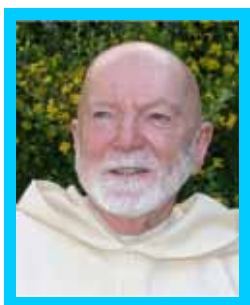


The Poorest of the Poor



Dear Mission Friends:

On the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in June 1947, the first foreign missionary of our Western Dominican Province, Fr. Anthony Hofstee, O.P., arrived in the midst of the horror and misery and despair of the Tala Leper Colony in the Philippine Islands. He remained there until his death in 1987, having served the lepers of Tala for four decades. According to the Vatican Pontifical Council for Health Care Ministry, there are currently, worldwide, 250,000 new cases of leprosy each year, 12% of which involve children. [Over the years your generous contributions to our mission office have enabled us to help continue Fr. Hofstee's legacy of compassion, healing, and hope.](#)

In recent years we have shared with you reports from Tala of the ministry of the Brothers of St. Martin de Porres (the Martinian Brothers), themselves lepers. The good brothers always had a dream of one day expanding their ministry to other leper colonies (someday even to other countries), and have now done so in Mindanao, at the southernmost end of the Philippines nearest to Malaysia. A rising conflict in Mindanao between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a Muslim organization fighting as an Islamic separatist movement, and the Philippine government has displaced over 100,000 people. Muslim-Christian violence is rampant; massacres, killings, and kidnappings are commonplace. And the lepers had been left with no one to care for them, until now.

The Superior of our Martinian Brothers, Br. Florencio Penaroyo, O.P., recently wrote to me describing their ministry in Mindanao: *"The first priority of our Brothers is taking care of the lepers, who happen to be Muslims. Because of the stigma of leprosy, they hide in the remote, mountainous areas of the islands, and we take long*



Br. Florencio Penaroyo, O.P., Superior of the Brothers of St. Martin de Porres

treks to find them, and then encourage and convince them to return with us to the lowland for proper diagnosis and treatment. After they are sent home, the Brothers monitor their regiments of medication, re-dress their wounds, check for complications, and follow up on their treatment plans. We also encourage those with other dreaded diseases that inflict the islands, such as malaria, to come for treatment."

A meeting of the Brothers and a group of Muslims on Mindanao.



The Brothers take whatever transportation is available to find and treat the Mindanao lepers-in-hiding.



A Brother on a follow-up visit to the home of a leper family.



Patients waiting for treatment.



The Brothers also assist with the spiritual needs of the Catholics in the area by organizing liturgies of the Word and arranging celebration of Mass and the sacraments. The number of Catholics is relatively small—Christian groups in general make up only 3% of the population—but, according to their apostolic vicar, Bishop Angelito Lampon, OMI, *“The Brothers’ religious presence is invaluable.”*

However, as survivors of leprosy themselves, the Brothers spend much of their time and energy on their health ministry, serving those who

need them most. Bp. Lampon also writes, *“Since the honorarium that I give to the Martinian Brothers in Mindanao is hardly enough for their personal sustenance, I thank you for your Foundation’s commitment and dedication to the poorest of the poor.”*

We pray that the following words written down by Mohammed in transcribing the Quran will be remembered by members of the MILF as they see our Dominican Brothers minister among the Muslim lepers of Mindanao:

“Nearest in affection to the believers (Muslims) are those who say, ‘We are Christians,’ because among them are priests and monks, who do not behave arrogantly.” As Mohammed protected the monks of Mount Sinai, may the Muslims of Mindanao protect our Brothers of St. Martin de Porres. I can think of nothing that would soften the hearts of Taliban and Al Qaeda more than the sight of our Brothers lovingly cleansing the wounds of Muslim lepers.

In Christ’s Peace,

Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P.

St. Martin de Porres,

*Patron of the Dominican Mission Foundation
and the Martinian Brothers’ namesake.*

In 1962 Pope John XXIII canonized St. Martin de Porres, proclaiming, *“Always obedient and inspired by his Divine Teacher, he dealt with his brothers with that profound love which comes from pure faith and humility of spirit. He loved mankind because he honestly looked on them as God’s children and as his own brothers and sisters. Such was his humility that he loved them even more than himself, and considered them to be better and more righteous than he was. He excused the faults of others. He forgave the bitterest injuries, convinced that he deserved much severer punishments on account of his own sins. He tried with all his might to redeem the guilty; lovingly he comforted the sick; he provided food, clothing, and medicine for the poor; he helped, as best he could, farm laborers and Negroes, as well as mulattoes, who were looked upon at that time as akin to slaves: thus he deserved to be called by the name the people gave him: ‘Martin of Charity.’”*

