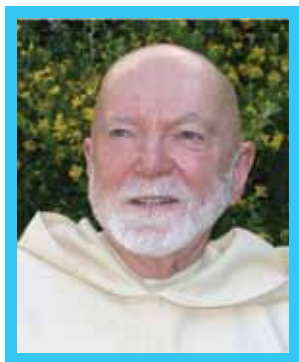


The Biggest Disease Today...



Dear Mission Friends:

It seems as if leprosy, one of the world's most tragic curses, has been present since the dawn of creation. In the Bible we read how it caused suffering and pain, not only for the victim, but also for the family and community who were forced to expel the leper, casting him or her off as the "living dead." Lepers used to be required to wear bells around their necks to warn people of their approach! Although never highly contagious—and not at all now with today's newest treatments—leprosy continues to attack today, and indeed the word "leprosy" still evokes sensations of terror and repulsion in the hearts and minds of most.

Recently the Vatican issued a call for worldwide support for children with leprosy, or Hansen's disease, as it is now known. In his statement, Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragan, president of the Vatican Pontifical Council for Health Care Ministry, cited statistics from the World Health Organization which found that in 2007 there were more than 250,000 new cases of Hansen's disease, 12% involving children. In calling on Catholics around the world to continue the fight against the disease as well as the prejudices against those with the disease, he praised "*the men and women religious [who are] active in the field of ministry to Hansenites.*"

[These words of praise certainly apply to the Dominican Sisters of San Fernando Pampanga who minister in the Tala Leper Colony in the Philippines.](#)

The Tala Leper Colony was founded in 1940 by the Philippine government. When anyone was diagnosed with the dread disease, he or she was banished to confinement to one of several leper colonies on the islands, such as Tala. It was in most cases a fate worse than death.



Fr. Hofstee (center) in 1946 while serving as a U.S. Army Air Corps chaplain, with our Fr. Lopez (right) as a teenager and his father Louis Lopez (left).

Our involvement with Tala began in June of 1947, when our first foreign missionary, Fr. Leo Anthony Hofstee, O.P., arrived in the midst of the community and announced that he was going to be their chaplain. He had previously met the lepers when, as a chaplain in the U.S. Army Air Corps in World War II, he took part in the liberation of the Philippines. [He made a promise to them then that he would return and be with them for the rest of his life, a promise that he kept until his death at Tala forty years later.](#)



Fr. Paul Scanlon, O.P. (back row, center) and Fr. Thomas Hayes, O.P. with the sisters and staff of the Tala Leper Colony in 1975. (Both priests are celebrating their golden anniversaries of ordination this year.)

Before the war, Fr. Hofstee had been assigned to St. Vincent Ferrer Church in Vallejo, CA, the home parish of both Father Vincent Lopez, O.P. (who preaches mission appeals for our office) and myself. As I celebrate my 40th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood this year, and Fr. Lopez celebrates his 53rd, we both realize how fortunate we were in being able to personally observe Fr. Hofstee in action, and how deeply he influenced our Dominican vocations, inspiring us even now to preach with enthusiasm and pride on behalf of our Dominican missions.

For many years the Dominican Sisters of Pampanga in the Philippines have carried on Fr. Hofstee's ministry among the lepers, with particular emphasis on the Holy Rosary School System which he founded, and which cares for and educates

leper children and children of lepers. Through the years our newsletter has kept you apprised of the work of Sister Rosa Yaya, O.P., the director of the Holy Rosary Schools. Recently I received notice that after many years of loving service in the colony, she is being transferred to her congregation's mother house, and will be succeeded by Sister Corazon Quiambao, O.P. I ask for your prayers for Sr. Rosa in her new ministry, and I will assure Sr. Corazon of the continuation of your compassionate and generous



Recess!

support for the sisters and the children to whom they minister.

I wish now to share with you a letter, previously published in our newsletter but still too relevant, from one of the many young people who continue to be served through your support of the ministry in Tala. Her testimony calls to mind a quote from Mother Teresa of Calcutta: *"The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted."*

In Christ's Peace,
Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P.

Love and Leprosy

by S.C.

The ambulance carried me off from the Jose Reyes Hospital in Manila to the Tala Leprosarium. My whole body was covered with festering wounds. For the past two years I had been bedridden at home, unable to stand up. My remaining energy was being drained. ***The diagnosis of the doctor had sounded like a death sentence: You have leprosy.***



Fr. Walsh with Holy Rosary School's youngest attendees.

I am the eldest of seven children of a poor family. Fresh from high school, I had started working in a factory because my dream of becoming a teacher was beyond reach. It was hard working in a factory for a girl of 16, but I became skilled at my job and I was happy to help my family.

***As my dream of teaching faded away, it was replaced by a nightmare when I was 18 years old.** I noticed red spots on my skin. I tried to keep it from my parents. But when my condition grew worse, they took me to a dermatologist who diagnosed it as an allergy.*

A strict diet and medicines brought no relief. I had to resign from my job when I started running a fever and the red spots turned into open sores.

For two years I stayed at home, bedridden. There seemed to be no cure from my ailment. I started thinking that it would be better to die than to make life more miserable for my parents.

I was convinced that I had skin cancer, not Hansen's disease, for I had very little knowledge about this sickness. Desperate, my father asked his employer for help. That was how we got to the Jose Reyes Hospital for consultation. There, I was assured that I would recover in no time at all at the Tala Leprosarium. Little did I know that my confinement there would last five years.

When I arrived at Tala, I was in critical condition. I was given the Last Sacrament. My faith in God has always given me much strength. That time it was tested very

severely. I could not accept that I had the dreaded disease. When I noticed the deformities on the older patients, I did not want to be part of their grim world. I would rather die than look like them, I told myself.

Every day Sister Pilar cleaned my wounds for hours. She assured me that with the present, effective medicines I would recover without deformities.

My mother was constantly at my side for six months. I began to notice that the older patients were happy and kind, notwithstanding their situation. Gradually I regained some hope about my future. After a few months, my wounds started to heal. My fear and feeling of hopelessness slowly disappeared. After a year, all my wounds were gone, but my complete recovery was still a long way off. I had to undergo physiotherapy to be able to walk again even with some assistance.

***My stay in the Tala hospital also resulted in inner healing.** Tala became a home for me. I appreciated the friendship and care of the hospital staff, fellow patients, church workers and many other people. Ultimately, I regained my self-respect and self-confidence.*

Then it was time for my discharge. The hospital had done all it could do for me.

My dream of becoming a teacher was revived when I learned that the Holy Rosary College in Tala provided free education to Hansenites. But after being out of school for nine years, could I survive in college? How would my classmates treat me? Physiotherapy had not been able to recondition my right knee, which remained bent at an angle of 90 degrees. But positive thinking prevailed: no pain, no gain. Going to daily Mass strengthened my resolve.

Everyone was wonderful to me, even when I felt insecure during my practice teaching in my fourth year.

In March, I finally graduated from college. It was a dream fulfilled for me and for my parents whose love never wavered over the years.

My doctors told me I was the worst case admitted to Tala during the last 10 years. But I am sure I am also on top of the list of people who experienced true love. There and in my condition, I realized that love can bloom in the most unexpected places and under the harshest of circumstances.



Sr. Rosa beaming (left) with one of our graduates.

Dear Jesus,

Let me see in the need
of the leper,
Thy need;
in his cry for help,
Thy cry.
Let me see
in every leper,
Thyself, O Lord,
that I may always
serve Thee
through him.

by Fr. Leo Hofstee

UPCOMING MISSION APPEALS

If you are in the area, please come to one of the Masses at which we've been invited to preach and say "Hello."

September 5-6

Immaculate Conception
Corning, CA
Fr. David Orique, O.P.

Our Lady, Help of Christians
Los Angeles, CA
Fr. Bart de La Torre, O.P.

September 12-13

St. Bernard/Our Lady of Lourdes
Scio, OR
Fr. Vincent Lopez, O.P.

Our Lady, Star of the Sea
Alviso, CA
Fr. Martin Walsh, O.P.

September 26-27

Resurrection
Aptos, CA
Fr. Vincent Lopez, O.P.

October 3-4

St. Anthony
Helper, UT
Fr. Donald Bramble, O.P.

October 24-25

Notre Dame
Price, UT
Fr. Vincent Lopez, O.P.