



FRIENDS

The Missionary Society of St. James
the Apostle

November 2024

Live, Give, Serve, Love...



Dear Friends,

In the Jubilee year of 2025, the international community Cenacolo, which originated in Italy, will be celebrating twenty years of pastoral endeavour in the St. James Society parish of Our Lady of Peace in Villa El Salvador, Peru. They are responsible for an orphanage which currently cares for fifteen children, who are all under age three. However, at times, there are as many as twenty-five children there. The community has since developed two other houses in Lima: one for the abandoned children (over the age of three) and a separate community in the north of Lima which helps young people with addictions. Sr. Mari Bussi, from Italy, is the only remaining member of that first group of missionaries which included both religious and laity. Here, she reflects on how the Holy Spirit has guided the community's missionary journey...

Diocesan priests serving the poorest of the poor in Latin America since 1958.



Our story began when Fr. Adrian Crowley (an alumnus of the Society of St. James) took part in the *'Feast of Life'* of the Cenacolo Community in Italy in 2004. He invited founder Sr. Elvira to visit Villa El Salvador, where he had been parish priest at Our Lady of Peace, a church which was founded and led by the Society of St. James. For a couple of years, Fr Adrian, along with the 'disadvantaged' youth of the area, had been working on building a 'Children's Home' (*Casa Hogar*). This place was destined to become an orphanage under the guiding hand of our community. Sr. Elvira responded positively to Fr. Adrian's

invitation, when she saw some photos of the place. She responded, "YES...we will go there soon!" A few months later, Fr. Stefano (who is now the superior following the death of Sr. Elvira a year ago) went to Lima to meet Frs. Adrian and Simon, to understand the situation better and to prepare for the opening of the Children's Home. They were astonished by what they experienced in the parish, when they worked with the young people or at the parish medical centre or at *Taytacos* (the parish elderly group). They sensed a growing, active young community filled with hope, faith, and goodwill, amid this vast expanse of desert land. On his return to the mother house in Italy, Fr. Stefano began visiting all the neighbouring fraternities,



to tell them about his trip to Peru. He showed them photographs and announced that he would soon be leaving for this new adventure. The Peruvian 'fever' broke out and many wrote to Fr. Stefano and offered to set off for South America, too. They prayed and made novenas. In short, a beautiful movement of the Holy Spirit began, and a desire was born in many young members of the community to put themselves on the line for God, without any idea of what the future would be like. A seed of mission was sprouting!



So, on April 23, 2005, a first group of missionaries (Roberto, Jonas, Maurizio, Alessandra, Francesca, Didi, Anna Maria, Jana, Paulina, Valentina, Sabina) blessed by Sr. Elvira left with Fr. Stefano for Lima. They were eager to learn and give and plunge into this missionary work. Prior to his departure for Peru, Fr. Stefano received an email from an Italian Bishop, Monsignor Adriano Tomasi, who had been in Lima for many years in the China-Peru Vicariate. Monsignor Tomasi asked Fr. Stefano about the possibility of opening a Cenacolo Community for young people with drug addiction problems, in Villa El Salvador.



In this way, the Holy Spirit confirmed that they were leaving in the name of God, and perhaps for a specific youth project in the future. Upon their arrival in Villa El Salvador, the group was warmly welcomed by Frs. Adrian and Simon and some lay people of the parish. Sr. Elvira arrived a few weeks later, along with Davide, Sr. Jennifer, and two novices, Cinzia and I. During the first weeks, Fr. Stefano and Sr. Elvira, helped establish a schedule for the day, with shared tasks and responsibilities, which gave us the opportunity to learn and observe, while we began working. Frs. Adrian and Simon accompanied us in both the physical daily tasks and our spiritual journey. These priests were always present and attentive to our first needs: Holy Mass and prayer. In the early days, to help us learn the Spanish language, we took turns attending the weekly youth meetings and helped neighbourhood children with their homework in the afternoons. We had an interesting experience when we spent one week at *Inabif* (a state Institution, which takes care of abandoned children and children with serious family problems). This week helped provide some very useful and necessary experiences for us beginners. When we started, we didn't really know what shape our pastoral work was going to take. We helped a few mothers with the care of their children. Then, as time went by and the needs of the place increased, we started to take in more and more abandoned, abused, and at-risk children. Sometimes we even housed a few elderly people, although we primarily cared for the little children. The circumstances of each child's arrival at the house, were quite varied. For example, one baby came into our care after being found in



Sr. Mari Bussi, with the children

a bag on the roadside. In a more recent example, we began to care for a newborn after his parents were arrested for child trafficking. After almost twenty years working here, we give thanks for every life we have been able to take in.

We are grateful for having been able to help children in their early years and watch them grow, change and thrive. In turn, we have received so much from the children we have cared for. They are our teachers, capable of carrying the burden of an often-heavy family cross, always ready to start over again. The spontaneity and innocence of these beautiful children has kept our feet firmly on the ground.



We know our mission. We are here to serve, and we are moved by the knowledge that God trusts us in this mission - to care for his children, to be their mothers and fathers. Sr. Elvira often told us that we must remain faithful to prayer and should always pray before making important decisions. We should discuss decisions among ourselves and discern the way forward. This advice has served us well over the years. This community in Villa El Salvador was really a new page for Cenacalo, which typically opened houses in ‘quiet’ places, away from the hustle and bustle. Villa El Salvador was the opposite setting for this Cenacalo community. It was a busy and bustling place, and we were surprised, and often astonished watching people manage everyday life in difficult circumstances. We were impressed with how the women worked for their families; how creative they were at “getting by”. They could sell anything and everything while continuing to ensure daily chores were done - such as boiling water or waiting for the rubbish truck to hopefully arrive. As pampered Europeans we were not accustomed to not having electricity, clean water or washing machines. We lacked the patience that was necessary to accomplish basic tasks. We often found ourselves in uncomfortable situations which helped us realize that we could still live, give, serve and love. The real source of strength for our work has been love and the sacrifices we have made together. These have united our hearts to live well in fraternity, in the charism of the Community. This means we have dialogue, true friendship, forgiveness, Divine Providence, Holy Mass, prayer, and the sacraments.

God continues to demonstrate, through the help and support of friends, groups, families and many generous men and women that He is our Father, and He thinks and cares for all his children. We sincerely thank Him for the priests of the St. James Society, with whom we have worked over these years in Villa El Salvador, particularly the friendship of Fr. Adrian and the constant presence of Fr. Simon. They have been faithful friends and spiritual guides. We are here in Villa El Salvador for a reason and the grace of God continues to show us that reason every day!

~ Sr. Mari Bussi

With Every Good Wish in Christ,

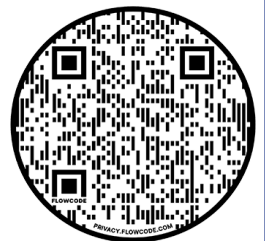
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