



# Heartbeats

A publication to share our accompaniment on the mission journey

Volunteers International for Development Education and Service

March 2007

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## Transforming MISSION Experiences

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I had never been more nervous and unsure [writes **Matthew Putorti**] than when the plane landed in **Khartoum, Sudan** that October night. It was as if I was entering some forbidden, dangerous land – a place only known because of its tragedies: war, famine, genocide. I did not say much as we boarded the bus to take us to the terminal. Inside the airport, my ears still plugged from the plane ride, I sat quietly trying to inconspicuously look around at this new place while I waited for my visa to be processed.

At least, though, I was with a friend (and fellow volunteer missionary), **Frank So** from Portland, Oregon. We were arriving from **Kigali, Rwanda** where we had just completed the first leg of volunteer service with VIDES (Volunteers International for Development Education and Service), an NGO (Non-Government Organization) operated by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Salesian Sisters), a Catholic [order](#).

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**St. Dominic Savio**, teach us to accept life as a gift and live it with true freedom and joy.

## 150 Anniversary of St. Dominic Savio

### A Word from Our Director

This year we are celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of St. Dominic Savio. He was an ordinary boy with an extraordinary love for God and for others. Dominic chose his life motto at 7 years of age when he made his First Communion: "Death, but not sin!"

"In the face of the old and the new needs of the young, always be ready to respond without hesitation or uncertainty. Put before them a plan of life such as Don Bosco did with Dominic Savio. Help the young people to accept life as a gift and to live it with true freedom and joy. Tell them that what will give them strength and guarantee their growth is friendship with Jesus, and having experience of God. And, finally, teach them to open themselves to responsibility, to service, to solidarity, to charity".

[From the homily of Card. Tettamanzi, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the canonization of Saint Dominic Savio, at the Mass in the Duomo of Milan, in the presence of the Saint's casket, 9 March 2004.]

Please see **A Word from Our Director** on page 3

# Winter FSC, Dec 28, 2006 - Jan 8, 2007

## New Volunteer Missioners + Spirit Team



### 2007 JANUARY Formation/Service Camp COMMISSIONING Bishop Patrick J Zurek, DD

**Back Row:** 07-Erica Greil (from MN, Mission-Rwanda); 07-Theresa Davey (from FL, Mission: Italy); **Bishop**, and 07-Paul Alvarez (from TX, Mission: Africa-07)

**Middle Row:** 05-Tarry Le (from OR, Mission: East Timor-05-06 and TX-06-07); 07 Christina Armari (from NJ, Mission: Honduras); **S Sandra Neaves**, FMA Provincial; **SM Gloria Mar**, FMA; 07 Marco Giroldi (from Italy, Mission: Mexico-06 and Venezuela-07); 07-Gabriel Jenko (from MT, Mission: Ethiopia)

**Front Row:** 07-Iris Lee (from CA, Mission: Australia); 05-Amanda Isaac (from TX, Mission: Honduras-05, TX-06, 07); 05-Allison Skinner (from TX, Mission: TX-05, 06, 07); 07-Jamie Young (from TX, Mission:TX, Rwanda); 04-Asheley Hanna (from TX, Mission: Honduras-04 and Guatemala-06)

#### **NEW Volunteer Missioners:**

Iris, Jamie, Christina, Marco, Gabriel, Erica, Theresa, and Paul

#### **+ Spirit Team:**

Amanda, Allison, Ashley, Tarry, Marco was "Spirit Team" and "New" to TX FSC, and S Theresa Jones, FMA



Scene from Bethlehem Village Camp  
at Westway, San Antonio, TX

**150... A Word from Our Director** from page 1

At 12, Dominic started attending the school run by St. John Bosco in Italy. At 15, only three years after, he died on March 9, 1857. He was canonized in 1954. How did he become a saint? By following the advice Don Bosco gave him: living with joy and love his daily life: playing, studying, praying, being friendly, doing his best, and helping others to do the same.

Thank you, VIDES Volunteer missionaries and friends, for helping to continue the legacy of St. Dominic Savio by working with the young and helping them grow in their love for God and for one another! ♥

*Sister MaryGloria Mar, FMA – VIDES+USA Director*

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**MATT from SUDAN** from page 1

I signed up for a year of service with VIDES after having completed my undergraduate degree. The decision to do so was something I contemplated for a long time – and was influenced by several factors. First and foremost, I was inspired by my parents whose long involvement with civic organizations helped shape my personal development and moral system. This metaphysical respect of humanity was codified and experienced during my time at Boston College where the Jesuit ideal of “men and women for others” brought me to Mozambique, El Salvador and Appalachia – and simultaneously to a better understanding of social justice and solidarity. Finally, with faith’s challenge to put love into action, I see a responsibility to work for the betterment of everyone. Choosing to do work internationally does not deny that poverty exists in the US; rather it highlights that the poverty in many places of the underdeveloped world is more entrenched and widespread, while infrastructure and good governance do not exist to bring people out of poverty.

My first four weeks abroad were spent in Rwanda, the site a not-too-distant genocide that left nearly 800,000 people dead during a terrifying 100 day period in 1994. But it has moved toward stability

and this is quite a feat: reconciliation to the point of progress in only twelve years.

I was volunteering at a primary school and orphanage for girls aged three to eighteen. My tasks, like washing dishes, were fairly menial, yet humbling and gave me plenty of time to spend with the orphans whose love seemed to radiate from their beings. More than anything, they wanted



only to be loved in return, to be paid attention to and affirmed, that – yes! – they have self-worth.

It was also in Rwanda that Frank and I founded the Banana Fund, a fundraising effort with the original aim of supplementing the diet of the school children and orphans with healthy alternatives.

It was difficult leaving the orphans after only a month, laden with a guilt that I was propagating a cycle of people coming into their lives then leaving shortly thereafter, but they understood I had to move onto a new challenge – and that they would forever remain in my heart. This new challenge was Sudan, an interesting juxtaposition to Rwanda because many claim a genocide is currently taking place here. It is also in Sudan that the Banana Fund took on a new dimension.

In Sudan I continue volunteering with the Salesians, but this time in a far different setting: at a technical training school for young men in the city of El Obeid, a school that has for the past three years educated and boarded an increasing number of IDPs (internally displaced persons) from Sudan’s troubled Darfur region, as well as young men from the Nuba Mountains and street children. Just before my arrival, the school had taken in 178 young men from Darfur for the 2006-2007 academic year.

Sudan, the largest country in Africa, has a turbulent past, a troubled present and an uncertain future. For nearly forty years preceding the signing of peace agreements in 2005, there was a gruesome civil war between the Muslim North and Christian and Animist South that left nearly 2 million people dead. This dramatic event was coupled by crippling famines in the 1980s and 1990s.

From that conflict, Sudan moved to another in 2003 between the Khartoum government and its Darfur provinces. There, the fighting continues and is presently entering its fifth year. This conflict is believed to have taken on an ethnic tone which pits Arabs against Africans – and is the foundation from which many international observers have declared that a genocide is being committed against the Africans. The violence in Darfur is very complex and a superficial analysis would only



trivialize it. Suffice it to say that since 2003, estimates put the death toll at 200,000, with

another 3 million who have fled their homes and become either IDPs or refugees in neighboring Chad, Uganda and the Central African Republic. Residents are subject to attacks by the *Janjaweed*, or Arab militia on camel back, widely believed to be supplied and supported by the Khartoum government. Both the rebels and the government have been implicated in attacks and have propagated the violence, but the government of Sudan has consistently rejected international humanitarian intervention by the United Nations on sovereignty grounds.

In fact, this issue of sovereignty and the violence in Darfur was the subject of my senior thesis at Boston College – and has recently taken on an entirely new dimension as I have heard first-hand accounts of what has happened in Darfur.

One year ago, sitting in the library researching this subject, I never would have imagined that today I would be sitting in Sudan asking young men from Darfur what has happened to them over the past four years. Never could I have imagined, either, this globalized society in which we live - one that proclaims the dignity and rights of every person – permitting such atrocities from occurring, going virtually unnoticed.

Several boys have told me how, when fleeing their village from attacks, they were separated from their parents and have not seen them since, unsure if they are alive or dead. Another explained how he was wrongly accused of being a rebel soldier, imprisoned for three days, tied up, beaten and tortured in an attempt to extract a confession. Almost everyone has had to flee their homes after the *Janjaweed* came to their villages, stole all their possessions and livestock, burned down their houses, killed their relatives and chased them to the nearest IDP camp. Many have scars from being grazed by bullets or hit by shrapnel from bombs. Everyone tells me life was good before; they were self-sufficient and happy. Now they live in fear, hiding the emotional and physical scars that come from living in a war-zone.

The bearers of these stories, young men from Nyala, South Darfur, are educated in the technical school where I currently reside. The idea behind the Darfur program is that it, if only for a year, removes them from what its director, **Fr. Vincent Donati**, SDB (an eighty year old Italian missionary dedicated to the service of humanity and love) refers to as the prisons of the IDP camps. It provides them with security and the opportunity to gain a technical skill, which increases their chances of one day finding



sustainable employment. It is a program which combines both

immediate relief and long-term development.

My time here has made me reflect about a number of aspects of life: Given what happened in Rwanda in 1994, why hasn't the international community taken the steps necessary to stop what has been happening in Darfur for over four years? What is the actual role of international NGOs and why hasn't more progress been made on the African continent if so much money and manpower is being devoted to development work? What are we, as individual US citizens, obligated to do in the face of such violence and poverty – both international poverty and the domestic poverty that Hurricane Katrina brought to the forefront?



What I do know is that Sudan will be my home for the next four months. I teach one English class a day to the young men from Darfur and Nuba Mountains. The rest of the day I spend coordinating the administration of the three boarding houses – paying the bills, purchasing food, making sure sick

students are taken to the hospital, taking care of the needs of the young men. One might say I am a pseudo-accountant and general problem solver. Together, Frank and I are also writing grants and pursuing other fundraising efforts to secure the monies necessary for the continuation, and possible expansion, of the Darfur program into next year. Unfortunately, the violence in Darfur shows no signs of stopping and thus the need for the program continues.

That is where the Banana Fund takes on its modified mission. Because of the generosity shown during the initial campaign, and because of the great needs Frank and I continue to witness in both Rwanda and Sudan, we have expanded its purpose to support the works of the Salesians in both places. Since its founding, we have been able to supplement the diets of the children in Kigali for one year, purchase English books for classes in El

Obeid and build a playground for children in Khartoum. In the future, and with continued support, we would like to be able to provide solar panels for hot water to the orphans in Rwanda. Additionally, we would like to bring as many young men from Darfur to the technical school next year (the cost for boarding and educating one boy for one year is about \$1,000). Most probably, we will find many other needs, but we will do what we can with what we have. Donations to the Banana Fund can be made online by visiting [www.vides.us](http://www.vides.us) (select "[Make a Donation](#)," donate through PayPal and enter Banana Fund in the "Message to Seller") or by sending a check made out to VIDES with "Banana Fund" in the subject line to: Sister MaryGloria Mar, 5630 W. Commerce Street, San Antonio, TX 78237 USA. VIDES USA is a 501 (c) (3) public organization where donations can be tax deductible.

I am very much looking forward to the remainder of this experience and I am far less nervous and unsure than I was five months ago. I try to be as present as possible, yet remain excited about returning to the US. I have a newfound appreciation for the rights and liberties afforded to us as US citizens, ones that ensure our security and progress. I have also come to realize how much my friends and family are blessings in my life. I am inspired by this all – and now also by the people of Rwanda and Sudan.

Frank and Fr. Vincent in ElObeid



Frank with Salesian Sisters

## FAITH in ACTION!



Frank and Matt started the [Banana Fund](#) for Rwanda + Sudan



Darfur boys learning a trade being helped by the Banana Fund

### Darfur, Sudan

Learn more about [Helping SUDAN](#).

Support Fair Trade Year Round by buying [Fair Trade Chocolates](#) where farmers receive fair price and there is no child labor. (This would make a great Easter gift!). Take a [quiz](#) to test your Fair Trade and Catholic Social Teaching knowledge.

### CRS University Programs:

1. CRS is seeking smart and passionate students to join the CRS/NCAN [College Leaders Program](#) on HIV & AIDS. Students receive a fantastic training on HIV & AIDS in Chicago, and head back to campus in the fall ready to make a difference. Apply today!
2. [Operation Rice Bowl](#): Be sure to check out this site for interactive material: video interview, photo tours, stations of the cross, recipes and other resources.
3. Take the [World Awareness Quiz](#) and test your knowledge of global issues.
4. Let's keep up the push, and urge Congress to enact [Comprehensive Immigration Reform](#) this year. It's fast 'n easy advocacy. ♥

## Stations of the Cross

Pray the Operation Rice Bowl Stations of the Cross and walk in the steps of Jesus, while reflecting on the reality of the poor. The Stations of the Cross available in [Flash](#) format.

## Share VIDES News!

Feel free to forward to your relatives, friends



VIDES Heartbeats Electronic Newsletter  
Sarah E. Herrmann – S MaryGloria Mar

## Take Note

VIDES+USA Heartbeats E-News is published to share glimpses of faith and love in action with all who desire to make a difference in the world.

For more information click the link to our website:

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