



COSTA RICA MISSION 2026

Medical Missionaries of Divine Mercy



3100 SWEETWATER BLVD, SUGAR LAND, TX 77479

www.mmdm.org

“One in Christ. United in Mission.”

(Pope Leo XIV’s theme for World Mission Sunday 2026)



A note from our Mission Director



Ten years ago, a small team from St. Laurence Catholic Church first traveled into the mountains of Costa Rica to serve the Cabecar indigenous community in Grano de Oro. From April 18 - 25, 2026, 39 missionaries, ages 20 to 81, carried that work forward, and by God’s grace, served a record 1,121 patients in a single week.

This was my first year as Mission Director. Our long-time Mission Director, Maria Jacobson, who served the Costa Rica mission faithfully for nine years, stepped back due to illness. We ask for your continued prayers for her healing, and for the other core team members who could not travel with us this year due to illness.

EJ Molina, Costa Rica 2026 Mission Director

Mission Accomplished

It was a week of firsts and a record of firsts. This was the first time a single family of five members participated in mission, four sisters and a brother, serving together. Daniel Alvarez (the brother) retired this year as Medical Missionaries of Divine Mercy (MMDM) Logistics Manager and has turned over his role, having served 20 missions, to Chris Spiers. We had three sets of parent and child participate, plus one aunt and niece. It was a family affair. Since a priest was not available to travel with us for the first time this year, we were instead blessed by Sister Edna Carina Vargas Vázquez, a Missionary of the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Immaculate, who joined us from Tijuana to provide spiritual direction, not only to the missionaries, but also to the patients. This was the first year dentists from Sugar Land / Houston did not travel with us to Grano de Oro, but instead we relied on dental support from local dentists, including Doctor Tatiana Bonilla, who has annually taken time from her private practice to donate her time and expertise at MMDM's annual mission.



Sister Edna Carina Vargas Vazquez

We enjoyed this year a donation of a pig, Mariska, the town matriarch, had raised over the past several years; she donated her home-grown pig as a gesture of gratitude.

Thirty-nine volunteers, along with 13 local Cabecar-Spanish translators, several of whom have served alongside us for the past seven or eight years, served a record 1,121 patients. That count includes 151 patients seen during a one-day outreach to Bloriñak. Bishop of Cartago, Costa Rica Mario Enrique Quirós Quirós joined the Outreach Team on the day-outing to Bloriñak.



Roberto Orlandi, Maritska the town matriarch, and Fr. Ignacio Torres Araya with Maritska's donated pig.

Daily Mass was celebrated by Father Ignacio Torres Araya, our Grano de Oro sponsor, newly ordained on November 1, 2025, and by Father Abraham Bisan Nake, PhD, who was visiting from the Vatican and holds a doctorate in Canon Law from the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome. In his Friday homily, Father Abraham recounted a moment from his audience, with Pope Francis. On learning of Father Abraham's doctorate, the Pope said simply: *"I hope you don't lose your humanity."* Reflecting on St. Paul, Father Abraham reminded us that *"God did not make you strong so you can lord over the weak. God did not make you rich so you can be condescending to the poor. The Lord has made you strong so you can defend the weak. The Lord has made you rich so others can receive daily bread through you."*

The patients we continue to serve annually often share the difficulties they encounter in arriving at our one-week clinic; some mentioned walking for several hours, crossing rivers and across mountainous regions to reach our clinics.



Fr. Abraham Bisan Nake and Fr. Ignacio Torres Araya



Kim Denson

Looking back, the voices of our missionaries tell the story best. Sister Carina, our spiritual director, said this of her week: *“The Lord gave me the opportunity to console and listen to people in their illness, in their pain facing the death of a loved one, and in the suffering of young people facing addiction. I cannot stop thanking Medical Missionaries of Divine Mercy for allowing me to share this experience. God’s time is perfect.”* Kim Denson, a triage nurse and first-time missionary, has been a registered nurse for more than 40 years and had long hoped to serve on a medical mission, though life always seemed to make it impossible. This past year, missing her daughter, who passed away seven years ago at the age of 26, and who had once traveled to Costa Rica herself, Kim saw a parish bulletin about our trip. *“Something within me felt called, almost as if it were a message from God.”* She applied in faith, and made her first trip outside the United States.



Andrew Castor

Andrew Castor, whose first mission was to Laredo in 2018 and was now on his 5th MMDM mission as a 24-year-old, served this year in a different role: building the digital infrastructure that will allow our clinics to capture patient records electronically across every mission, so that a patient seen this year can be known the next. *“There’s a quiet dignity in being remembered,”* he reflected, *“and if our technology can give that to even a fraction of the people we serve, that feels like a form of presence worth building.”*

LuAnn Spiers, a first-time missionary in the Vision Clinic, shared a moment of grace from an ordinary morning: a young man arrived at the clinic alone, and as he moved through the stations, the team realized he could neither hear nor speak. Moments earlier, LuAnn had been speaking with another patient who knew sign language. She brought the two together. *“In my mind, it was Divine Grace. God puts us where we are most needed.”*

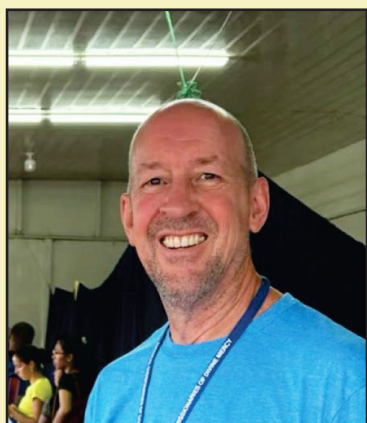


LuAnn Spiers

In fact, there were many moments which took place which could not be considered anything but Divine Grace. For example, volunteers discussing how to feed patients who had been waiting all day long for follow-up appointments and just then the Ministerio Divina Misericordia de Turrialba (Divine Mercy Women’s Group from Turrialba) arrived with ingredients to make sandwiches for the patients. However, while they had the ingredients, freshly baked bread right from the bakery, the sandwiches still needed to be made. Right at that moment, who happened to be walking by? None other than Rosibel, who runs the kitchen at Club de Paz where MMDM volunteers reside overnight during our annual week at Grano de Oro. Rosibel jumped in the car with them and they drove to Club de Paz to make sandwiches for our tired and hungry patients. In that same

instance, two missionaries (Chris Spiers and Jim Murray) were considering their options for going out into the village to find bottled water to hand out to the patients. As it turned out the ladies also had bottles of water to donate. As the call went out for someone to go to the car to collect the bottles of water, Chris and Jim turned and looked at each other. Their prayer for bottles of water had instantaneously been answered.

The mission also served as an opportunity to have heart-to-heart encounters with other missionaries which resulted in enlightening moments of self-awareness, opportunities to heal from traumatic past injuries. *God puts you in another person's life when they need you and places people in your life when you need them.* (Life Motto: EJ Molina).



Jim Murray

The Mission is carried not only by those who travel, but by those who provide support in a variety of ways from home. For example, once again, the third graders of St. Laurence Catholic School made chaplets for the third graders at Grano de Oro. They also donated \$1836.63 to MMDM from their History Wax Museum Project. Thank you to Theresa Rebolledo and her team for their continued partnership with MMDM. One of our young missionaries, on her second mission to Costa Rica (Avery Jung), remembered making chaplets as a third grader for this mission.

Looking ahead, the need is real and our core team is arriving at a point where traveling abroad may no longer be possible. We are especially in need of dentists, physicians (general and pediatric), nurses, eye doctors, and Spanish – English translators, keeping in mind every set of helping hands matters. For those who cannot travel, MMDM has formed new committees you can join from home: Communications

& Branding; Technology & Reporting; Partners & Sponsorships; and Fundraising & Special Events. As MMDM expands toward new mission fields in rural Texas, South America, Asia, and Africa, these committees are how the work will be accomplished between trips.

2026 COSTA RICA VOLUNTEERS

Mary Ann Alvarez

Daniel Alvarez

Tom Benzaia

Richard Byrd

Juliana del Valle Camejo Fernandez

Andrew Castor

Suzanne Condron

Minnie Davidsohn

Kim Denson

Gregg Dimmick

Pat Gibson

Mary Gomez

Jeff Hernandez

Cheryl Herny

Dan Holley

Janice Holley

Daryush Hosseinian

Kaitlin Jinkins

Ana Jordan-Castillo

Avery Jung

Jane Ladd

Aleksandra Lawera

Karen McMillin

Terry McMillin

Laura Munoz

Jim Murray

Susie Murray

Riccardo Orlandi

Roberto Orlandi

Patri Pereira

Susie Pummill

Margie Reyna

Bob Samborski


Cathy Short

Chris Spiers

LuAnn Spiers

Gloria Tobin

Carina Vargas-Vazquez

 1st Time Missionary in Costa Rica

“Helping Others Has Always Fulfilled Me”

Daniel Alvarez • Missionary since 2011



Although I have been involved in missionary work since 2011, it was only this year that I was joined by four of my sisters simply because I gave an open invitation to attend one of the missions. It had never occurred to me to make an invitation because none of my siblings live anywhere close to Sugar Land and it would have been quite an inconvenience. However, during our family’s 2025 Thanksgiving meal my sister Mary Ann asked me to give a short description of what I did during mission work and I invited them to consider joining one of the missions. I was truly amazed that four of my sisters said YES!

The mission in Costa Rica was an emotional one for me not only because my sisters accompanied me but also because it was probably my last Costa Rica mission due to health reasons. I will truly miss the friends who I have made both on the mission team and the locals who I have worked with since 2017. However, I will continue to support MMDM in whatever capacity I can.

The desire to join the Medical Missionaries of Divine Mercy (MMDM) first began when I joined St. Laurence in 2006 and they were looking for volunteers for the trip to Tamasopo, Mexico. I knew I could help because I can speak fluent Spanish, but I wondered how my skills as an engineer could be useful to the mission team. After joining and attending my first mission in Laredo, I quickly learned that everyone can contribute. MMDM has a position for you regardless of your profession and skills. Since joining MMDM I have contributed in the dental clinic, vision clinic, triage, logistics, and as an overall translator.

Helping others has always fulfilled me because I am using the gifts that God has endowed me with and HE waits for all to use their skills. Come and join MMDM or provide support in other ways.



On the grounds of Club de Paz, where we stay each year, there is a statue of Jesus without hands. At its base, a sign reads: “I need your hands to keep doing good.” Prayer is powerful, but prayer alone is not enough. We are called to get up and do God’s work, to be His hands. Whether you serve by volunteering on mission or part of the MMDM home team, by donating funds or through personal ministries (rosaries and scapulars), by joining an MMDM committee, or by praying for our patients and volunteers, MMDM thanks you. You are part of our mission.

***One in Christ.
United in Mission.***



**Medical Missionaries
of Divine Mercy**

UPCOMING MISSIONS

Laredo, Texas
November 4 – 10, 2026

Batangas, Philippines
February 16 – 25, 2027

Grano de Oro, Costa Rica
April 17–24, 2027

**MMDM
MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT**
St. Laurence Parish Hall
July 18th and 19th
Before and After Mass



**Fundraising Gala
September 12, 2026**

