

Medical Day in the Village of Nazareth, El Salvador

Nazareth, a community located approximately 18 kilometers from the capital of El Salvador, is a rural area full of vegetation, especially abandoned coffee plantations, because the owners decided to stop harvesting coffee. The village's families struggle to survive each day. While some have formal work, others struggle every day just to make ends meet. Of course, nobody's life is economically solvent. In contrast to this reality, large residential neighborhoods have been built around it.

The village of Nazareth, in addition to being poor and lacking opportunities for all, is one of the areas plagued by the presence of gangs. Although a small country, the secure areas, where one lives without violence, are already very scarce.

In this place, the Carmelites of the Province of the Most Pure Heart of Mary have established a house of formation, and in agreement with the Gospel and the pastoral Magisterium of Pope Francis, we have incarnated ourselves in the reality of the poor, privileged recipients of the Kingdom of God. We began to assist the sick and the elderly and, in this spirit of solidarity, we coordinated a medical day with the Carmelite Missionary Sisters (founded by Blessed Francisco Palau, OCD). These sisters run a medical clinic in the Municipality of Soyapango, in the department of San Salvador. They have been great apostles of solidarity with the poorest communities on the outskirts of the capital.

This Medical Day was held on the day of DOMUND (October 24). On this day, the Universal Church prays in a special way for the missionaries and those who work with the missions.

The objective is to make a broad range of health services accessible to the people of our village. The services of general medicine, gynecology, dermatology, rheumatology, nephrology, hematology, and dentistry were offered. In addition, eye exams, laboratory and pharmacy services, bone densitometry (to detect osteoporosis), and psychological therapy were also provided. We, together with members of the health committee and the social pastoral of the Catholic community of Sagrada Familia, began to prepare for the event many weeks before. Because the interest was in benefiting all the families of Nazareth, we felt that Catholics, Evangelicals, and neighbors in general should come together. We joined in the preparations to try to insure a very successful.

On the afternoon of Saturday, October 23, a group from the El Carmelo clinic, including the director of the clinic, Sister Carmen Vargas, health personnel, members of the Secular Missionary Carmel and volunteers, became

messengers of good news. They arrived loaded not only with medicine and medical equipment, but also with a real desire to care for the sick people present in our village. Although they had already worked their normal full day at the clinic on Saturday, they arrived full of energy and love.

Three teams were quickly formed: two doctors, two nurses, and a psychologist went to visit the sick who could not leave their houses but were waiting as the day turned to night. The sick, used to the silence that remains when night arrives, heard the greetings from the teams and responded quickly, inviting the medical people into their simple homes. Neither the slippery ground nor the night which is so dark that one cannot see their own hand without the light of a lamp, prevented us from arriving at the homes of several of the very ill.

On Sunday, summoned by the crowing of the roosters and the first rays of the sun, we made our way from the Carmelite house monastery to the elementary school in the center of the village and to the halls of Sagrada Familia, the local Catholic church. This activity took place on the day of DOMUND (October 24), in which the Universal Church prays in a special way for the missionaries and collaborates with the missions.

With the objective of making integral health services accessible to the population of our village, the services of general medicine, gynecology, dermatology, rheumatology, nephrology, hematology, and dentistry were offered; in addition, eye exams, laboratory and pharmacy, bone densitometry (to detect osteoporosis), and psychological therapy were also provided. We, together with members of the health committee and the social pastoral of the Sagrada Familia community, began to prepare for the event many weeks before it was held. Because of the interest in benefiting the families of this place, we felt that Catholics, Evangelicals, and neighbors in general were called together, and we joined in the preparation to make the day a great event.

On the afternoon of Saturday, October 23, a group from the El Carmelo clinic, formed by the director of the clinic, Sister Carmen Vargas, health personnel, members of the Secular Missionary Carmel and volunteers, as messengers of good news and loaded not only with medicine and medical equipment, but also with the desire to care for the sick people, were present in our village. And, although they had had their normal day at the clinic on Saturday morning, they arrived with their feet and hearts full of energy and love; so much so that we quickly made three teams: two doctors, two nurses and a psychologist who went to visit the sick who could not go out and were at home watching the darkening of the end of the day. The sick, attuned to the silence left by the day that is slowly leaving, heard greetings and they promptly responded by inviting them into their simple homes. Neither the

ground, which was slippery, nor the darkness which, without the light of a lamp, could not even see our own hands, prevented us from arriving at the homes of several of the sick on Saturday evening.

On Sunday, together with the crowing of the roosters and the first rays of the sun, which was rising cheerfully as if approving the day that was about to begin, we made our way from the monastery to the elementary school and to the halls of Sagrada Familia, the local Catholic church. The rest of the clinic staff and volunteers, among them a group of hairdressers and beauticians, together with some of the local health unit and volunteers from the village of Nazareth, began the consultations.

The people of the community had gotten up early, just like us, and lined up in the street waiting to meet the doctors. The day unfolded in a true celebration of health. Emotions and gratitude were shown without any shyness.

Some people received crutches, canes, walkers, bath chairs, and the like. But, more importantly, all they received comprehensive health care and affection. Approximately 250 people participated in this first Health Care Day. It is now engraved in the heart and memory of the community of Nazareth. Following the medical checkups, the day culminated with a celebration of the Eucharist. The people wished to thank the Lord for being able to share the gifts received.

"Jesus returned to his Nazareth to do good and heal the sick." We are witnesses of this. Now we tell the world about it!