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by Fr Pablo Abreu, sdb

The Caribbean nation of Santo Domingo has been blessed by the presence of great missionaries who planted the seeds of the Gospel, as did St John Bosco, in such a fruitful way that it produced a hundredfold. Such is the case of Fr Andrés Németh Herczeg, a Hungarian missionary with typical Salesian ingenuity who worked tirelessly for the salvation of souls and, as one of his most precious legacies, left a group of women who consecrated themselves to God in and from the world, cooperating in the building of God's kingdom: they called themselves Parish Missionaries of Mary Help of Christians.

On 8 December 1961 as part of the celebrations for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, St John Bosco Parish in Santo Domingo was the setting for the first group of young women to pronounce vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and thus consecrate themselves to the

Lord to serve him as Parish Missionaries of Mary Help of Christians. Thus a Secular Institute dedicated to parish work came into being.

The main objective of the group is holiness through the practice of virtue, and salvation of one's neighbour through a life of intense apostolate in a parish setting. They work for the poorest of the poor, especially young people of all ages, and in the spirit of Don Bosco's charism.

The apostolic zeal which they have embraced has enabled them to immediately spread the kingdom through their work in the parish, a work of teaching catechetics in forgotten slum areas and in public schools, as a faithful response to God's call. They believe He has invited them to become holy by giving their lives to develop a future for people who were born without true knowledge of Him. They are currently working in

Holy Family, Doña Chucha parishes, Altagracia Boys Town and St Dominic's School, all in the Dominican Republic's Capital.

They are at the service of the Church, taking in orphan children, the extremely poor or at risk. They offer them a place to live, food, education, health, recreation, and a well-rounded human and religious formation, both personal and social, but they especially offer them the love that has been denied these children.

As Luke's Gospel puts it, these women accompany and await the Lord (cf. Lk 8: 1-3): they have experienced a personal encounter with Jesus through their efforts to turn sorrow into smiles. From this encounter they gain the strength, reinforced by charity, which turns them into authentic proponents of the Gospel, which says: "Look, there is the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:36).

