



## Friends & Helpers of Madre Berenice

April 2021

Dear Friends and Helpers,

You have been a big part of our work in Ecuador over the years, and we can't thank you enough for your support. Though it has been a difficult year for all of us here, can you imagine how difficult it has been to run a hospital for people with Hansen's Disease in a pandemic? To educate impoverished children with little or no home access to the internet? To keep out of danger as a caregiver oneself?

Let us tell you of what has been happening this year with our projects in Ecuador.

1. As you know, our main work has been to support Damien House, Guayaquil, in bringing dignity to persons affected by Hansen's Disease (leprosy). Our dear friend Sr. Annie Credidio, BVM, has recently written to tell us their news. Some of their nurses and kitchen staff have again tested positive for COVID and had to stay home; the reduced staff, sometimes doing 24-hour shifts, are trying to care for three patients with COVID, quarantined in their rooms, as well as all the other clients. They have lost five elderly clients in the pandemic months. Sr. Annie and Dr Martinez have contracted COVID too, and had to quarantine. Still, with amazing resilience they somehow keep going. Sr. Annie is recovering, thank God. Her energy and courage have come through for her too: "It's good to be able to walk around again," she writes. "We continue to fumigate twice a week for COVID and mosquitos, and fill up the rat traps. We did not have internet during my confinement due to the fact that the rats ate through the fiber optic cables on the roof!"

Recent spikes have happened in the city after the pre-Lenten carnival and the national elections. The hospitals are full, she says, and medical services in general in Ecuador are inadequate to deal with the scale of infection. To give one example, "Our friends who work in some of the public hospitals say that when they leave their shift, they have to pass on their biosecurity uniforms to the next shift." Please continue your prayers and support for the residents and staff of Damien House in this ongoing crisis.

2. We have sadly seen the permanent closure of another favorite mission in Guayaquil, the nearby Escuela Julio Matovelle, a Catholic school that educated many poor children. In a fraught economy, and already locked down because of the pandemic, the school was forced to make the final difficult decision as its teachers, even without a regular salary, did their best for the past 18 months with the very few students who could participate on-line.

As we so regret the loss, remember this: FHMB has not only sent funds this past year for teachers' stipends, but many of you have provided scholarships for many years for Julio Matovelle students, so that each year over 100 children were enabled to get uniforms, books, and tuition fees with your help. All the children you supported will always have this solid foundation to fall back on.

3. Our more recent work has been to help a new project in another impoverished neighborhood. Sisters Fanny and Gladys, who have formed the association *Una Sola Fuerza* in Duran, started using garden boxes to teach and promote urban vegetable gardens as a source of food and natural remedies for families, and to teach nutrition. They have been very successful with this effort, and have added free carpentry and sewing classes: these also draw the community together, with proper social distancing! The Sisters are working to put on more programs, especially for the elderly, in the coming year.

4. Lastly, some individuals FHMB has helped flourish with your support:

Antonio, a tailor who has Hansen's Disease, and his daughter, aged 16, who has also contracted the disease, have both been receiving assistance from Damien House. Now, funded by you, he has a new sewing machine, and is once again able to provide for his family. As a double bonus, his main work this year is sewing bio-security uniforms for the Damien House staff!

A former patient, Carlos, whom you helped become a Registered Nurse, has come back to Damien House as a professional member of the staff. He has already risen to supervisor of the nurse aides there, and it was his invaluable leadership that got them through Dr Martinez and Sr. Annie's recent quarantine absence. Carlos would like to go forward for a graduate degree at some point, and we would like to help.

Mariuxi, another former patient, aims to follow Carlos's example, so we are sending her to university to get her degree.

Yes, FHMB has been able to make a significant difference in the lives of many in Ecuador: and it's all because of you. If any of these areas speak to your heart, please consider a gift.

All of us at FHMB are volunteers—nobody is paid, and our overhead is little-to-nothing, so 98.5% of your funds go straight to their intended target.

On the one hand, it has been a challenging year for all of us, but on the other, we have it so much better than the poor of Ecuador. Since we cannot have our annual Spaghetti Dinner fundraiser this year due to COVID, we're asking you to help us help the devastated poor of Ecuador by responding to this letter—consider it our “Virtual Spaghetti Dinner”! Information on how to donate can be found on our website: [SUPPORT US | fhmb \(friendsofhmb.org\)](https://www.friendsofhmb.org). You can also send a check to the address at the bottom of the page. And of course, you can always just contact one of us. Thank you again for all your support, and for taking the time to read this. May God bless you always.

In love and gratitude,

Betty Matteson, Katie Brown, and the Board of Directors of FHMB.

***Board of Directors***

*Katie Brown  
Patrick Burke  
Jerry Legare*

*Kathy MacCarthy  
Mike MacCarthy  
Betty Matteson*

*Marianna Moran  
Robert J. Mulcahy  
Sr Mary O'Connor*

*Inspired by the teaching of Jesus and the call to have a preferential love of the poor, Friends & Helpers of Madre Berenice was organized to provide help and support to the missionaries of Ecuador. Assistance is given by acquiring healthcare and educational supplies, clothing, and funds to supplement selected education and health services. Members witness to the love of God by visiting and getting to know and serve the people personally.*

***We are a charitable organization under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3)  
Tax ID 20-8115700***

**FHMB, PO Box 9739, San Diego, CA 92169**

**[www.friendsofhmb.org](http://www.friendsofhmb.org)**