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Last month, I had the opportunity to visit Notre Dame Elementary and High Schools in East Stroudsburg for a Mission Mass.

Mission Masses are an opportunity for me to pray with our students for the missions, to remind them of their ability to help those less fortunate, and to thank them for the ways they support the Pontifical Mission Societies as Catholic school students.

After Mass, Father Brian J.T. Clarke, the school chaplain, and I visited some students in the elementary school's younger grades. In one of the classrooms — a Montessori class filled with pre-k and kindergarten — I had a conversation that stuck with me and really made me think.

Father Clarke asked the children, "What does it mean to

be poor?" There was silence. No one raised their hand. The children looked confused, unsure of how to answer. But when the question was switched to, "What does it mean to be rich?" the room came alive with ideas!

"It means you have lots of money!"... "You have a big house!"... "You can go to Disney World!" The answers continued, and they had no difficulty imagining what it's like to have more than enough.

I walked out of that classroom smiling, but also reflecting on their responses. These children weren't being rude or unaware; they simply didn't have a personal understanding of poverty. In some ways, that's a blessing for them.

This experience highlighted a larger truth for me: if we aren't careful, we can overlook the needs around us and forget how fortunate we are.

As Thanksgiving approaches, it's a good time to pause and appreciate the good things in our lives: faith, family, food, health, shelter, and peace. Not everyone is as fortunate. Many people struggle every day, and as members of the Body of Christ, we are called not only to be thankful but also to help those in need.

Poverty isn't just something we see on TV or hear about far away. It exists right in our own communities. In every town and parish, families are having a hard time putting food on the table, elderly individuals are choosing between buying medicine and paying bills, and children are going to bed hungry. Their struggles may

not always be visible, but they are very real.

And if we look beyond our borders, the situation can be even worse. In places where our Church provides support, such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America, many communities live without clean water, basic medical care, or even a nearby church where they can worship and gather. Our missionaries, whether they're priests, religious sisters or brothers, or lay volunteers, work in these areas under difficult conditions, providing not just spiritual support but also practical help and hope.

We can start by paying attention. Look around your parish community. Talk to people involved in local charities, such as Catholic Social Services or your parish and community food pantries. Ask your pastor where help is most needed.

Then, take action. Make an extra donation, drop off groceries, invite someone who might be alone to your Thanksgiving dinner, support missionary efforts, and pray for those in need. Teach your children and grandchildren about kindness through your actions and examples.

Thanksgiving should be more than just a holiday; it can be a way of life. True gratitude leads to compassion and caring for others.

Those children at Notre Dame Elementary may not yet understand what poverty means, but they know what it feels like to be rich. If we guide our young people well, they will learn that true wealth comes from sharing what we have — freely, joyfully, and often.

MISSION MESSAGE

What Does Rich Mean?: A Thanksgiving Challenge

By Shannon Kowalski
Diocesan Director,
of Pontifical Mission Societies



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World Mission Sunday showcases universality of Catholic Church

SCRANTON — In his more than 15 years as leader of the Diocese of Scranton, the Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, said he could not recall a local liturgy that more powerfully radiated the universality of the Catholic Church than the World Mission Sunday Mass celebrated on Oct. 19 at the Cathedral of Saint Peter.

“I don’t think I have ever experienced a Mass in this Cathedral in all of my years as Bishop that has reminded us of the fact that our hands reach across oceans and countries to one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord,” the Bishop said at the close of the liturgy. “May we continue to live in that spirit!”

The Mass, which drew a diverse crowd of religious sisters and lay faithful, featured both the Cathedral choir and a Congolese choir that sang in Swahili. Their voices highlighted the richness of the global Church – not just in song – but in shared mission.

While Bishop Bambera served as principal celebrant of the World Mission Sunday Mass, the homily was delivered by the Most Rev. Matthew Kwasi Gyamfi, Bishop of Sunyani, Ghana – a longtime friend of the Scranton Diocese.

He called on the faithful to rekindle their missionary spirit and recognize their shared role in the Church’s global mission.

“This task of evangelization to all corners of the earth was given, not only to the pope or bishops and religious, but to all of us,” Bishop Gyamfi said.

He also reminded those in attendance that the Church’s mission is far from complete.

“There are still vast areas of the world where people have never heard the name of Jesus,” he shared. “I come from one such area. There are still children growing up without a church to



The Most Rev. Matthew Kwasi Gyamfi, Bishop of Sunyani, Ghana, blesses a young child following the World Mission Sunday Mass at the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton on Oct. 20, 2025. (Photo/Mike Melisky)

worship in, a priest to baptize them, or a catechist to guide them.”

Bishop Gyamfi offered a powerful scriptural image from the first reading: Moses, whose arms were held up by Aaron and Hur, to ensure victory in battle. Likewise, he said, Bishops need their priests, and the Church needs every lay person, to sustain the mission.

“Working together, we win,” he said. “Each of us has a role to play.”

The impact of that shared mission is critically important for the Diocese of Sunyani.

In recent years, financial and spiritual support from Scranton has helped fund schools, health clinics, assisted with seminarian tuition, and assisted with chapel construction in some of the most remote corners of Ghana.

Bishop Gyamfi recalled how Bishop Bambera, on visits to Sunyani in 2022 and 2023, saw firsthand the impact of that support.

“On behalf of our priests, clergy, religious, and the lay faithful of the Catholic Diocese of Sunyani, I express my sincerest gratitude and profound appreciation for helping us,” Bishop Gyamfi added. “You may

never come there (Ghana), but your contributions go far and make an impact.”

There are currently eight priests from the Diocese of Sunyani serving as pastors, assistant pastors, or administrators in parishes throughout the Diocese of Scranton. These men are among more than 20 international priests currently serving locally.

As the celebration concluded, Bishop Bambera expressed his admiration for Bishop Gyamfi’s words and the profound reminder they offer.

“You are not only a dear friend and colleague to me, but your presence here reminds us of the great relationship that we have with the Diocese of Sunyani,” Bishop Bambera noted.

Shannon Kowalski, Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the Diocese of Scranton, said people often think missionaries are elsewhere spread across the globe – but there are missionaries right here in Scranton.

“Today’s Mass was a vibrant illustration of what World Mission Sunday is meant to be,” she said.

Kowalski hopes people will be inspired by Bishop Gyamfi’s final words of challenge.

“The Lord calls us to go to the corners of the world,” Bishop Gyamfi said. “What have you been doing? What can you do?”

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