

Franciscan Mission Service

OVERSEAS MISSIONER FORMATION: GROWING IN THE FRANCISCAN TRADITION

For Franciscan Mission Service (FMS), formation goes both ways. A three-month curriculum imparts the knowledge to sustain missioners over the next two years. In turn, FMS responds to feedback from those in the field by refining the formation process. Individuals preparing for service benefit from new sessions and new techniques designed to deepen their awareness of their host countries and themselves.

Just like missioners for the past two decades, this year's participants received a core curriculum of Franciscan spirituality. In addition, there was a dedicated session on problem solving for health situations in an unfamiliar environment. Missioners acquired skills to solve health issues on their own and an understanding of when to reach out for assistance in an emergency. In a new self-defense class, they learned how to take care of themselves in potentially threatening situations.

To tend to other self-care needs, a new session was added on building helping relationships. Missioners acquire basic pastoral counseling skills as a foundation for their work in the community. Different environments bring their own stressors, but each setting requires reflective listeners who understand the subtleties of ministry of presence. Missioners learn that good boundaries are essential to having the strength to minister in the long term in places where many people need a good listener.

This message is also reinforced through studying Franciscan values. As missioner Maggie Van Roekel shared after MJ Park's presentation on peace, "If we want to be instruments of peace in the world, we must first find our own balance and inner peace." During a formation session over Skype, current missioner Janice Smullen shared that her work with MJ helped her incorporate inner peace into her ministry with children in a Jamaican elementary school.

But as all missioners discover, communication takes place through the lens of culture. For this reason, we have



Class 32 missioners in a formation session with Fr. Joe Nangle

enriched our formation sessions on cross-cultural communication. For example, an alumna of the Immaculate Conception High School in Kingston, Jamaica, introduced missioners to the country's distinctive speaking style or patois. They also used role playing to prepare themselves for different communication styles than they were accustomed to in the United States, such as the Caribbean fondness for nicknames. Bolivia and Guatemala are "people first" cultures that don't follow a U.S.-style time clock. No matter what their destination, missioners were more prepared to encounter a new way of life just as valid as their own.

Whether teaching about health, counseling, or culture, this year's formation sessions built on FMS' long commitment to Catholic social teachings. For the D.C. headquarters to successfully impart Franciscan values, we have to live them. To do this, we must listen as well as teach. Feedback from each formation session and every communication with missioners in the field shape the next group's formation experience.

This attentiveness bears fruit. As current missioner Catherine Sullivan said after last year's formation process, "It was clear that FMS sets itself apart from other mission services, in that it is not project-oriented, but people-oriented."

Since formation sessions are open to all the staff and volunteers within FMS, our D.C.-based program participants also benefit from the formation process by acquiring a solid Franciscan background for serving communities in need in the nation's capital.

At Franciscan Mission Service, we are proud of our formation program, and we continue to grow to meet the needs of our missioners and the communities they serve. A thoughtful formation process is our gift to all our men and women who will then go on to give generously for the next two years.

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Self defense class led by Zurriane Bennett