News



Drs. Alex Olney, Rachel Johnson and Anna Sulimirski Strasma first met at Prince of Peace Church in Flowery Branch, Georgia, which sponsors a mission to Nicaragua. (CNS/Courtesy of the Sulimirski Family via Atlanta Archdiocese)



by Dan Morris-Young

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Editor's note: The Field Hospital blog reports on parish and other grassroots efforts across the U.S. and Canada to accompany those on the margins. Pope Francis said he sees the church as a "field hospital" that labors "from the ground up" to "heal wounds."

How much impact can a trip to communities in need in other countries make? Here are three examples:

• Three young women with roots in Prince of Peace Parish in Flowery Beach, Georgia, are doctors today, inspired by volunteering in Nicaragua through a nonprofit born in the parish, Amigos for Christ.

• A 1968 mission trip — this one to Guatemala — appears to have been a turning point for Fr. Stanley Rother. As a result of the visit, Rother asked to be moved from parish work in his Archdiocese of Oklahoma City and assigned to the mission at Santiago Atitlán. He was brutally murdered there in his rectory in 1981, an act attributed to death squads linked to the military. He will be beatified on Sept. 23 at the Cox Convention Center in Oklahoma City.



A woman holds a booklet with a picture of Fr. Stanley Rother during Mass in 2006 at a church in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala. (CNS/Reuters/Daniel LeClair)

Among those attending the beatification rite will be Fr. Kenneth Weare, pastor of St. Rita Parish in Fairfax, California, which has extensively supported mission work in the Santiago Atitlán area since 2001, and which spearheads the Marin County Guatemala Mission Program.

"St. Rita's participation over that period has resulted in the construction of two churches; the rebuilding of a convent; the rebuilding of a rectory; the construction of a carpenter school; the construction of a primary and secondary school; the construction of a pre-school; assisting in the construction of a major hospital; and the construction of a multi-purpose building at our school site," reports the parish website.

The St. Rita effort also sponsors multiple medical team visits annually.

• In yet another example, Caroline Boudreaux, a longtime parishioner of St. John Neumann Catholic Church in Austin, Texas, was deeply moved by her experiences at an orphanage during a 2000 trip to India.

As a result, she founded the Miracle Foundation on Mother's Day that year.

Today, the nonprofit works with 30 orphanages with a focus on providing staff training, facility improvements, and operational guidance. The Austin-based nonprofit is now also collaborating with Vatican efforts.

The church directs more than 2,000 orphanages worldwide, helping serve a global orphan population estimated at more than 150 million by UNICEF, according to media reports. The Christian Alliance for Orphans claims this could be an underestimate.

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On another front, NCR and Global Sisters Report have reported on Sacred Heart Parish's remarkable embrace of migrants in McAllen, Texas. That embrace led to the creation of the Humanitarian Respite Center on the parish campus. A Catholic Extension grant of $100,000 has helped build a new center a block from the church.

A Catholic News Service report provides background on the work there in the context of a recent visit to the McAllen center by Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich, who is chancellor of Catholic Extension. Some 70,000 have passed through the center,

most refugees from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras.



Sr. Norma Pimentel, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, and Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich greet asylum seekers at the Humanitarian Respite Center at Sacred Heart Church in McAllen, Texas, Aug. 15. (CNS/Courtesy of Catholic Extension)

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