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MISSION MESSAGE

Liberation is bound up with those we serve

*By Shannon Kowalski
Diocesan Director,
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“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time; but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” — Lilla Watson

The first time I heard this quote, I was sitting in the Theology and the Human Experience class I was required to take in preparation for a service-learning experience my junior year of college. Father Don Williams — class facilitator and University Chaplain at the time — recounted for us his own experience on mission in Haiti. He had seen the quote from Lilla Watson emblazoned on the side of a building and it stuck with him.

Those words from the Aboriginal educator and activist served as a reminder for visitors to not just come “rescue” the Haitians with donations and manual labor, but that our common humanity unites us in our struggles and in our achievements. Father Don offered those words to prepare us for what

we would do, see, think, and feel while on mission in Jamaica.

Thirteen of us from Misericordia University traveled to Kingston, Jamaica, for a one-week immersive mission experience. We stayed in the rectory of our gracious host, Father Patrick, a native of Kenya and a missionary himself.

Our accommodations were tight and certainly not what a bunch of American college students were used to. The men in our group took one for the team and slept on the cement floor of a garage-like addition to the house right next to the guard dogs that were released on the property at night.

As a 20-year-old woman who had never left the country before, I was more than nervous, but I was also exhilarated by the whole experience! From painting and repairing a parish school

to assisting the Missionaries of Charity shave, bathe, and dress residents in a care home, I was moved beyond myself and finally understood Jesus’ words from Matthew 25:40: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

It is often said that in mission experiences you end up getting more than you give, and I can confirm that is true. What I experienced on mission in Jamaica changed my life. It liberated me! So much so that I came home with an unavoidable desire to do more.

Unsure of where to go or who to talk to, I contacted the Chancery. That is how I first met Deacon Ed Kelly and Miriam Heverline and learned about the Pontifical Mission Societies some 13 years ago and began serving on the Diocesan Mission Board.

I am honored to continue on the legacy of the Diocese of Scranton’s Pontifical Mission Societies office, and I look forward to sharing more about my own mission experiences through this column.

So let us continue the good work of the Pontifical Mission Societies, serving the poorest of the poor around the world, and may we never forget that our liberation is bound up with those we serve.



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Shannon Kowalski with one of the young school students she met while on an immersive mission service experience in Kingston, Jamaica, when she was a junior at Misericordia University.