

# THE HEART OF A MISSIONARY

*Finding Christ in the Mission Fields*

*by Joann Giambalvo*

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Joann in Ghana, West Africa, during her first mission helping to serve the people in Sefwi-Asafo at the parish of St. John of God.

I KNEW FOR A LONG TIME THAT I WANTED TO BE INVOLVED IN MISSIONS AND HUMANITARIAN WORK. I KNEW IT YEARS BEFORE OUR LORD FINALLY THOUGHT I WAS READY TO TAKE ON THE TASK. WHEN HE KNEW I WAS READY, HE GUIDED ME TO SERVE OTHERS THROUGH MY CATHOLIC FAITH AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ME TO NOT ONLY SHARE MY FAITH, BUT TO TRULY LIVE IT. IT IS THROUGH THE LEGIONARIES OF CHRIST THAT I HAD MY FIRST OPPORTUNITY TO BE INVOLVED IN MISSION WORK. OUR LORD COULD NOT HAVE PICKED A BETTER PATHWAY FOR ME TO START MY JOURNEY. WITH THE GUIDANCE OF THE LEGIONARIES I HAVE MET, I HAVE COME TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE FAITH I AM LIVING AND THIS HAS HELPED ME ON MY PATH TO SERVING OTHERS.

## **A Guide for the Journey**

Each mission is a journey for my soul, and an effort of love and sacrifice. I feel I am walking hand-in-hand with Christ as I help my less fortunate brothers and sisters. He is with our mission team every day, not only watching over us as we use our different skills to serve the people we meet, but also working through our Legionary chaplain, our shepherd, who travels with us to each mission site celebrating Mass, leading morning and evening prayers, and offering spiritual direction to the missionaries. These spiritual moments help me to bring hope and charity to each person I meet. Bonding with other missionaries who are also joyful in serving others through Christ, I share in moments that



At the start of a new day of service with the mission team in Playa del Carmen, Mexico, on an annual November mission.

I might not otherwise have the opportunity to experience. We experience an unconditional love that only comes from giving ourselves as instruments of Christ.

Whether I am helping to set up a clinic to receive patients, joining in on activities with the local children, handing out reading glasses, or sharing in a moment with someone who needs prayer, there is a happiness and fulfillment that comes from helping these people who are strangers at first, but ultimately my Christian brothers and sisters. I am overjoyed by the comfort that the team I am part of brings to people in need. A simple smile, handshake or hug from someone I have helped is such a great gift! They are grateful and happy to know people care about them. After all, isn't this what Christ wants us to do?... to love and help each other to the best of our abilities.

### An Instrument in His Hands

Each day of the mission brings an opportunity for spiritual direction. Over the years, with each mission, I find this time gives me a chance to reflect, not only on the current mission, but also my direction in life: Why has Our Lord called me to this mission? How well am I serving people with the gifts God has given me? Do I feel Christ is preparing me through my mission work for a task he might need me for later in life? It's good to have spiritual guidance as to how I can best continue to live my life serving Our Lord. This November will be my seventh mission and the third of my annual trips to Mexico. I am looking forward to seeing what new insight I will gain from my experiences there.



Handing out much-needed vitamins to mothers and their children at St. John of God Hospital in Ghana.



In the village of Santa Rita Arriba, Panama, with a group of girls who came to visit our clinic with their parents. Knowing that one has the ability to help others is not just a responsibility, it is also a gift.

I never know how I am going to affect someone's life on a mission and, equally as important, I never know how someone else is going to affect mine. Any interaction with fellow missionaries or the people I serve is an opportunity for Christ to use each of us as instruments. To some, it might seem crazy to give up the comforts of home, travel thousands of miles, and spend almost two weeks with people you don't know, but I feel compelled to do this work and I believe Our Lord has me doing it for a reason. Like St. Teresa of Ávila said, "Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion is to look out to the world."

### A Thankful Servant

I can thank Christ every day for guiding me to where I am now in my life, a place where I have a heightened sense of his undying love for me and a place where I can truly serve him by serving others. I can tell him every day that I am aware of the blessings he has given me. However, I feel that through this journey of service I am actually *showing* him just how aware I am and just how much I appreciate all that he has done for me. The missions rejuvenate my soul, and I have Christ to thank for that. As a Catholic I have always practiced my faith, but thanks to the missions I now celebrate my faith – every day. ✚

For a list of upcoming missions please visit **HELPING HANDS Medical Missions** at [www.hhmm.org](http://www.hhmm.org)