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Bringing Dignity to persons affected by Hansen's Disease (leprosy) **20th Anniversary Newsletter**

Damien House Celebrates

20 Years!



Buen Provecho means Enjoy Your Meal!

A note from Sr. Annie Credidio, BVM

A warm welcome to the 2015 Damien House Newsletter! This is an opportunity to share with you, our cherished friends and supporters, the important events, significant changes, and special accompaniment we've received throughout the last year. As I look back upon the last 20+ years of Damien House, I am in awe at God's incredible work; God has smiled upon our Hansen's patients, our wonderful staff, retreat groups, and volunteers in countless ways. When I first came to Ecuador in 1987, I was a preschool teacher at Nuevo Mundo School. I visited what was, at the time, part of Guayaquil's infectious disease hospital. What began as leading arts and crafts on Saturdays turned into 20 years as a legal foundation that works for the dignity of Hansen's patients, provides holistic care for those in need, and shares in life's greatest challenges and gifts. I thank each of you for your prayers, donations, and visits, and say sincerely that none of this would be possible without you. We are so grateful. Here's to 20 amazing years of Damien House and to 20 more to come! May God continue to bless you, and may we keep working to bring dignity to the lives of those affected by Hansen's Disease.

BVMs Visit Ecuador!



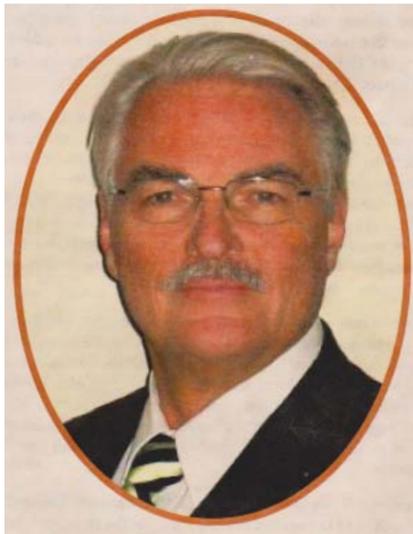
LEFT - President - Sr. Teri Hedro and Vice-President - Sr. Kate Hendel are greeted with a warm reception by Blanca and the other patients and recipients of the Mary Frances Clarke/Mary Griffin Scholarships for Women.

We celebrate the last 20 years of Damien House in both gratitude and thanksgiving for the magnificent family of BVMs and Associates, who have ensured recourse in moments of enormous need and prayer. Through their Ministry Focus Grants,

Mission and Ministry, Local Needs, Hunger Fund, and Margaret Mann Fund Committees, they have provided a number of opportunities, as well as constant daily necessities to our patients and friends.

*"From this moment on our lives will be driven by contemplation and imagination as we seek God's will and mission in all of creation."
 —Leadership Team Talk, 2014 BVM Senate*

To learn more about The Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, BVMs and Associates, visit us at <http://www.bvmcong.org>.



In Honor of Friends

We honor the lives of our dear friends Dr. Elizabeth Szalay and Dr. John Houkom. Dr. Szalay blessed Damien House with her beautiful icon of Father Damien. She also introduced us to our friends and supporters from St. Anthony's Alliance. Both she and Dr. Houkom were extraordinary orthopedic surgeons who used their talents to help hundreds of poor Ecuadorian children through Project Perfect World. We celebrate their lives and will miss them dearly for their incredible generosity and love. Our hearts and prayers are with Elizabeth's husband, Ken Gilman and John's wife, Alexe Page, and their families and friends. Damien House has two more angels watching over us!!

LEFT - Dr. John Houkom
RIGHT - Ken Gilman and Dr. Elizabeth Szalay



BOTTOM - In thanksgiving for the donation of wheelchairs through Globus Relief, Wilson gifts his beautiful paintings to Dale Montgomery, Vice-President (left), and Douglas Beck, President (right) of Project Perfect World. RIGHT - Isidro chooses a new donated wheelchair



A New Mural

Everyone enjoys the beautiful mural of Padre Damian. This painting was created by Jim Lochhead and helps bring some more beauty to the residents living here at Damien House.



Jim Lochhead puts his wonderful artistic talent to use painting this mural. We were lucky to have Jim volunteer his time from Rostro de Cristo and to bring this happiness to Damien House!



Annual Tea Time

Betty Matteson, Rita Rank, Katie Brown, Jimmy MacNamara, and Olga Miller pictured at the Annual Tea, sponsored by Friends and Helpers of Madre Berenice. This is the fourth year that hostess Rita Rank has offered her beautiful home on the ocean in San Diego for this event! We'd also like to thank all of our Friends and Helpers from Madre Berenice for their yearly commitment to and donation from another successful spaghetti dinner for Damien House!

Remembering Abuelita (Grandma) Celeste

There have been many invitations given over the years, but none of them have led to the creation of something as great as the invitation by Celeste. When Sr. Annie first arrived in Ecuador, it was to teach preschool children at Nuevo Mundo School, founded by Sonya Rendón and Pat McTeague. There, she had many invitations - things like lunch with new friends and visiting the homes of some of her students. But, it was the invitation by Celeste to visit a chapel for Mass that changed Sr. Annie's life! During this Mass, Sr. Annie first met the "untouchables" of society: those affected by Hansen's Disease. It was through this experience that she realized that she was called to Ecuador not to teach, but to help and care for



Sonya, Sandra Molano, Celeste, and Patricia arrive at Damien House

those who had been abandoned by society. Sr. Annie knew what she had to do. Soon after, she left Nuevo Mundo to start Fundación Padre Damián (the sister foundation to Damien House in Chicago). It was at that Mass, on the invi-

tation of Celeste, that she began her mission to give a voice to the voiceless. All those who have been helped at Damien House have Celeste to thank, for it was she who set Sr. Annie upon her path to help and care for those less fortunate.



Thanks to Ash Robinso, Shaimaa Alwassiti and Globus Relief for the HUGE amount of donated medical supplies and vitamins!

A BIG thank you to the Caster Family whose generous donation renovated several bathrooms!



Donations for the Women

In the womens section, life has been made brighter and more comfortable. Students from MacEwan University graciously donated new windows and a new sliding door was donated by Cynthia Paddu. Also, the women can now take refuge from the heat with the new air conditioner donated by Darshna Patel and her son Shivam.

Maria, Mercedes, Sr. Campion McGuire, RSM, Gladys, Sr. Pat Murphy, RSM, Blanca, Leonor, Sonia, and Magaly enjoy lunch in the womens section. The Chicago Mercy Sisters Campion and Pat never pass up an oppourtunity to visit Damien House while staying with their friends Pat McTeague and Sonya Rendón.



Pope Francis visits Ecuador!

Pope Francis visited Guayaquil and offered Mass to over one million people! Six residents and five others boarded the foundation van at 3:15 AM in order to get into the open field by 4 AM for assigned seats. The Pope arrived at noon for Mass. While waiting for the Pope, Blanca was interviewed and when asked what she hoped the Pope's visit will bring, she responded: "I hope that this will help put an end to violence." We needed to leave before Mass ended because our residents each presented health issues as they dealt with sweltering temperatures in the 90's! There was no place to hide from the sun and the wait for a bathroom was no less than an hour and a half. The good news is that we did get a glimpse of the Pope!

Blanca is interviewed about her thoughts on the Pope's visit to Ecuador and the upcoming Mass.

Alcedes, Manuel, and Sonia use umbrellas to escape from the sun during their long wait for the Pope's Mass.



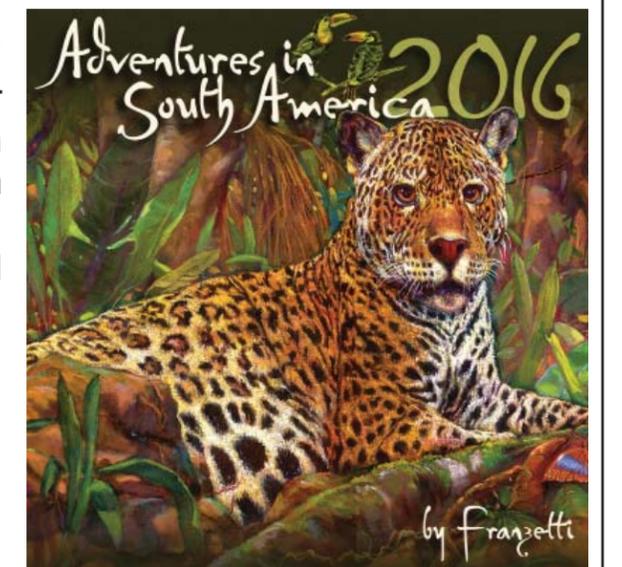
2016 Calendars Are Available

A BIG thanks to Joe and Paul Franzetti for their continued support helping Damien House with their beautiful calendars. All proceeds from their calenders go to Damien House. You can get more information on these beautiful calendars at:

<http://franzettiart.com>

or

<http://www.facebook.com/FranzettiArt>



Through the Eyes

Emily Kane - Rostro de Cristo Volunteer

“Compassion is not a bending toward the underprivileged from a privileged position; it is not a reaching out from on high to those who are less fortunate below; it is not a gesture of sympathy or pity for those who fail to make it in the upward pull. On the contrary, compassion means going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there. God’s compassion is total, absolute, unconditional, without reservation.” -Henri Nouwen

When I first told family and friends back at home that I would be working at Damien House during my year of service with Rostro de Cristo, I was shocked at the reaction I received. I was asked questions like, “Is that really a safe place to be for a year?” or “What happens if you catch it?” I couldn’t believe that despite modern technology and easy access to information, most people are still under many false impressions regarding Hansen’s disease. Before coming to Ecuador I knew the disease still existed in the world, but I could not fathom what that reality looked like for someone with Hansen’s. After nine months of volunteering at Damien House, I have come to know and love the names, faces and individuals behind this disease and through those relationships, I’ve begun to understand the signif-

icance of the ministry of presence. In every moment that we share with someone, whether it’s giving them a hug or a kiss or just sharing a conversation, we share an expression of love. It has taken a great lesson in humility to accept that I cannot change or “fix” the issues facing the people here at Damien. I can, however, make a difference simply by loving them as they are- in their struggles and their joys. Throughout this year, I have often reflected on the concept of downward mobility, an idea that we are quite unaccustomed to in US culture. We constantly feel the pressure to move in an upward motion- always striving to be richer, better, stronger, faster. That mentality has been fundamentally shifted throughout my time in Ecuador, particularly at Damien House. Instead of trying always trying to achieve more, I am learning the value of slowing down, and to simply just be. I am learning that God does not only love us in our attempts at perfection or what we can do well- God loves us in our brokenness and our powerlessness and our incompleteness. My time at Damien House has allowed me to see God

manifested in those who are most stigmatized or neglected in society. I certainly do not know the answers to the problems our patients face, but what I do know is that in this moment, all I can do is accompa-



Emily and Jacinto

ny each individual I have come to know- to meet them where they are in his or her journey, and embrace this downward pull to which God is calling me. As the Henri Nouwen quote states, compassion is about going to the margins and, without hesitation, creating a home with those who suffer most deeply. Damien House embodies this idea of compassion. It continues to be a refuge of unconditional acceptance and love for those who have been most marginalized by society, and I am proud to have played just a small role in that legacy.

Colleen Putzel - Rostro de Cristo Volunteer

As a Rostro de Cristo volunteer we are called to live out the Gospels in a very real and radical way. The Gospels provide messages of non-violence, inclusion, but most importantly love. As a volunteer at Damien House I have been challenged to love as Jesus loved in the Gospels; without question nor expectation. As we approach nine months in our thirteen month commitment I look back on what I thought before entering into this experience. The concepts of those pushed aside by society or poverty were only ideas that could be quantified in statistics. Now I consider Ecuador a home, where my family is, where my friends are, and where a piece of my heart will

their basic needs. It is fully diminishing that barrier of stigma that still surrounds the residents. We break down the walls by standing by aligning ourselves fully in both their joys and struggles. Surprisingly, barriers can be broken more easily than they are built. For me, aligning myself with those at Damien has meant living out the Gospels in a manner of

and Ave Maria’ during an intense game of dominos remind me that there is blessing in friendship and change that comes from kinship. He shared his health problems, sto-



Colleen and Ramon



Emily, Colleen, Sr. Annie and Anna (UEES Exchange student from France)

always be. A part of my home here is Damien House, where love and inclusivity are the rules. Loving people at Damien House is much more than providing them

‘being.’ One of my favorite ways to ‘be’ is playing dominos with Ramon. His constant heckling, advice about life and love, and repeated mantras of ‘hasta manana

ries of his life, and his gregarious smile. Although I cannot offer anything more than my company, our time spent together was one of jokes and laughter, building community despite the barriers. This experience has expressed to me how justice is built. First we must listen, because it is only with listening that we can truly become a voice for the voiceless. For when we listen, we can truly express what it is that people tell us, rather than what we think they need. It is only in ‘being’ that we can gain a sense of understanding, by living in the ordinary we experience what life means for them. By joining in a sacredness of inclusion we do not stand separately fighting ‘for’ them, but stand beside them, as friends and family, advocating together.

Congratulations to all at Rostro de Cristo on their 25th anniversary!

Interested in becoming a Rostro de Cristo volunteer? Check out the website: <http://rostrodecristo.org>

of a Volunteer

Partners in Research and Surgery

Eric Wan - Volunteer

Damien House continues to dedicate itself to improving the lives of persons with Hansen's by giving the best treatments available. Since 2004, we have collaborated with peripheral

and become compressed by their surroundings in the body. This results in neuropathy, or the loss of the nerves' motor and sensory functions, and is why patients with Hansen's lose their ability to move their hands and feet and their ability to feel pain when they

knowledge by sharing our experience with patients and advocates of Hansen's around the world.

Eric Wan is a volunteer who has come to Damien House for four months to do just that. He works with A Lee Dellon, MD, PhD, from Baltimore, Maryland in the

US. Dr. Dellon is one of Annie's Angels who came here in 2005 to do nerve decompression surgery on some of our patients. At that time, Dr. Dellon donated one of his inventions, the Pressure Specified Sensory Device (PSSD), which allows us to catch neuropathy in our patients early, halt the damage, and monitor their improvement.

Using the PSSD, Eric has been performing follow-up research on our patients so that



Eric Wan performed nerve conduction testing on over 100 patients. Here, Sr. Luz is being tested for sensory loss.

nerve surgeons who call themselves Annie's Angels. The group Annie's Angels comes from the US to perform nerve decompression surgeries on our patients.

Why do our patients need these surgeries? Our patients suffer from disabilities including clawed hands, "drop" feet, burns, and amputations. These disabilities are caused by the bacteria *M. leprae*, which is responsible for Hansen's, directly attacking the nerves and the body's immune reaction to the bacteria. The bacterium thrives in cooler, peripheral environments of the body, so it often targets the nerves of the arms, legs, and face. When the nerves are injured, they can swell

are hurt or burned. The patients lose part of their connection with the world, previously sustained through movement and touch!

The peripheral nerve decompression surgeries are intended to reverse some of the damage caused by the compressed nerves and also to prevent development of further disability. Over the years, we have had a great number of surgeries—over 100!—with many success stories. However, in the world's medical literature, these surgeries have never been adequately shown to be successful, mostly due to old technology that has limited the interpretation of results. Along with our mission, we wanted to fill in this gap of

it can be scientifically proven that these nerve decompression surgeries help our patients. He has seen that the majority of our patients have improved motor function and sensation owing to the surgery. The patients unfortunately cannot regrow any missing digits, but after surgery they can move and feel with those digits that they still have. These surgeries really can connect our patients with the world around them! Now it's time to share our experience with the Hansen's patients of the world.

We hope that soon these surgeries can be performed in other countries with Hansen's patients suffering from disabilities due to nerve damage from the disease.

A very special thank you to Dr. Dellon for his donation of the testing machine and for his continued support of all those at Damien House.

For more information on pain relief through nerve surgery, visit <http://www.dellon.com>.

Therapy for the Residents



Isidro, Abel (translator), Ramon, Fortunato, Gregorio, Bethany Ludwikosky, Maximo, and Carlos keep a balloon from touching the ground during therapy.



Maria Elena, Bethany Ludwikosky, Blanca, Leonor, and Blanca stretch their necks during their morning exercise.

The start of this year brought with it a long term volunteer. Bethany Ludwikosky is an Occupational Therapist from Kansas. She decided to volunteer at Damien House for ten months! Bethany first arrived at Damien House five years ago as a student of Occupational Therapy at Rockhurst University in Kansas City. Every year, Rockhurst visits Damien House with their students of Occupational and Physical

Therapy. They provide much needed therapy for the residents and outpatients of Damien House. After her week of help five years ago, Bethany knew she had to return and help again. In August 2014, Bethany was traveling in South America with her husband Matt. They arranged to meet up with the Rockhurst group when they made their yearly visit to the Foundation. That time, she was a supervisor of

the visiting students. When those students made their way back to the US, Bethany & Matt decided that they would return to Damien House to volunteer. Since Bethany has been here, she has improved the lives of the residents, outpatients, and staff through the creation of daily group therapy classes as well as individual therapy sessions. Bethany has been a wonderful volunteer and a inspiration to others!



English For Employees

Learning English is a goal for many Damien House Employees. We are fortunate to have volunteer Matt Ludwikosky here to help. Using donated laptops, Matt has created a small classroom so those workers who are interested can practice their English. Matt is here volunteering with his wife Bethany! He also helps fix various computer issues that arise and helps with any and all foundation operations. He writes grants, manages promotional media, takes and edits photos, and anything else requested of him!

Magaly, Matt Ludwikosky, Danilo, and Marjorie work on Rosetta Stone. This English learning program was generously donated by Tammy Szilagyi!

Jill Montanari, Carol Thornton, Gary Szilagyi, Vincent Seid, Tammy Szilagyi, Sr. Annie, John and Nancy Thielmann, Zeny Seid and Larie St. John enjoy a fundraiser held in Tammy and Gary's beautiful home in Los Gatos, CA.



BVMs Sr. Bette Gambonini, Sr. Elizabeth Avalos, Sr. Marilyn Wilson from Sunnyvale, CA enjoy the fundraiser with Sr. Annie

Visitors from a working retreat through St. Joseph's Parish, Cockeysville, MD take a rest after sorting and bagging the clothing, shoes, and hospital supplies/donations they brought to Damien House.



Rostro de Cristo volunteer Aly Monteleone sits with Norberto. Aly visited Damien House in 2010 as part of the Magnificat High School "Working Retreat" and knew she wanted to come back!

Damien House is Independant

Last year, the mayor of Guayaquil signed papers extending the lease for the foundation for another 25 years! This has been coupled with some recent changes on the relationship between Damien House and the Hospital of Infectious Diseases. Damien House has been officially separated from the hospital, bringing with it increased cost such as the foundation covering more utilities and providing the evening meal in-house. One major advantage of this separation is that no resident will ever be asked to leave. The Hospital of Infectious Diseases no longer has any say in the running of Damien House!

LEFT TO RIGHT - Germania, Sr. Annie, Gino Molinari, and Mayor Jaime Nebot pose after gifting the mayor with a handmade pillow made by the women residents.



St. Matthias and St. Pius Retreat Immersion Group



Students from St. Matthias and St. Pius cheer up Jacinto while he was recovering from surgery. After their wonderful experience at Damien House in June, the youth group, coordinated by Sabrina Harper, returned to the US wanting to help Damien House more. This led to a mass mailing and a fundraiser dinner at St. Pius in October. We are very grateful for all their support!

Rockhurst Returns!

Occupational and Physical Therapy students from Rockhurst University in Kansas City returned again to provide therapy for the residents and outpatients. Many of the patients have been coming every year for the Rockhurst annual therapy visit. Those who attended left with excercises, therapy equipment, and education on improving their daily lives. Since many had come before, they were able to show the progress they have been making using the help they have received in previous years.

Carlos receives extenders on his wheelchair brakes as students from Rockhurst discuss adaptations to help him in daily life.



Thank You!!!



All of us at Damien House would like to give a special thanks to ALL of our Donors, and especially to:

- The Sisters of Charity, BVM bvmcong.org
- The Sarita Kennedy East Foundation
- The Damien Dutton Foundation
- Carmen Estarellas de Cevallos for the generous printing of this newsletter
- Zeny and Vincent Seid, John Lis, Sr. Margaret Cosgrove, BVM, and Katie Brown for donating airline miles to make fundraising possible!
- St. Anthony's Alliance
- Joe and Paul Franzetti
Congratulations to Joe and Stephanie for their marriage!

A New Home and a Full Heart

One does not know what to expect on an ordinary day at Damien House. Such was the case when Sr. Luz called with a special request. A 93 year old woman named Natividad was found by her neighbors crawling on her hands and knees. She was hoping to find some food in her tiny cane house. Sr. Luz asked, "Don't you remember her? Damien House built a bathroom for her years ago." Since then, she was abandoned by her family and left alone to care for herself. Neighbors were concerned because she could no longer walk. The request was simple, could you take her into your home? Our reply was an immediate yes! In January, Natividad became part of the Damien House family. After therapy with Bethany, she is now walking! We were able to do this because of the generosity of all of our donors!

Natividad and Sr. Annie admire a painting made by Sr. Maxine Rummelhart, BVM



Fifty Wonderful Years of CMT!

Congratulations to the CMT (Centro del Muchacho Trabajador) for fifty years of service to the families in Quito, Ecuador! Since its inception, Damien House has enjoyed a long standing relationship with the CMT. Last November, Sr. Annie traveled to Quito to participate in the festivities celebrating fifty years of breaking the cycle of poverty. It started out as a place for young boys who were not working and it transformed into something greater. A family of families!

To learn more about CMT and their volunteer program, visit:

<http://www.c4wf.org/>

Sr. Annie, Father Halligan - S.J., Sr. Cindy Sullivan - BVM, Sr. Kate Hendel - BVM, Sr. Teri Hadro - BVM, Sr. Miguel Conway - BVM, Sr. Saskia Alquina - BVM, Pat McTeague - Associate, Sonya Rendón - Associate were among the hundreds who took part in the grand celebration!

How Can I Help Damien House?

SEND YOUR TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION TO:

Damien House, Inc.

C/O Suzanne Belz, President, 4407 North Elston Avenue, Chicago, IL 60630

This is a mailing address only, not an office.

All donations go directly to the care of Hansen's patients. There is no overhead.

DONATE INSTANTLY ON OUR WEBSITE USING THE JUST GIVE BUTTON ON THE HOMEPAGE:

www.thedamienhouse.org

WRITE US AT:

damienhouse@gmail.com

SHOP ON AMAZON USING:

<http://smile.amazon.com> (select Damien House Inc for your charity)

LOOK FOR US ON FACEBOOK

La Fundacion Padre Damian