Columns
Horizons
Ministry




Dominican Sisters of St. Rose of Lima traveled six hours in order to distribute donations of noodles, cooking oil, cakes, bowls, chopsticks and hats to people in Dak Lua Parish, Tan Phu district, Dong Nai Province, Vietnam, in December 2022 (Mary Nguyen)



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Mission is inherent to the nature of the church. If the church does not engage in missionary work, she loses herself. Therefore, every member of the church — bishops, priests, religious men and women, or lay faithful — must be missionaries, enthusiastically going out to proclaim the Good News, as Jesus instructed his disciples before ascending to heaven.: "Go out to the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15).

Responding to the command of Jesus, the sisters of Xuan Loc of the Holy Cross congregation voluntarily engage in missionary work at Dak Lua Parish, a missionary parish of Xuan Loc Diocese and the poorest parish in Tan Phu district, Dong Nai province, Vietnam. Dak Lua parish is in a remote area. The population is about 10% Catholic. The Catholics live 1-3 kilometers from the parish.

The life of Dak Lua's parishioners is very difficult. They make a living by farming rice and growing corn. The income from a three-month corn crop is 1,500,000 Vietnamese dong (about $65), and the annual rice crop income is 15,000,000 Vietnamese dong (about $650). However, the income from such crops is not enough to feed their families. Thus, they have to work as hired laborers, in tasks such as picking corn, weeding rice or cutting trees. On average, they earn 150,000 Vietnamese dong per day (about $6.50). Under these difficult conditions daily life for Catholics can become tedious, and non-Catholics have little chance to see the Catholic Church in action.



An 85-year- old Catholic woman receives a donation from a Dominican Sister of St. Rose of Lima in December 2022. (Mary Nguyen)

The sisters of Xuan Loc of the Holy Cross congregation established a small community next to Dak Lua Parish in 2017. Unlike other communities of the congregation, these sisters do not teach classes to earn a living. The congregation

pays all expenses for their daily life. In addition to serving the parish by arranging flowers, practicing singing and teaching catechism, the sisters dedicate their time to visit the poor — Catholic and non-Catholics — in the community.

Sr. Anna, who oversees the missionary work of the community, shared that she spends three days a week visiting both Catholics and non-Catholics. When she visits Catholic families, they warmly welcome her. After talking and asking about their work, daily activities and spiritual life, she learned that most of them, especially the men, had stopped going to confession for many years. During her visits, she advised them to go to confession with the priest and return to the church to attend Mass. Currently, she has helped a number of families return to the parish, and they attend Sunday Mass weekly.

She is particularly interested in non-Catholics. The purpose of her visits is not to force people to embrace Catholicism, but rather to initially get to know them and establish friendly relationships. Non-Catholics are very surprised when a Catholic, such as Sister Dung (who they may not realize is a nun), approaches them.

During one interaction a non-Catholic asked her, "Why do you, a Catholic, come to my house?" She replied, "I want to get to know your family so that when I go out and am caught in the rain, I can drop by your house for shelter." Her answer made them feel closer to Catholics. Although they don't embrace Catholicism, they have faith in God, attributing to Him the grace to overcome difficulties and live better lives.



Dominican and Holy Cross sisters bring gifts for poor families in difficult situations in Dak Lua Parish, Tan Phu district, Dong Nai Province, Vietnam in December 2022. (Mary Nguyen)

Sister also confides that some non-Catholics have requested a rosary to wear around their necks and an image of the Divine Mercy to hang in their house. They find peace in having such items, even if they do not fully embrace the Catholic faith.

However, missionary work is not only words but also deeds, and it involves the spirit and material support. Sometimes sisters also extend aid to poor families by using savings from the daily activities of the congregation, or from contributions from their relatives. Since the sisters here do not earn any money, they live entirely on the support of their motherhouse. Another difficulty for the Sisters doing missionary work in this remote area is that they encounter many people in situations of poverty. The sisters want to assist them, but are not able to due to economic constraints.

When we, the Dominican Sisters, visited the Sisters of Xuan Loc from the Holy Cross congregation, we understood their challenges and difficulties in doing missionary work for the poor in that diocese. Therefore, we have collaborated with them by asking for support from benefactors  to assist the poor there.

During our visit, we brought 300 gifts for children, including items such as milk, cakes and candies. We also brought 100 gifts for the elders, including noodles, cooking oil, cakes, bowls, chopsticks, hats and more for them to distribute. The sisters also introduced us to some non-Catholic families to visit, and we gave gifts to them and their children as well.

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We were deeply moved by situations of poverty of non-Catholic families. We were reminded to pray more for them and for the sisters who have sacrificed and generously engaged in missionary work in this remote area. Moreover, we were really glad to bring these gifts, and we hope that the lives of people in difficult circumstances will be a little less difficult every day.

I talked to an 85-year-old Catholic woman who was delighted to receive our gifts. She relies on the aid of benefactors and currently lives with her daughter. Her daughter, a widow with two children, struggles to feed her mother. She works as a hired laborer and earns 150,000 Vietnamese dong per day (about $6.50) but she can only find work for one day at a time and has to stop for the next three days because sometimes there is no work available.

I also met a 78-year-old poor, non-Catholic man whose plight was very difficult.  He cares for his wife, who has had a stroke, and a son with mental illness. He felt deeply touched to have received our gift, and when he couldn't carry it alone, he had a lady help him carry it home.

I am very proud to have zealous Vietnamese sisters voluntarily coming to remote areas to help the poor because they have to sacrifice time and health and must accept living in uncomfortable conditions. They are wonderful role models for us, Dominican Sisters, to imitate in serving and loving the poor.

In short, mission is a duty and a privilege for every Christian. Christ wants us to bring the Gospel into the hearts of the people. This mission requires our generosity,

our sacrifice, our willingness and our witness to show others God's love for humanity.

We constantly thank God for giving us his abundant grace and strength to carry out our mission: to bring God's love to the poor. We also thank God for sending benefactors inside and outside Vietnam who have aided us in serving the poor in remote areas. May God bless them so that they can continue to bring love and happiness to others.