministry. My email address is pmcmahon@stellaosf.org and my phone number is 716 754 4311, ext. 138.

Previous to this position, I served as a member of the General Council of the congregation in Rome, Italy. During my years there, I had the privilege of spending time in both Assisi and Heythuysen, Netherlands, the place where our congregation was founded. I literally walked in the footsteps and visited the places of prayer of Francis, Clare and Mother Magdalen. As I begin this ministry, I pray that I may be faithful to the Spirit of their witness and wisdom.
Tanzania Mission  
*From the Tiny Mustard Seed...*

In 1835, Mother Magdalen sowed the seeds of her fledgling congregation in Heythuysen, Netherlands. Nearly 200 years later, the idea of a new branch on her congregational tree would likely have astounded her.

At St. Clare Mission in Tanzania there are 55 Tanzanian sisters along with our missionary sisters: S. Marguerite (Margie) Wolf from Holy Name Province, Stella Niagara, and S. Daniela Palubicka from Mary Help of Christians Province, Poland. There is a spirit of goodness and welcome that Mother Magdalen would (and does) relish. There is a spirit of humility and gratitude that St. Francis would (and does) find comfortable to walk alongside. There is a spirit of companionship and care that St. Clare would (and does) love to see. These women are walking into this time in history with faith, conviction and hope. *(Letter from General Council, Rome)*

Through this new branch, the Gospel is spread and there are many heralds of peace and hope! And this branch continues its growth with its recent election of its FIRST Tanzanian Mission Minister and council members! Pictured (left-right) are S. Elizabeth Happiness, S. Oliva Mkabajuni, S. Angela Kemilembe (Mission Minister), S. Anastazia Kokuberwa, and S. Evodia Mukamuleguzi.

From the tiny mustard seed planted on the heath, there has developed the large tree now overspreading five continents, where nearly 1,200 daughters of Mother Magdalen carry on her work in schools, hospitals, homes, and foreign missions, strengthened and encouraged by the legacy of their Mother that GOD WILL PROVIDE!

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On May 4, 2021, Mary Help of Christians Province, Orlik, Poland shared the results of their XII Provincial Chapter of Election: Provincial Minister, S. Majella Lizińczyk, is in the center of the photo. The councilors are (left to right), S. Marcelina Knade, S. Samuela Ginter, S. Irmina Grulkowska, and S. Edyta Gilmajster. The province has more than 140 professed sisters. Like sisters in all Provinces, they serve both locally and abroad, ministering to those in need.
Sister M. Josita Seyfried - January 10, 1930 - December 13, 2020

Young Ruth entered the Sisters of St. Francis at Stella Niagara on September 2, 1947, and professed final vows on August 18, 1953. Sister Josita obtained her B.S. at Rosary Hill (Daemen) College and her M.S. at Niagara University. Before retiring from the classroom in 1999, she taught in New York at St. Joseph School, Gowanda, St. Benedict School, Eggertsville, Our Lady of Lebanonon, Niagara Falls, Stella Niagara Education Park, Stella Niagara; in South Carolina at Holy Rosary School, Greenville; and in New Jersey at St. Agnes School, Atlantic Highlands, and Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Atlantic Highlands. From 1991 - 2012, Sister Josita served as Stella Niagara convent treasurer, and was the assistant to the local minister and seamstress at the convent. Stella Niagara employees will not forget her talent and kindness when, in 2011, she gifted everyone with her creation of a framed crest of their initial. Sister Josita moved to the Stella Niagara health center community in January, 2020.

Sister Mary Owen Doody - April 6, 1928 - December 23, 2020

Born in Columbus, Ohio, Donna entered the convent at Stella Niagara on August 31, 1946 and was professed August 18, 1949. Having received her Bachelor’s degree in Education from Rosary Hill (Daemen) College, she fully embraced being an educator. Sister Owen taught in New York at St. Joseph School, Gowanda, and St. Benedict School, Buffalo; in New Jersey at St. Agnes and Our Lady of Perpetual Help Schools, Atlantic Highlands; and in her beloved Ohio at St. John, Holy Rosary and St. Anthony Schools, Columbus; St. Aloysius, New Lexington; and St. Michael School, Worthington, Ohio. She was a computer enrichment coordinator at St. Michael’s from 1988 until 2006. Sister Owen retired from teaching in 2000 and moved to Stella Niagara in 2011, then joined the health center community in 2013. No matter where Sister Owen lived, she remained an avid OSU Buckeye’s fan.

Sister Catherine Tronolone - August 10, 1924 - January 9, 2021

Lucretia “Grace” Tronolone was born in Buffalo, NY and entered the Sisters of St. Francis at Stella Niagara on September 6, 1942. Professing final vows on August 18, 1947, Sister Catherine went on to receive her Bachelor’s degree in Education at Mt. St. Joseph Teachers College in Buffalo and her Master’s degree from Catholic University, Washington, D.C. She will be remembered as an educator and pastoral minister. She taught at St. Michael School, St. Benedict School and Cardinal O’Hara High School in Buffalo, NY; Seminary of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Stella Niagara, NY; St. Francis DeSales High School, Columbus, OH; Mater Dei High School, New Monmouth, NJ; Charleston Catholic High School, Charleston, W. VA; and Casa Maddalena Language School and St. Francis International School (where she also served as Principal), Rome, Italy. She served in pastoral ministry at St. Mary Parish, New Monmouth, NJ. After many years of teaching, she continued her ministry to the sick and homebound in Buffalo, NY, and was sure to include the sisters in the Stella Niagara Health Center on her weekly rounds. Not long before retiring to the health center at Stella Niagara in 2015, she traveled to Poland where she taught English to the sisters in Our Lady of Help of Christians Province, Orlik.
... IN ANOTHER WAY

**Sister Agnes Lucille Schubert** - January 2, 1923 - January 11, 2021

After entering the Sisters of St. Francis at Stella Niagara on September 9, 1940, Sister Agnes Lucille (formerly Sister M. Lucille) was professed on August 18, 1942. She received her Bachelor’s degree in 1955 from Rosary Hill (Daemen) College, Buffalo, NY, and her Master’s and PhD from Ohio University in 1974. Her teaching ministry began in Ohio where she served in Columbus, New Lexington and Athens; then continued in New Monmouth and Atlantic Highlands, NJ; Charleston, WV; and Buffalo and Gowanda, NY. Throughout the years she taught different elementary grades as well as college level courses. In 1994, Sister Agnes Lucille moved to Stella Niagara where she was the driver for the sisters and later managed the campus store. She enjoyed her retirement, working on the computer to make cards and signs for the sisters, as well as playing games and cards. After moving to the health center in 2016, Sister Agnes Lucille continued to enjoy her favorite activities that included reading, making rosaries, taking watercolor painting classes and Wii-bowling.

**Sister Jane Feller** - September 9, 1943 - January 19, 2021

Born in Buffalo, NY, Jane entered the order of the Stella Niagara Franciscans on Sept 6, 1964 and made her final vows on August 26, 1972, taking the name Sister Mary Faith. She obtained a Bachelor of Science degree from Rosary Hill (Daemen) College and a Master of Social Work degree from the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1980. She served as both a teacher and a social worker. She taught at Stella Niagara High School and Bishop McMahon High School, Buffalo, NY and worked in the Admissions Office at Rosary Hill (Daemen) College, Amherst, NY. As a social worker, Sister Jane worked at Catholic Charities, Buffalo, NY; St. Philip Neri Center in Murray City, OH, and later to Perry County Children’s Services in New Lexington, OH. She was a Counselor at Marion Adjustment Center, St. Mary, NJ, then in Louisville, Kentucky, served as Supervisor/Program Manager at South Louisville Community Ministries, Ferncreek/Highview Community Ministries, and served on staff at St. Martin of Tours Parish Golden Arrow Clothing Closet. She also spent two years as Coordinator of Hofling Hall Sisters’ Infirmary (later named the Stella Niagara health center). In 2016, Siser Jane retired to Stella Niagara and became a resident of the health center in 2018.

**Sister Martina Keitz** - March 20, 1929 - March 17, 2021

After leaving her childhood home in Buffalo, NY and entering the Stella Niagara Franciscans on September 5, 1948, young Elizabeth “Betty” made her final vows on August 18, 1954 and took the name Sister Martina. She obtained her Bachelor of Science degree from Rosary Hill (Daemen) College and began a long teaching career. She served in Charleston, WV at St. Anthony; in New Jersey at St. Agnes School, Atlantic Highlands, St. Mary Elementary School, New Monmouth; in South Carolina at Greenville’s Our Lady of the Rosary School; in Ohio at Holy Rosary, Columbus, St. Paul School, Athens, St. Bernadette School, Lancaster and St. Rose School in New Lexington. She served as a teacher in Buffalo, NY at St. Lawrence School, St. Joachim, and St. Benedict, as an aide at Francis Center, Niagara Falls, and as a seamstress at St. Michael Convent. She also served for three years at St. Francis International School, Rome, Italy. Sister Martina retired to Stella Niagara in 2008 and moved to the health center in 2010.
TRIBUTE GALA
2021

Last year, our friends rallied to ensure that our first online Tribute Gala was a huge success! In fact, it was an event so heavenly - it was in the cloud!

The generous response helped us meet the unexpected demands of keeping our sisters safe during the pandemic. THANK YOU!

Clearly planning an event in the midst of a pandemic is a difficult undertaking, but we know our much anticipated Tribute Gala will be held in some form. Stay tuned...

SAVE THE DATE!
Wednesday, October 6, 2021!