



# Marianist International Volunteers

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**Marianist  
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Dear friends  
of the Marianist Family,

As we come to the end of the year 2006, we are very happy to celebrate the achievements and consolidation of Marianist International Volunteers' in different parts of the world (in Peru, Bangladesh, Togo and Kenya).

We have very promising plans for 2007, as the number of MIV volunteers may increase from 3-4 to probably over 10! Amongst them, a whole young family with two kids from France is interested in volunteering in Argentina through the MIV for as long as two years, while a retired Argentine woman will probably volunteer in Peru next year. These are two very concrete and significant examples to show that the MIV does not only offer the possibility of volunteering internationally to young, single folks. All these prospective volunteers are moved by a spirit of solidarity to the poor, inspired in the Marianist Charism, regardless of their

age and marital status.

To conclude this year of publicity of volunteers' stories, we share with you the ones written by some of our current volunteers: Jane from Malawi in Bangladesh, and Gabriel from Argentina in Peru. Maria from Spain also brings us up to speed on how she's currently living her time of re-entry after her mission in Kenya, as she is already preparing for her next trip to Kenya again next year.

Additionally, we have included an article that clearly defines the motivations of international volunteers, and their need to be inserted in a program of human development, so that their experience is not an isolated one with little to no continuity. And as we did in our last edition, we have also included the reflection of a former Marianist volunteer from England, who shares with us what her life is like today 10 years after her experience as a Marianist international volunteer in the United States.

As usual, we hope that you enjoy reading this newsletter, and that it may help you better understand the motivations, concrete activities, and spirituality behind the experience of international volunteers with the MIV. Finally, we ask you again to help us circulate this material among all those people in your countries who may be interested in knowing more about the MIV, either to collaborate with it, or to join us as prospective volunteers for the near future.

May this new birth of Jesus, poor but fully hopeful amongst us, renew our hearts to start a new year with renovated forces, as we keep on working for another possible, more peaceful and fair world for us all.

Merry Christmas for everyone, and blessings for 2007,

**José Luis Pérez**  
MIV Coordinator

May he renew our  
hope and  
solidarity.

Merry Christmas  
and Happy New  
Year.



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## Successful closure of the mission in Peru

For many years, I was in search of an opportunity like the one I had the chance to live this year. For many years, being a volunteer was my DREAM to accomplish. It finally turned out to be true, and it was a deep, mystic, social and wonderful experience for me. The center of this mission in Otuzco is Jesus, but it's also the peasants and the intense way they live out their faith. In the visits to the small villages (there are 23 small communities made up of about 30 families each), you learn many lessons for life, because you share your life, your time, and your work with the local people, who humbly and enthusiastically take great care of you. For me, these visits are the high point of this experience, although there's also the meetings with the youth, the retreat preparations for the children, the youth and the adults, and the collaboration in the liturgical celebrations in the different places. . . The work in the radio is another pillar of the mission of the Center, because besides

being a program of pastoral and Marianist contents, it enables us to have a close and effective contact with the communities who live up on the hills. Another aspect to be taken into account is community life. As time went by we have been strengthening our bonds, till we became almost like a family. We left behind the feeling that we were a "working team", to become a Christian, Marianist community. Besides having a wonderful heart, the members in my community are very sensible and watchful people. Javier is the name of the priest in charge of the mission. He does not live with us, but he regularly stops by to visit. He's open, straightforward, joyful, and he's a very good listener, he takes care of our work and of our state of mind. He also has a very progressive and eloquent vision of the Church and of her role in favor of evangelization, and a very clear idea of the needs for a higher relevance and more important role of the laity in this mission. One of the most important activities of this experience is the mission in January.

For 2007, the idea will be to start with a pre-mission, a moment of coordination and preparation for all the prospective missionaries, which will go from January 7<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup>. On that same day, small groups of missionaries will travel to different small villages to share life, faith, and the treasures that the Lord fills our hearts with. They will stay there until the 28<sup>th</sup>, which will be the closing day. This mission is very important, because it gives new volunteers a very clear picture of what the experience will be like throughout the rest of the year. I believe that one of the most important ingredients to this experience is the uprooting process. You learn a whole lot when you are away from home. The heart becomes more permeable to give and to receive. This is why the experience as a volunteer is something very personal, very enriching, and an unforgettable turning point in the life of those who dare live it. I truly hope that many more people will hear this call from the Lord, this desire to share life and faith with the blessed of the

Kingdom, and that they decide to visit these lands, where many dreams become true.

**Gabriel Vasco** / MIV Volunteer from Argentina in Otuzco, Peru





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## Eradicating poverty in Bangladesh

I am so grateful to have this chance of sharing with you my nurturing experiences here at the IIRD (Integral Institute of Rural Development), in Bangladesh. These are nurturing experiences



because they have always kept me energetic each morning I wake up from my bed to another day of service. I started learning the Bangla language as soon as I arrived in Bangladesh. What a great experience to be able to speak in another language that you have never dreamt of. Within the first two months of my stay at IIRD I was able to speak good phrases and mastered the tenses. At my Bangla School, I also was able to learn the basic cultural practices of the country in general, especially in



terms of dressing and personal presentation. I attended my language class in the mornings and during the afternoons I was able to assist with clerical work and other duties assigned to me, especially in the field of communications. As part of my orientation, I had individual meetings with IIRD staff, especially those that I was going to work with more closely. I discussed their work with them, their future plans for IIRD and their challenges. Greg, the only volunteer I found at IIRD, assisted me to adapt to the norms of the



IIRD office in Dhaka. I also had a lot of reports about IIRD on my desk to help me capture more information about IIRD. My Australian friends that I met at my Bangla School invited me to join them on their trip to Shrimongal, one of the rural areas, and this was my first time going out of Dhaka City. This too brought a lot of amazing experiences, as I was now able to see the real Bangladesh. I came across kids that have no families, during one of our afternoon walks we visited a very poor family that welcomed us so warmly at their home and we stayed with them for more than an hour, at the same time I had the chance to visit the tea plantations where most of the poor rural people work to earn very little money. Though I did not continue attending the Bangla class after my second month, I must say that my



Bangla skills are improving every day because of my frequent contacts with IIRD's development partners, the rural poor. Dhunot Integrated Development Project (DIDP) and Shepur Integrated Development Project (SIDP) are two of IIRD's rural projects that I visited first. I spent most of my time there with poor families and their kids, the sick people in IIRD's rural hospital and out-reach centers, the poor women working in IIRD's rural garment industry, and other activities aimed at eradicating poverty. I felt like staying on and on in the rural area but I had other things to do. Later on I visited Netrakona Integrated Development Project (NIDP), another IIRD's rural project. In most of IIRD projects the activities are similar, they differ only in activeness, but amazingly, the poverty in individual families is so unique and can never be compared.

In NIDP I visited the landless families, and IIRD purchased some lands for them in Borowari Beel and gave them fishing and embroidery activities so they can make a living. I spent good time with the women in Borowari Beel, they shared the achievements in their families with me thanks to the IIRD activities and also their challenges as women in development. Together we sang songs in Bangla, what a memorable experience I had. Nikli Integrated Development Project (Nikli-IDP) is located on an Island and it is said to be the most difficult area to be reached of all IIRD rural projects. The buses to Nikli are about a 40 minute-drive from the IIRD office. After the a bus there are still another three hours from the main road on a small van and, last but not least, a one-hour trip by boat. In Nikli I visited the poor families under the Special

Target Ultra Poor (STUP) program. These families are very poor and are given special assistance in terms of livestock, loans and garments. Hearing stories from women who have benefited from STUP program gives hope that the IIRD is up to something positive. Last month I attended a four-day workshop together with some IIRD staff members. This workshop was conducted by Canadian Hunger Foundation (CHF), IIRD's partner in Development. The objective of

this workshop was to impart in us skills on Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA), which IIRD would use to implement projects funded by CHF. Now I am involved in the implementation of





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such projects in Kachua Integrated Development Project (KIDP). I went for two weeks in Kachua and during this time I was helping in collecting data (their contribution and what they want as assistance) on poor families who would benefit from CHF funds. While in Kachua, I also attended a workshop that was aimed at providing us with tools to use during the project implementation called Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). In the meantime we are working with 3500 families. In the rural area



there are no phones and no internet, and for this reason, I came back to Dhaka office for a few days, to check emails and help with any office work and will be going back to KIDP to join my colleagues.

I was reading a book by Gandhi called the Gita and I quoted "True service is service directed to strangers, people you have no blood relation or any kind of." From this writing, I would like to add that "True family is a family composed of strangers, people who have no blood relation or any



kind of." I have served other people before in my country, Malawi, but serving Bangladeshis through IIRD gives me the spiritual fulfillment that I have never experienced before. The kind of Family Spirit that Fr. William Christensen SM initiated amongst the IIRD staff gives me a reason to stay and serve more. My fellow volunteers: Mike Brennar, 53, American who joined us three months ago and Greg Pardo, 23, Mexican-American, are the brothers that God has given me, and together we are a lasting



family. In this family of three, we share past experiences, future plans and challenges that we face during our everyday services. More importantly we never forget to exalt our Lord together. As a community we are working together to assist IIRD realize its international marketing plans for its garment products. We are the pilot volunteer community for IIRD and we are working hard to set things in place. Finally, on behalf of Mike and Greg, I would like to extend thanks to the MIV Coordinator, José Luis Pérez, Fr. William Christensen SM, and the Marianists at St. Mary's University, USA for their spiritual and material support and for making our stay here easier.

**Jane Mbale** / MIV Volunteer from Malawi in Bangladesh



## Remembering Nairobi from Valencia

Hello, this is María, the young lady from Spain who was in Nairobi for two months last summer. I worked in a Marianist school as a volunteer. Two months and a half have passed since I returned, but I have the feeling that I am still there, both physically and mentally. After these months, I've had the time to think calmly about my experience, so what I am feeling now is not the result of any impulse, it is just the feelings that are a part of mine. Without a doubt this trip has been the best experience in my life. It's the best thing that happened in my 32 years of life. I thank God every day and every night for the so beautiful gift He has given me, for the opportunity to have lived surrounded by extraordinary people there. During the six weeks of my visit I lived and shared my time with marvellous Marianists,

and people who have loved me and who I loved in return. You may wonder how I know it has been the best experience in my life, in what way it has changed my life, so let me tell you : I do know it has been the best thing in my life because now I do know I am happy, because I don't feel empty, my heart is full of love and joy. I do know all of this now, before I didn't know I was happy, but now I thank God I AM HAPPY. And another proof of my big happiness is that I have already bought the flight to go to Nairobi for next summer and to share this time with the 1,500 kids of school, Our Lady of Nazareth, and with the Marianists I lived with, and above all, with God in my rucksack !!! I do need to live with them and share my days with them. It is part of those needs that we all have, but this one is, without a doubt, a

need that makes me happy and helps me to live. One of the many things that I learnt during the two months I was in Nairobi was that you have to look for God among the poor. I realised this to be true and is one of the reasons for my tremendous happiness; because I felt that God was very close to me. God has been in my rucksack every second that I lived in Nairobi. We always gives what we receive, and receive what we give, but this time I received much more than what I gave to them, I'm sure about it. There is no money in the world to pay for what I received, for what they gave me, for what I shared, what I learnt, what they taught me, what I lived, what I felt there. I have also learnt that praying together creates a feeling of unity and togetherness, that's why I have felt so close to God, and to

all the people that I had the great privilege to live and share this time with.

**María Pilar Lis** / MIV Volunteer from Spain in Kenya





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## 10 Years Later: an English woman in Cincinnati...

My name is Ruth, and I was in the MVSC ten years ago, which now makes me realize how old I must be! I was just 22 when I moved from England to the USA to work as a volunteer in a



runaway shelter. Being a protestant English woman becoming a volunteer for a Catholic organization based in the US was purely accidental, or was it divine? I met someone in a youth hostel whilst I was traveling in the US who lent me a book about volunteering opportunities, one of the addresses I wrote down was of the MVSC. I came to the program with no knowledge of the Marianists and no real concept of what was meant by "living in Community."



My work with dysfunctional adolescents whilst volunteering pointed me towards a career in high school teaching. This was something that I had been considering even before my MVSC year. Living in community was the high point of the experience for me and even though I have never done it again, I think that the lessons I learnt about communication and tolerance has held me in good stead, both with friends and in my marriage. The biggest change that occurred because of the year as an MVSCer was that I met my husband to be. We both attended an international students' organization and ultimately got married. I had no intention of living in the US after my year as a volunteer, yet after meeting him I ended up living in Ohio for three more years and New Jersey

for three years. I didn't convert to Catholicism and I didn't give up all my worldly possessions, but life has taken a completely different turn because of my year as a Marianist volunteer.

**Ruth Dicker** / Former MVSC Volunteer





# International volunteers

The mission of International Volunteers is characterized by the decision to leave one's own land and settle down in another, to put oneself at the service of a cooperation project. This concept entails, in a way, a **more mature** form of volunteerism, as it implies a higher degree of commitment, strong motivations and precise goals. It also presumes the existence of a serious and accurate development project, and the participation in an organization that may respond to the needs both of the recipients of the project and of the volunteers who join the program.

The option of volunteering, even for a few years, is however a **life option** in its total meaning. It must then be considered as a precise vocation, because it implies an inner attitude of unconditionally giving oneself to others. The effort to inculturate, to learn the local language, the commitment in favor of a fluent dialogue, the appreciation of the characteristics of the peoples volunteers work with, are and should be signs of an option for human development that privileges interpersonal relationships and tends to transform the structures that generate injustice and violence. This is the way volunteers become peace-makers.

Volunteering usually evokes an idea of action, work, and efficiency. This is true, but it's only the tip of the iceberg. When the volunteer is "authentic", his or her basic beliefs share the **deep convictions** that constitute the conscience of the people, before and above all temporary situations. "Being a volunteer is an internal virtue, and as such, it needs to be cultivated and grown. It calls for difficult, progressive options, for an educational process, for stages and verifications. Volunteering makes us more mature, more "adults", as it becomes an inner attitude that gradually transforms our concrete lifestyles. It helps us realize that the goal of our existence, and in fact our

maturity, is to be found in our total availability to the others' needs". The key element is to "**possess and guide our own life**", to decide our own options from within. Our values and motivations should precede, at least logically, our meeting with the people we serve. The emotions, the needs of our fellows, of the poor, should not be the motivation for our decisions, they should simply be an accompanying reason. Deep inside, a volunteer is not such when he or she "leaves" the place of origin, but instead, one becomes a volunteer when the inner force unifies the whole life, no matter where one may find oneself.

## Key elements

When volunteering internationally, the key element **is the person** of the volunteer who decides to spend some years of life abroad at the service of the others, in a different culture, and in favor of the human development of individuals and of social groups. A second key element of International Volunteering is the **development project**. It should call for the insertion in an organized structure (normally and preferably an NGO) where volunteers are challenged to seriously analyze the problems of human development. It should professionally respond to the needs of a particular group, and should work on the basis of a respectful dialogue with the different cultures. But above all, it should guarantee the continuity and sustainability of the commitment when the term of service of a given volunteer comes to an end. The volunteer who decides to join an international program puts his or her own professional skills, his own culture and his own life at the service of the development of other peoples. Therefore, a specific **professionalism** is required, which may lay the foundations for a constructive relationship with



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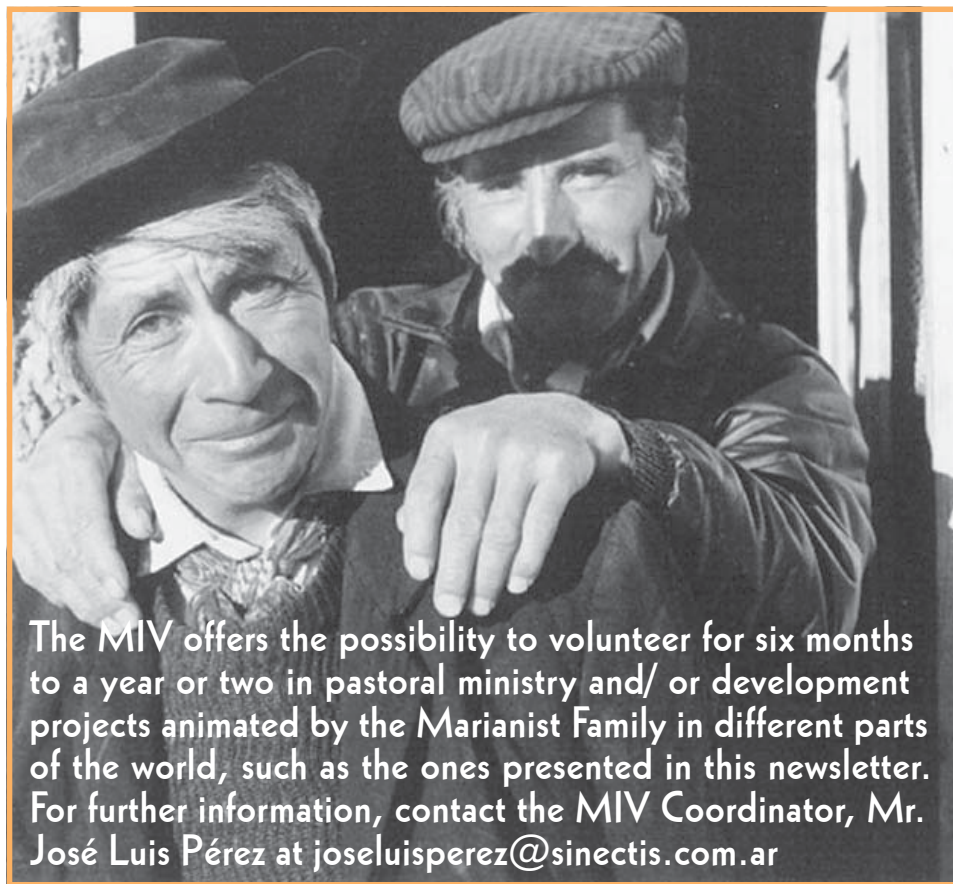
the “foreign” culture, a relationship that may need the volunteer to literally “abandon” his or her own world, the value system of the culture, to meet and understand “the other one.”

We can therefore state that International Volunteerism is based on the awareness of the **interdependence** between peoples and cultures. Nowadays, in a world made smaller thanks to the communications media, the knowledge of market laws, the growing gap between the rich and the poor, generates a new attitude: interdependence, which is felt as a determining system of relations in the world today, in its economic, cultural, political and religious aspects, all of them integrated as a moral category. It is the awareness of feeling engaged with the other six billion people in the world, with the environment, with the past, and especially with the future that we are conditioning with our options in the present.

“When interdependence is conceived along these lines, the correlative response, as a moral and social attitude is **solidarity**, which, as a consequence, is not based on vague compassion or superficial entertainment generated by the needs of so many other people, close or far away” (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis 38).

Therefore, International Volunteerism is born of a free decision to share, from different options, but with increasing commitment, the situations of marginalization and underdevelopment, wherever they exist, in order to walk together towards the total liberation of humankind.

From the **International Volunteers’ Formation Course** given by the Salesian Program **VIS** in Italy



The MIV offers the possibility to volunteer for six months to a year or two in pastoral ministry and/ or development projects animated by the Marianist Family in different parts of the world, such as the ones presented in this newsletter. For further information, contact the MIV Coordinator, Mr. José Luis Pérez at [joseluisperez@sinectis.com.ar](mailto:joseluisperez@sinectis.com.ar)