

Good morning.

I just came back from a 12 day trip to SD and PR. Soon after I arrived in PR, I received an e-mail from Rebekah, who thought I was home, to do the reflection for Mission Sunday, 2016. She thought I could reflect on my recent experiences in both SD and PR. I told her I would be happy to do that. Perhaps, I was just grateful that I and our Sisters in SD escaped the devastation that ravaged Haiti. As you know, the Dominican Republic and Haiti share the same island. DR is the eastern part and Haiti is the western part of the Island. Because of their different topographies, DR was spared while Haiti suffered devastating damage and loss of life.

Before I get into my mission experience, I want to call our attention to the message of Pope Francis for World Mission Day, 2016.

What he says in his message is this: In this extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, which the Church is celebrating, a distinct light is cast on World Mission Sunday, 2016. This special Sunday, i.e. today, invites us to consider the mission as a great, immense work of mercy, both spiritual and material. On this World Mission Sunday, all of us are invited to "go out" as missionary disciples, who generously offer their talents, creativity, wisdom and experience in order to bring the message of God's tenderness and compassion to the entire human family. By virtue of the missionary mandate, the Church cares for those who do not know the Gospel, because the Church wants everyone to... experience God's love. The Church "is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel" and to proclaim mercy in every corner of the world, reaching both young and old.

Francis goes on to say: "When mercy encounters a person it brings deep joy to God's heart; for from the beginning God has lovingly turned towards the most vulnerable because God's greatness and power are revealed precisely in God's capacity to identify with the young, the elderly, the marginalized and the oppressed. God is a kind, caring and faithful God who is close to those in need, especially the poor; God is involved tenderly in human reality just as a mother or father are involved in the lives of their children.

His message also goes on to say that mercy finds its most noble and complete expression in the Incarnate Word, Jesus, who reveals the face of the Father who is rich in mercy. Jesus speaks of mercy and explains it by the use of comparisons and parables, but mostly by "personifying it" by how he lived when he dwelt among us.

His message further says that all people and cultures have the right to receive the message of salvation which is God's gift to every person. This is all the more necessary when we consider how many injustices, wars, and humanitarian crises still need resolution. Missionaries know from experience that the Gospel of forgiveness and mercy can bring joy and reconciliation, justice and peace. Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord

points out , but all of us are asked to respond to God's call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel.

So what did I experience in Santo Domingo? We have a community of three Sisters living in a very simple house in Las Canitas, a barrio of Santo Domingo. When we first went there in 1993, we asked the pastor of the church, what did he want us to do? He answered, be a presence first and then you will know what to do. From the beginning, this was an international group of sisters: Sr. Myriam Colon from PR, Sr. Mary Providence Kriley from the US and Sister Monika Mrosek from Germany. Before long, they found the ministries to which they were being called: Sr. Mary Providence started a Senior Center which provided respite from the very poor conditions in which the elderly were living, small shacks which often lacked running water, with no way to prepare meals and no respite from the heat. Her program offered an opportunity for adults to gather in a more comfortable environment, offered them an opportunity to socialize, pray together and enjoy two meals together, breakfast and a cooked lunch. Sr. Myriam followed her passion to do work among adolescent youth. She set up a place for them to gather, a place where they could study, have access to computers if they were fortunate enough to be going to high school. The homes, from which the youth to whom she was ministering came, were small, cramped, and hot and the barrio was very noisy. She gradually did motivational and youth ministry work among them. Twenty-three years later, these individuals are involved in her current work. Sr. Monika got involved in the parish school called Pituca, a school that enrolled students from three years of age to second grade, in half day sessions. They came to school mostly because they could get two nourishing meals a day-- breakfast and lunch for the morning group and lunch and dinner for the afternoon group. Sr. Monika, an educator from our German Province, gradually made a k-8 school out of a child care center. So who is in our Mission in Las Canitas today? What is the work that they do? The local community of our sisters is still international. There are two Korean Sisters, Sr. Serena Hong and Sr. Clara Kim and Sr. Myriam is still there working with a new generation of youth. The work of both Sr. Serena and Sr. Clara is largely supported by Korean donors. Sr. Serena took over the Center for the Elderly, now called the San Martine Center, and she carries out the work that Sr. Mary Providence started—and she expanded it. With the donations she receives, she can hire local women to help with the cooking and cleaning of the Center. Sr. Serena offers an opportunity for her patrons to take care of their hygienic needs because they may not have running water. She manages their medication. She has connected many of them to a doctor and takes them to their appointments, if necessary. She gives them their medication because many of them cannot manage it themselves. Sr. Clara found her way to Pituca. With the improvements started by Sr. Monika with the aid of German donors, the school was expanded and enrolls 350 children from K to 8 in an 8:00 to 4:00 (all day) program that begins with breakfast and includes an enriching lunch. Sr. Clara's role has been to introduce music, including instrumental music, and art into the school and she teaches these classes. Sr. Clara is

a certified Social Worker. She said that these children at Pituca are growing up in a violent environment. They need what she calls a “soft” emotion which she feels is provided by the music and art programs. Clara provides drinking water to each classroom. She realizes that it is difficult to have enough water to supply to the children due to financial restraints and the school’s location. She works with the principal of the school to identify children who could not otherwise attend school and provides uniforms and school supplies for 15 children. She also works with the principal to provide for 7 graduates of 8th grade the uniforms, school supplies, back packs and scholarship money they will need to go to high school. And she meets with them monthly to keep them on track. She also provides groceries once a week for the families of the poorest 15 students. Besides supporting Sr. Clara’s and Sr. Serena’s activities in the Las Canitas barrio, the Korean donors also provided a 12 passenger van for the Sisters to use to transport clients and the youth who are working with Sr. Myriam. In the meantime, Sr. Myriam, through donations she has received from the states, has found a building which they were able to renovate for the youth. She named it the Emmanuel Center for Youth (after Bishop Ketteler who name is Wilhelm Emanuel Von Ketteler). She has offices, rest rooms and a computer room on the 1st floor, a large room for gatherings, which is also equipped with tables and chairs for study groups on the 2nd floor and a 3rd floor gymnasium. She has flower boxes in a roof garden so that she can provide some beauty to the neighboring families living in the poorest of circumstances. Because many of the children in the barrio go to school in half day sessions, she has daily morning groups and afternoon groups who come to the quiet environment of the Emmanuel Center to prepare for the classes. She uses the graduates of her program to volunteer at the Center daily. These volunteers help the students with their assignments. She also has a group every Thursday evening which is for faith formation, spirituality and motivation. These are youth from 12-17 years of age. She does the same on Saturday mornings for children from ages 4 through 11. She has formed an adult group of about 45 men and women who are preparing to be Associates of the Community. I am always amazed of the impact of our Sisters on this poor barrio. In January, Sr. Wendolyn will be returning to Santo Domingo. She is being hired by Youth House in the Archdiocese of Santo Domingo. Youth House has 14 programs. Sr. Wendolyn is working in the first program called Institute of Theological-Pastoral Formation. Sr. Wendolyn will join the Korean Sisters, Serena and Clara, and the Puerto Rican Sister, Sister Myriam. Her culture, Dominican, will be the 3rd culture in the house.

In Puerto Rico, where we have been since 1932, we no longer go to the compos to teach catechism and prepare children for the sacraments, and we no longer teach in schools staffed by the Community. We now have a social ministry called OPDH in Arecibo that is akin to our Catholic Charities. The program was started by Sr. Roberta Grezlak. Sr. Ana Lydia worked at OPDH as a counseling psychologist for several years before becoming a member of the PLT. We have two Sisters working at OPDH now, Sr. Elsa and Sr. Veronica. OPDH has supportive classes

and programs for single women who are heads of households. They also have programs that counsel women on issues of domestic violence. Other programs help the unemployed to write resumes and prepare for work interviews. They have an entrepreneurial program for starting a business. They also have programs that are family support programs that empower the parents. The program is recognized by the Diocese who provides space for it in their seminary. Other than that, OPDH is supported by grants, particularly United Way and private Foundations. They have many volunteers through ARRP, Vista, and have interns through local Colleges. As you know, PR is struggling financially at this time, so it has been difficult continuing programs during the gap times of waiting for promised grants to release the money.

As you know, we also have other social ministries in the States—**La Posada Providencia**, a shelter for people in crisis from around the world who are seeking legal refuge in this country. The staff provides a safe and welcoming home, mentors to promote self-sufficiency and cultural integration. This mission is located in **San Benito**, in southern Texas. For 27 years, LPP has “welcomed the stranger,” provided a safe, welcoming home to immigrants and asylum seekers who have come to the US to escape violence, political repression, natural disasters and other life-threatening situations. Since we opened our doors there in 1989, we have served 8,250 clients from 75 counties.

Room At the Inn in St. Louis County provides emergency shelter and a stabilizing support system to women and families in need in St. Louis County. It provides shelter and services during the day at Providence Center and uses a collaborative interfaith effort of congregations to provide dinner and overnight accommodations. It also provides an address for the homeless children so that they can attend school while they are homeless. Last year, they served 167 people which included 60 children.

And lastly, Providence Connections on the North Side which serves children, youth and families. It is a family-focused and community-based Family Support programs which share the goal of empowering and strengthening adults in their role as parents, nurturers and providers. At PFSC, the focus is on prevention and on identifying and building upon strengths that the family has. It is a program to help families living on the margins of society so that they do not become involved in situations that are difficult to overcome such as gangs, addictions, and so on. Their programs include quality child care for working mothers, before and afterschool programs and child care on days off from school, family unification evenings, and programs to celebrate all holidays so that families can create memories, parent education classes, and family development specialists who provide more intensive programs to families in their homes. Last year, Providence Family Support Center served 400 local North Side families

These latter ministries that I described are in the States. Those who minister in these programs are also missionaries. One time they were called home missionaries. We sometimes refer to

these ministries in the Community as Gospel ministries, because they reach out to people as we see Jesus doing in the Gospel. So these ministries also qualify as missions in the context of World Mission Sunday.

The Province also has educational institutions which are involved in "mission activity". La Roche College, our next door neighbor, instituted the Pacem in Terris program in 1993, which invites students from war-torn countries, and it continues today. They also sponsor programs such as Global Solutions and Humanitarian Aid. These programs not only engage students in "mission" activity, but the broader community as well. We also have Providence Heights Alpha School in this building. Their Provident Student Program encourages work in the home missions. These students have been involved in Providence Connections work on the North Side for years. And our School System in Kingston, MA, Sacred Heart Schools, in their K-12 program engages students in mission activity locally and abroad. Sister Donna Marie Gribshaw and Sister Nelida Naveros Cordova have engaged Students at Sacred Heart through their campus ministry program in our international mission in Peru.

So today, on World Mission Sunday, I wanted you to be inspired as I was in reading Pope Francis's message. All of us are called to bring God's love and compassion to the peoples of the world in the capacity in which we are able. Here, at Mother of Divine Providence Chapel, I want to thank all of you who worship with us for your engagement in our mission. You are our financial supporters of our mission and many of you volunteer as well. May God bless you for your generosity of spirit and may you continue to respond to God's grace which nudges us all to be all that we can be for others.