



# Mission Report

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- \* **Bangladesh** Becomes HLI's 158<sup>th</sup> Mission Territory
- \* **HLI's Hispanic Online Training Program**
- \* **This Month's Gift to Donors: *How to Build a Culture of Life.***

*Left: Dr. Ligaya Acosta with children from the Home for Champions orphanage in Dhaka, Bangladesh.*

Dear Pro-Life Friend in Christ,

In this month's issue of *Mission Report*, Dr. Ligaya Acosta, HLI Regional Director for Asia and Oceania, reports from a milestone mission trip: Bangladesh has become the 158<sup>th</sup> country HLI has traveled to for missionary work in our history of over 35 years. The purpose of this trip was to lay the groundwork for future mission trips. However, in addition to making several important contacts there, Dr. Acosta managed to give three presentations as well.

This report also gives you insight into the life of an HLI missionary. Leaving the comforts of home, our missionaries face many challenges in dealing with foreign cultures and difficult accommodations. While conveyed in a colorful and good-hearted way, Dr. Acosta's account of the hardships she endured make us appreciate all the more what an HLI missionary goes through to spread the Gospel of Life.

Next, Mario Rojas, HLI Regional Director of Latin America, relates the wonderful Hispanic online training program that has been enthusiastically received in many countries of Latin America. This program has seen tremendous growth in recent years, and all signs indicate that it will continue to expand in the months and years to come. In addition to sharing the history of this program, Mario's report tells of a graduation ceremony he attended this past February, which was held for 298 participants who completed the program.

The fruits of our labor are both rewarding and inspiring. Lives are truly changed through the heroic efforts of our missionaries. We may be tempted at times to get discouraged by powerful governments and organizations that spread the evils of the Culture of Death; but our missionaries "in the trenches" save lives and heal souls on a daily basis. This is the work Our Lord has given us, and we thank Him daily for the part that you, our donors, play in it. May God reward you for your unwavering support.



Fr. Shenan J. Boquet  
President

Yours in Christ and in Our Lady,

Fr. Shenan J. Boquet  
President, Human Life International

## MISSIONARY TRIP TO BANGLADESH

*By Dr. Ligaya A. Acosta, HLI Regional Director for Asia and Oceania, February 2017*

I embarked on my first mission trip to Bangladesh on February 20, 2017, making it the 158th country visited by HLI.

Bangladesh is a country in Southern Asia, sharing land borders with India and Myanmar. Though seemingly overpopulated with a population density of 1,146 per square mile, Bangladesh's Total Fertility Rate is actually just on the replacement level at 2.19 children born per woman.

With 31.5% of its population living below the poverty line, Bangladesh is a haven for death peddlers. In fact, the country has been a training ground for abortion in Asia, despite the fact that induced abortion is illegal here – except “when performed to save a woman’s life.” Dubbed as Menstrual Regulation (MR), it has been part of Bangladesh’s national family planning program since 1979. MR is “a procedure that uses manual vacuum aspiration (MVA) to safely establish non-pregnancy after a missed period.” MR procedures are done up to 8-10 weeks “after a woman’s missed period,” which simply means that a baby in the womb can be killed up to age 10 weeks.

The annual rate of MRs is 18.3 per 1,000 women aged 15-44, which totaled 653,100 in 2010. In the same year, there were also 646,600 induced abortions, which has an estimated rate of 18.2 per 1,000 women aged 15-44. But even with this already staggering number of pre-born killed each year, death peddlers are still aggressively finding ways to increase the number!



## INITIAL SHOCK

I arrived in Dhaka around midnight on February 20, but the streets were still teeming with people. On the way to my hotel, I had to take great care as busses and cars would swerve anytime anywhere. It's no wonder that the busses are covered with huge scratches and bumps, and every vehicle is continually blasting its horn. Even from my 14th-floor hotel room,



Dr. Ligaya Acosta (right) with her guide in Bangladesh, Joshef Jony Quiah.

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the noise was so disturbing that, despite travel fatigue, I was not able to sleep a wink on my first night. And when I opened the dust-filled curtain of my hotel window in the morning, I thought there was going to be storm, until I realized it was dark smog enveloping the entire city.

Faintness of heart, however, is not a characteristic of an HLI missionary. Very soon I got used to what is normal in Bangladesh, including riding in tricycles called CNG (Compressed Natural Gas), which seemed a faster mode of transport as it could more easily snake through the daily heavy traffic. And with the CNGs covered all around with steel grills, which could only be opened from the inside, I felt secure. I just had to close the canvas curtain to make sure I was not covered with thick dust flying all over, while at the same time constantly fanning myself for air. In Bangladesh, busses, cars, CNG's, rickshaws, and people chaotically co-exist in the streets, each constantly trying to outdo the other. One just needs to trust that the drivers who are all locals are expert in their jobs. But this is not always the case, as I soon found out.

Once, on my way back to the hotel, my driver ran into a motorcycle that had stopped suddenly in order to avoid hitting a child. This abrupt stop sent me flying forward, and I hit the back of the driver's seat with my

face! I thought I would go to my next meeting with a black and blue face, but, thank God, my frantic use of ice packs worked.

In addition to the chaos in the streets, another challenge was sanitation. A thick layer of dust coated the cemented streets, and piles of garbage peacefully co-existed with countless street vendors, most of them selling food items. One time, I was severely vomiting in my CNG on the way back to my hotel, but the Lord made sure I did not experience embarrassment, and I was still able to fulfill all my engagements. Miraculously, I was only severely sick when I was secured in my hotel room. I offered my pains for the success of the mission in Bangladesh.

#### **MEETING WITH PASTOR ALFRED**

The day after my arrival, I met with Baptist Pastor Alfred Biplob Biswas, who had written to HLI in August 2016, expressing his desire to promote HLI's mission in Bangladesh. Pastor Alfred brought along his Catholic accountant, Joshef Jony Quiah, and we had a long, cordial discussion. Jony became my guide and companion in the following days, as I was told it is not safe for a foreigner to travel alone.

## VISIT TO SMYRNA AND HOME OF CHAMPIONS

In the afternoon, Pastor Alfred brought me to his “Home of Champions,” an orphanage he founded, which currently cares for 28 children, mostly in their teens. Many of the children actually have parents, but as Pastor Alfred explained, they are too poor to take care of them, much less send them to school. Thus, with the help of some foreign benefactors, he takes care of all their needs, including their schooling. Pastor Alfred intends to keep them in the home until they have finished their studies and are old enough to take care of themselves.

I was warmly welcomed by everyone, and they listened intently as I spoke to them and encouraged them to always strive to be good and to take their studies seriously. I explained that I myself had come from a poor family, but I took seriously my father’s advice to study hard, as education is the key to a better life. I also told them that God loves them and one proof of that is their presence in this home where their needs are being met.

Though I had very limited funds



Dr. Ligaya Acosta with some of the children from the Home for Champions orphanage in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

myself, I fished out a hundred dollars and gave it to Pastor Alfred for the children. I also brightened their eyes by buying them ice cream.

## MEETINGS WITH CHRISTIAN PRELATES

In addition to Pastor Alfred, I also met with other Catholic and Christian leaders. Each meeting would lead to yet another meeting, as I was introduced to more people.

The first Catholic priest I visited was Rev. Fr. Quirico Martinelli, Parish Priest of the Mary Queen of Apostles Church in Mirpur District. Father Martinelli also runs a Catholic school and dispensary, and from the way he was greeted by locals, it was obvious that this great priest had captured their hearts. Over a cup of tea, I introduced the mission of HLI and presented to him the HLI DVD Library, The Pro-Life Handbook, the HLI Contraceptive Series, Baby Joshua and Precious Feet pins, for which he was deeply grateful. He suggested that I see Fr. Mintu Palma, whom he said is the priest they always call for talks on marriage and the family. And, knowing that I also wanted to see the Cardinal Archbishop of Bangladesh, he invited me to re-

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turn the next day when the Cardinal would be celebrating Mass in honor of four sisters taking their perpetual vows and another one celebrating her 50th anniversary.

I arrived very early the next day at Father Martinelli's church. His Eminence Patrick d'Rozario, the newly appointed Cardinal of Bangladesh, also arrived early, and thus we had plenty of time to talk. When Father Martinelli introduced me to him, he very warmly said, "I know her!" And when I asked permission to do the mission in his country, he very humbly said, "You don't need my permission, you already have been anointed by God!"

As we spoke, he did not let go of my hand, like a father to her daughter. The 74-year old Cardinal was like a voice of God to me, inspiring me to carry on. I met him again at the Saturday evening Mass I attended at the seminary. Listening to his homily, which this time was in English, I was once again touched by his humility. Obviously his being a prince of the Church did not go to his head. He said that his appointment came as a surprise to him and is "Pope Francis's gift to this poor country."

As recommended by Fr. Martinelli, I went to see Rev. Fr. Dr. Mintu Palma, who very cordially received me at his office in the Holy Rosary Parish Church. Fr. Mintu is the Judicial Vicar of the Interdiocesan Ecclesiastical Tribunal in Dhaka, and is at the same time the Director of the Christian Family Counseling Centre and Professor at the Holy Spirit Major Seminary. Having been schooled in the oldest Pontifical University in the Philippines, Fr.



**Dr. Acosta with His Eminence Cardinal Patrick D'Rozario, CSC; Rev. Fr. Quirico Martinelli; and a PIME sister in Dhaka, Bangladesh.**

Mintu received me like an old friend and, after our meeting, invited me for coffee at their dining hall where he introduced me to other priests. He was pleased at my arrival and said that HLI's mission is needed in Bangladesh. He was enthused at my offer to give pro-life training and said that it should be offered countrywide. Thus, he also recommended that I see Rev. Fr. Jyoti Francis Costa, Secretary of the Episcopal Commission on Family and Life of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB). Father Mintu also said he wanted to attend the upcoming HLI Asia-Pacific Congress on Faith, Life, and Family, to be held in November in Bangkok, Thailand.

### **VISIT TO THE HOLY SPIRIT MAJOR SEMINARY**

As a major component of HLI's mission, I visited the Holy Spirit Major Seminary in Dhaka, where I had a very cordial meeting with its Rector, Rev. Fr. Emmanuel K. Rozario, who was also happy to receive my gifts of HLI materials. He promised to give us at least one full-day session with the 98 seminarians when we return. He also said he will invite all the other formation houses to send participants during that time so many more can hear our talks.

I was also able to interact with the seminarians, including the four who were ordained deacons that day by the Cardinal. Every one of them was interested in HLI's mission, and told me they look forward to our return. They were happy to receive the HLI DVD Library, which is truly an excellent resource for them. They were also excited to learn about "Seminarians for Life International" and that they could go to our website for downloadable materials.

## TALKS TO THREE GROUPS

Aside from meeting key people, I also gave three talks: first, to the residents of the Home for Champions; second, to a group of couples and leaders at the Baptist church of Pastor Alfred; and third, to the PIME nuns (The Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions) at their convent and formation house in Mirpur.

Everyone, including the non-Catholics, expressed a lot of interest in the talks and said they were hearing this information for the first time. One couple leader said, “These are very important topics that I want to learn more about so I can teach them to our people.” No one, they said, had ever told them about the killer effects of contraception and the beauty of Natural Family Planning. Thus, I took time to teach NFP to the young couples, for which they were very grateful.

I thank with all my heart all those who earnestly prayed for my safety in Bangladesh. Certainly, the good Lord heard our pleas. As I arrived in Manila, in my home country of the Philippines, my perspectives were changed. Before, I thought we had the worst traffic in the world. When I returned, I thought everything was perfect!

We often need to see conditions in other places to feel how blessed we are and to be able to generously share what we have, knowing that people in such places need our help.

Please help us pray that the seeds I planted in Bangladesh will grow and bear much fruit.

I also beg everyone to share whatever you can so that we can continue the mission there.

May everything we do glorify the Lord!



Dr. Acosta with two PIME nuns at their convent and formation house in Mirpur.

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## MISSIONARY TRIP TO COLOMBIA

*By Mario Rojas, HLI Regional Director of Latin America, February 2017*

In February of 2017, I was invited by Fr. Nelson Patino Villa, Family Pastoral Delegate of the Diocese of Sonsón Rionegro, Colombia, to participate in graduation exercises for 289 men and women in Antioquia, Colombia, who had enrolled in and were graduating from HLI's Online Pro-Life Hispanic Training Program.

The origin of this online program dates back to 2013, when Nancy Tosi, an HLI trainer and adviser to HLI for Latin America, was asked to offer a course via Skype to a diocese in Bogota, Colombia. The issue at the time was that, although training was needed, the funds were not available to do live sessions.



**Mario Rojas (left photo) and Nancy Tosi (right photo) with two of the 298 graduates from HLI's Online Pro-Life Hispanic Training Program.**

In 2015, the need to expand this program was determined during a REDESSVIDA (Latin American Network of Priests and Seminarians for Life) congress in the Diocese of Sonsón Rionegro, Colombia. There was a great desire to expand this online training program to more parishes in more countries, and so this initial effort expanded to other dioceses in Colombia, Bolivia, Mexico, and Peru.

Finally, at another REDESSVIDA congress that took place in the Diocese of Sonsón Rionegro in April 2016, we were able to schedule training for 289 participants from that diocese alone. This was the graduating class of February 2017.

The testimonies of the participants that took the course were very encouraging. Here is a sampling of questions and the answers given:

Q: How do you evaluate the course in general?

A: "I value the course immensely, it is a blessing from God, and it teaches you to value life much more profoundly."

Q: What was your understanding of life and family issues before taking the course and how has it changed after taking the course?

A: Before taking this course, my understanding was very poor. I lacked the knowledge of many elements that science teaches about life and human dignity. But now I feel I have the tools to love, respect, and defend life.

Q: Would you recommend the course to other people?

A: I believe it is very important that more people take the course, because it seems to me that due to lack of knowledge, some governments and self-interested people are trying to confuse the population, using the cause of human rights to promote anti-life policies. The more people become better informed, the more possibilities we have to stop the Culture of Death.

Q: How might we make this course better?

A: We need more videos. But because of the course,



**Mario Rojas, HLI Regional Director of Latin America, (left) and Jesus David Vallejo of Oriental Catholic University in Rionegro, Colombia.**

I am a better person and I offer my services to the pro-life cause, God bless all those people that prepare, promote and teach the HLI PRO-LIFE course.

One of the general comments we received was: “I now have the arguments to love and defend life using science and the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. As a member of the Church, I can now defend life with more enthusiasm and conviction.”

In short, the hundreds of testimonies obtained all agreed that the HLI pro-life course is very important in preparing people to defend the right to life and that this course should be promoted more aggressively all over the world.

Our experience in teaching this course to participants from most of the parishes of the Diocese of Sonsón Rionegro, Colombia, motivated us to make the same offer to the Diocese of Maturin in the State of Monagas, Venezuela. After we concluded a mission trip to that state in February, the pro-life group of Monagas, with the blessing of Bishop Enrique Perez, started to prepare participants from of all parishes of the diocese to start taking the HLI Pro-life course online at the beginning of May 2017. We are expecting the participation of 35 parishes and approximately 300 participants. The course should run for about 6 months.

This trip to Rionegro, Colombia also allowed us to cultivate a larger cooperation agreement between the Family Pastoral of the diocese of Sonsón Rionegro, Human Life International, and the Catholic University of the Orient, which among other things could mean and expansion of our online training program. Also, the Catholic University of the Orient might offer a bioethics course using HLI’s pro-life course as its core. The university has already offered its foreign language school for translation services of some HLI publications from English to Spanish and may extend to other languages.

We are having discussions with many others regarding the online training opportunity. Bishop Pablo Salas of the Diocese of Armenia, Colombia is another who is seriously considering having participants from all the parishes of his diocese start taking the HLI pro-life course beginning in 2017.

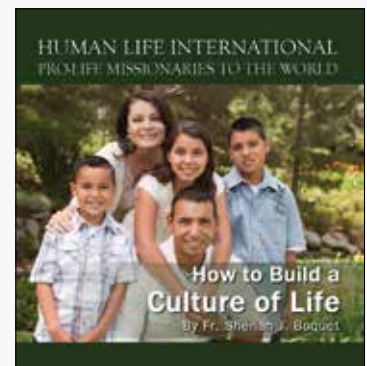
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