

Operation Mato Grosso

*with the youth...
... for the poor*



"...to do Charity is to open a door you can never close"

***These pages describe the work
of Father Ugo de Censi and volunteers
of Operation Mato Grosso.***

...one must see up close and touch all these works, and the others underway, to marvel and be moved. How was it possible? Thanks to that charity mentioned many times by Father Ugo, and his bringing tens of dozens of Italian volunteers almost four decades ago - doctors, engineers, technicians, teachers, artisans, workers, artists, students - to work for free living with the poor and working shoulder to shoulder with them to end misery and to push back poverty.

But, above all, to give back to the “campesinos” the dignity and humanity which exploitation, abandonment and the iniquitous conditions of life have taken away from them...

... and discover that in this selfish world there still are men and women devoted to helping others, doing that which we call good, and that in this commitment and sacrifice they find the reason for their existence.

Ah, if there were as many “stupidi” in the world like in Chacas, my dear and admired Father Ugo!

From Spain’s newspaper El Pais by Mario Vargas Llosa, winner of the 2010 Nobel Prize in Literature (April 7, 2013).



“Operation Mato Grosso is not so easy to understand. But its concept is.

This volunteer group is full of good energy, the source of which is Father Ugo. His is a living legacy with constant and undeterred emphasis on “path of charity,” “youth adventure” and “helping the most needy.” This has given way to thousands of volunteers across five countries on three continents.

Operation Mato Grosso does not have a CEO or supervisors. No one has a business card. Not many even have a title apart from “volunteer.” There are no waivers to sign, no free T-shirt to go with it. There does not seem to be any requirement to join, except from an unflinching willingness to try, and to do something for someone else with no expectation of anything in return. This message of volunteerism in its purest form exists in 55 communities throughout Peru.



Just now, as I write this, I receive a letter from Father Ugo.

He writes of his never-ending will to dream, even at age 91, and of his newest dream: that for 60,000 plus people of a coastal city called Chimbote, he wants to build a City of Friendship. It sounds almost corny. It’s absolutely brilliant. When Operation Mato Grosso fulfills this vision – and they will – it will not be done to praise its visionary and founder. Instead, it will stand a testament to the thousands of people, as young as 10 and as old as 91 who embark on these adventures, those who see a need and aim to provide for that need.

Yes, Operation Mato Grosso is difficult to explain. It’s far easier to simply live it.”

Nicholas Bruce
Boston, US

Contents

INTRODUCTION

- Father Ugo de Censi 7
- Operation Mato Grosso in Italy 10
- Operation Mato Grosso in South America 15

WORK IN THE MISSION

- Oratory of the Andes 22
- Educative work 23
- Family of artisans Don Bosco and Maria Auxiliadora 34
- Other works 41
- Disease and neglect 53
- The spiritual path of the work 62
- Martyrs of Charity 67
- Recent history: Charity begins among Peruvian young people 73

CONCLUSION

- Contacts 78
- Acknowledgements 79

Father Ugo de Censi



Ugo de Censi was born on January 26, 1924 in Polaggia, a small town in northern Italy. Coming from a humble and simple family, he was educated with his five brothers in love for God and neighbor, so much so that, at a young age, he and his brother Ferruccio decided to enter the seminary.

When Ugo was 16, his mother Ursula died. Nine years later, Ugo was diagnosed with tuberculosis, which would affect his life forever, forcing him to spend long periods of time at a hospital near Genoa, some three hours from where he lived.

On March 8, 1952, Ugo was ordained a Salesian priest, beginning a long journey of preaching the gospel of charity and love for thy neighbor. A faithful devotee of the order's founder Saint John Bosco, Fr. Ugo, showed great enthusiasm for activities with the young. In 1955, he started working with the orphaned boys of Arese Center, a home for troubled youth. It proved an invaluable period in his life in as much as the young people helped define his character.

In 1960, he was appointed spiritual assistant of the oratorios of Lombardy and Emilia regions. Convinced that he could not work with the youth in offices or enclosed spaces, he called on catechists to spend their vacation climbing the mountain "Val Formazza."

This was meant to take them away from the city to a simple environment, which would help them to reflect on their lives and unknowingly lay the foundations for the new adventure that would have been born a few years later.



Meanwhile, Father Pietro Melesi returned to Italy in 1966, after spending 10 years as a missionary in Brazil. He told Fr. Ugo of the difficulties he encountered in his work for the poor people in Mato Grosso state. Hearing this, Fr. Ugo turned to the young people of the oratories, with a proposal: "Why don't we go to help him?" By July the next year, the first group of missionaries had left for Brazil.

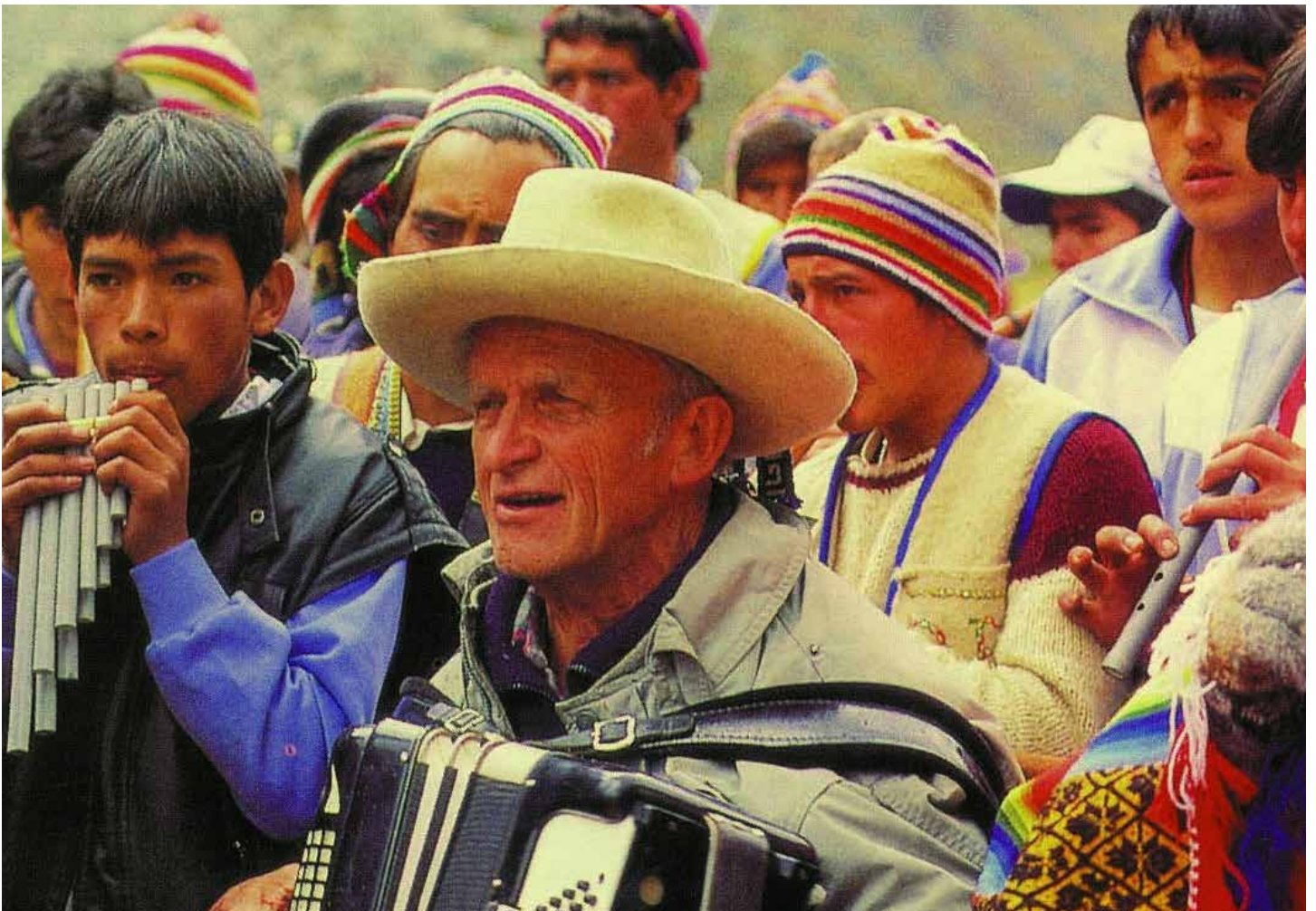
Tuberculosis kept Fr. Ugo in the hospital in Santa Corona and unable to travel with the group. From his hospital bed, he followed each step of the work of the first mission, writing and guiding those who would eventually come to form OPERAZIONE MATO GROSSO.

In 1976, with missions established in Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru, Fr. Ugo moved to South America. He became pastor in Chacas, a village in the central Andes Mountains of Peru. He is dedicated to sacrifice, giving all his efforts to those in need while setting an example for many young people who desire to follow his lead.



When Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini visited Operation Mato Grosso missions in Peru to inaugurate a house for the elderly donated by the diocese of Milan, he said:

“I always wanted to see with my eyes the oratory of Valdocco when Saint John Bosco was there. My wish has been granted here, at the foot of the Andes. “



... in Italy “Where the adventure began”

Operation Mato Grosso was born in a very simple way. Not with the idea to establish an organization just to live an adventurous summer trip to Brazil. This funny name was taken from a James Bond’s movie “Operation Double 007”, popular in that time. The concept was proposed by Fr. Ugo to help the work of his missionary friend Fr. Pietro who lived in Brazil. In 1967, Fr. Ugo posted an ad in the Italian newspaper “Corriere della Sera” calling for young people to travel to Brazil for building a school and a clinic.

On July 8th a group of 20-year-olds volunteers traveled to a Brazilian region called “Mato Grosso”.

The volunteers planned to stay there for four months. When four months came and went, and not having finished the clinic, several decided to stay while others returned to Italy as planned. Those who arrived back in Italy felt the need to support their friends who remained to complete the project. They decided to work in their free time and raise money for people in Brazil with odd jobs on farms. Also, their volunteer efforts went to “rag-picking,” a concept generating from the Emmaus movement that was quite popular in France and across Europe at the time.



“Why pick up and sell scrap metal?”

Emmaus was founded by Abbé Pierre, a French Catholic priest, with the goal of helping refugees, the poor and the homeless after WWII.

In 1951, at a time when the community was struggling financially, Abbé Pierre passed Parisian restaurants at night to ask for any donations. His Church, rebuked him for his begging ways. His community was in great need. So, during a meeting a member professed to having survived by going through rubbish and selling what he salvaged. This caught the attention of Abbé Pierre. So they began this new “rag-picking” activity to collect unwanted items for resale. This formed the basis of Emmaus Communities raising funds and using profits to help others.



“How it works now”

Operation Mato Grosso followed this example for raising money.

It began as a movement of young people working to support missionary work.

Performing this work, the youth discover and acquire certain fundamental values at a crucial stage in their lives: fatigue, putting words to action, team spirit, respect and cooperation, sensitivity and attention to the problems of the poor.



Anyone can belong to OMG without favor to an ideological, political or religious preference.

Although born in a Salesian environment, the movement has always been non-confessional and open to everyone who can do something to help others.

All people are free to enter and leave the group at any time; the limits set are exclusively related to the intensity of personal relationships. There is no organizational structure.



OMG is a place to cultivate the vocation of love for others.

“Enough words, let’s get to work,” is its motto. Charity work puts the needs of other first, at the same time as focusing on the changes to oneself.



Every day, young people in hundreds of groups across Italy meet in their free time after work, school, or during weekends to carry out various activities such as gardening, painting, helping families to move, and collecting of scrap metal and paper.



Every summer, some 30 volunteers spend six months or more in the missions in South America.

Federico Toscani was one of the first volunteers to go to Brazil in the early 70s. He spent the rest of his life in Brazil helping people with his wife and his three children until his death on November 29th 2012 due to lung cancer.

The following is a letter he wrote to other volunteers of Reggio Emilia OMG group to encourage them. In the last days of his life, he kept saying to the people who visited him: "I am fine, I die peacefully and I am happy with the life I have lived."

Santa Clara, Brazil
October 14, 2001

Dear guys of Reggio,
I would like to write your names, but I do not know if I can remember them all: Elena, Silvia, Elisa, Giulietta, Cristina, Daniele, Gabriele, Daniela, Giovanni, M.Giulia, Garcia, Fausto e Benedetta..

Are you all ok? Are you happy? What a question, you might say!

Nevertheless, this is really important, "to be happy doing OMG". Contentment in being part of OMG is a very clear sign and it means that you are doing it well, and doing it well means like Fr. Ugo does. OMG is nothing more than a way of living like Fr. Ugo, not something additional or parallel to his life. It is not just doing things for the poor, or working with young people, but it's everything he does, every moment of his life. In fact, I have never seen a person happier than Fr. Ugo. Always happy, always optimistic, even when everything was falling apart or in the midst of great suffering with the deaths of Giulio and Fr. Daniele [volunteers killed in Peru in the 1990s]. This joy comes from the fact that he lives it all and does it all. Sadness, lack of serenity, and contentment comes from living and doing it for ourselves -- making us feel good, giving us fulfillment or letting us see it firsthand or counting on others. Once Ugo said to me, '... we are too demanding and ruthless with ourselves and when something does not go as we would like, we lose our serenity, we blame everything and everyone and we are no longer satisfied'. Do it all "for nothing," for free, without expecting anything in return, is what makes us happy even if it costs all our efforts. That is OMG... it is no longer living for ourselves, do not pay attention only on yourself, but focus on the need of the others, for the poor, for the young people ...Be happy and then you will see that OMG will make you realize how beautiful life is!

Sincerely
Federico

Operation Mato Grosso's messaging falls on several key components:

POOR don't focus only on yourself or what you need. Look behind you; there is always someone less fortunate than you.

WORK a mouthful of words is useless; let's work. If you want to change the world, change yourself first.

FRIENDSHIP in helping other people, you find true friends and a real friendship united by a common purpose.

OPENNESS don't close yourself or your ideas. Be open to sharing, comparing them with others and learning from others.

NON-CONFESSIONAL means that you don't know the TRUTH, that you are in doubt, but you feel the need to find something true for your life.

...in South America

As of 2015, a total of 110 OMG communities exist in South America: 69 in Peru, 18 in Ecuador, 12 in Brazil and 11 in Bolivia. OMG missionaries – young people, families and priests who volunteer their work completely free – perform numerous activities in different sectors: education, labor, health, agriculture, technology, social and religious.



Brazil The missionary adventure of OMG began in Brazil in Mato Grosso region, in Poxoreo. During the years, many more missions were organized and schools were constructed in villages where children previously did not have the opportunity to attend school.

Current missions are:

JARUDORE, NABOREIRO, NOVO SAO JOAQUIM, GENERAL CARNEIRO, BARRA DO GARCAS, SANTA CLARA, GOIANIA, CAMPO ALEGRE, PARANA, SAO SALVADOR, RETIRO and PALMEIROPOLIS.

Bolivia OMG has been in Bolivia since 1969 when a group of young Italians stepped into the Amazon jungle to open a mission in a remote village. Volunteers have moved into other poor and needy areas, seeing the extreme needs of people found in abandoned communities. Current missions are:

COCHABAMBA, AMBANA, ESCOMA, CARABUCO, SANTIAGO DE HUATA, PENA COLORADA, PASO RAPA, POSTERVALLE, BOLIVAR, CHOQUELLUSTA and WAYAPACHA.

Fr. Remo Prandini was one of the first volunteers in the OMG missions. He left for Brazil after his ordination in 1971. In these two letters, he describes the life in the first years of the mission.



Corumbá,
August 11th, 1971

“If you knew, Ugo, how it is hard to do what we have to do here, where the poor are just one meter from our house. We, without realizing it, are led to live with those who have our same culture, our standard of life and, if we do not pay attention to that, we make our friendships almost entirely among these people. We are more willingly to stay with them, and gradually we are going to live like them. We come within people who are cultured, worth and count; OMG volunteers become people who are estimated, who are important in the city.

For me above all, being poor is about not counting on anything.

The poor people do not count; no one wants them, no one invites them, no one asks their opinions, none of them is worthy of a look. However, we are not poor with the poor yet, we are still not a part of them, we just live next to them with a European standard of life.

I feel rich.

I lack nothing, food is good and plentiful, the house is comfortable and cozy.

It is terrible to realize how we can live so well, right here where there is so much misery. We still have a long way to walk for living fully the spirit of the OMG.”

In 1975 Father Prandini moved to a small village of a few huts in the Amazon rainforest of Bolivia. He was a man, full of dreams and ideals, which he wanted to express by his life as we can read from his letters.

Sagrado
January 1st, 1982

“Dear Lodrino group

...more and more we learn “to make room for” and the more we walk in the OMG path.

In a society where everyone wants to have a place, it costs to make room, but it is the only way to break this selfish logic that is leading us to the destruction.

If people do not learn to make room, we will never find a solution to our problems and conference of Geneva or Montreal will serve for nothing.

If rich countries do not make room for poor countries, nothing will change.

This is also true for each of us in our relations with other people.

The entire Gospel, the OMG path are briefly this: making room inside and outside of us for those “placeless”, who are the vast majority of people on the earth.

This goal will be achieved when all people have learned to make room for the others; it must be our ideal.

Remember that the first one who found no room was Jesus, of which Gospel says: ‘There was no room for him and he was born in a stable.’

Therefore this year will be for all of us a great commitment “to make room”.

Please remember us, and our poor people, who are having a hard time (dollar increased to 40 bolivianos).”

He died tragically by drowning, at only 44 years of age, on December 25, 1986, while riding his bicycle, carrying Christmas gifts to the poorest children in an area of Santa Cruz, called Hardeman.

His remains are buried in Hardeman, because locals did not allow him to be taken away:

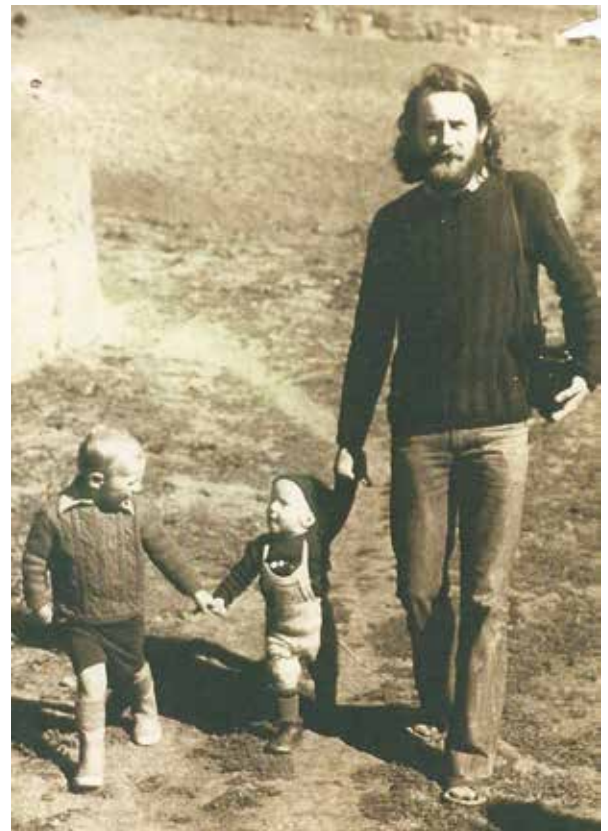
“Father Remo is ours! Nos Pertenece! He belongs to us! “

Ecuador The missions here began in 1970 in the rainforest with a sawmill and a furnace for making bricks and tiles where volunteers were living with indigenous nations. In the 1970s and 1980s the involvement of volunteers in the missions was preferably in a social context to address immediate needs: building roads, bridges, kindergartens, schools, clinics, conducting workshops for women to learn sewing and hygiene, and organizing agricultural cooperatives to sell local products. Subsequently they opened “talleres” or workshops, following the model of Fr. Ugo schools in Peru.

There are 18 missions in Ecuador:

QUITO, CHINALO, CHUGCHILAN, INSINLIVI, ZUMBAHUA, PUJILI, SUMALO, QUINDISILLI, ANGAMARCA, SHUYO, SAN NICOLAS, FACUNDO VELA, CUATRO ESQUINAS, SAN LORENZO, SAN MATEO, CELEN, TENTA and GUANAZAN.

Enrico Cappelletti was one of the first volunteers in Ecuador. He was introduced to OMG during the summer of 1968 when he met Cesare who had returned from Sucua, Ecuador.



“We decided, Silvana and I, to go to Mato Grosso, because we wanted to live a more poor and simple life (but inwardly rich) for the poor, of which we so often spoke. We wanted to learn to live in a way different from how we live here [in Italy], without all those things that are constantly offered in advertisements, and without the isolation that characterizes our families. A life that keeps in mind the needs of others, especially of those most in need. “

On October 7, 1971, Enrico and Silvana moved to Simiatug (Ecuador), a few months after their marriage.

“It was a very poor area and very secluded - as Silvana remembers - where about 30,000 “Indigenous” lived in 50 different communities. Ninety percent of the men were illiterate and almost every one of the women. “

Enrico, an ardent advocate of education organized and opened an elementary and a middle school to promote literacy. He also developed a school for training teachers, so local people could teach in their villages. The objective for Enrico and Silvana was to educate young Ecuadorians to serve the poorest people. Silvana began courses of weaving and sewing, and she opened the first medical dispensary with medicines from Italy. Enrico took charge of organizing agricultural cooperatives, aiming to enhance local traditions and make them more available to the community through the cultivation of community land.

“Meanwhile, we were slowly getting used to this lifestyle. I assure you, in Italy, just thinking to work the land seemed to me very strange. I could not imagine myself doing something like that. Now I’m realizing that it is one of the most beautiful types of work, nothing obsessive, nothing binding, a lot of responsibility, peace, and above all, a work in the hands of God. Here, you can truly realize that without Him there is nothing, the seed sprouts, becomes a plant and gives the fruits, it’s all on a tightrope: when it rains too much, everything rots; it’s windy, it freezes, it dies; it’s too hot and everything dries.”

In September of 1977 Enrico, Silvana, and their two children, Elia and Maigua, returned to Italy for a few months to visit relatives and friends, and to raise money for their projects in the mission. They also participated in the OMG work camp in order to tell young people about the importance of working for the poor.

On November 19th, while traveling between towns in Italy, a truck collided with their car. Enrico died at the age of 28 years old.

The night before, during a meeting with young volunteers of OMG in Vighizzolo, Enrico was asked: “How long do you want to live this life?”

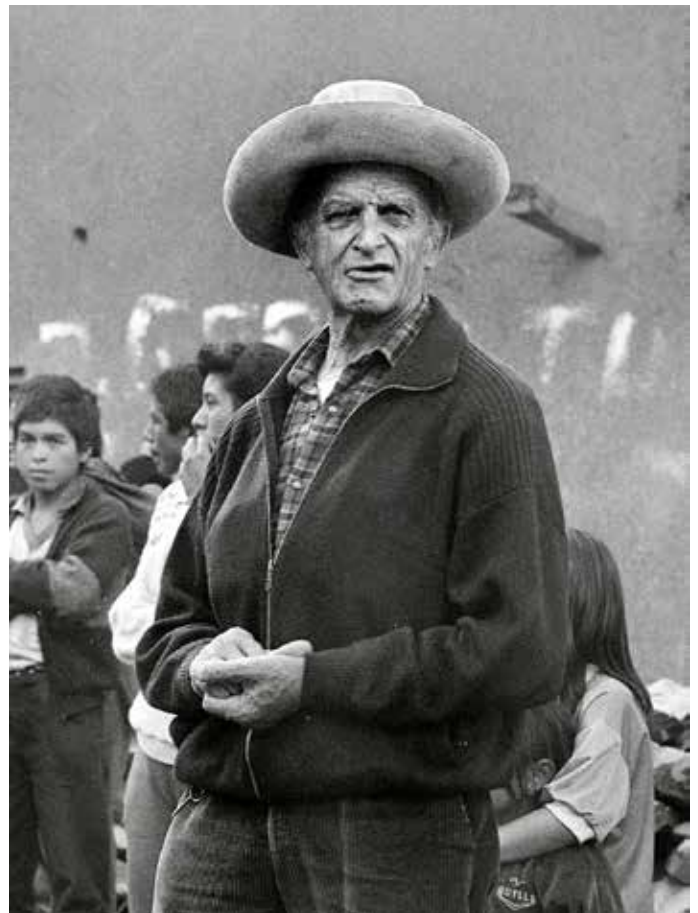
“Until the end. Even if I die tomorrow...”

Peru In 1975, Peru's first mission was created in Piscobamba. In 1976, Fr. Ugo arrived and started working as the pastor of Chacas. His charismatic personality attracted many volunteers to Peru who wished to help him in the path of charity. Their work allowed for the opening of many OMG missions.

Current missions include:

CHACAS, SAPCHA, HUALLIN, WECRONCOCHA, YANAMA, PISCOBAMBA, PAROBAMBA, SAN LUIS, MITUJIRCA, POMALLUCAY, TOMANGA, ILLAURO, TARAPAMPA, YAUYA, CHALHUA, HUACHUCOCHA, QUICHES, HUACRACHUCO, LLAMELLIN, CHACCHO, ACZO, TINTI, SAN MARTIN, QUINHUARAGRA, RASPAPAMPA, UCO, RAPAYAN, HACACHI, HUACCHIS, HUANTAR, TAUCA, LLAPO, CONCHUCOS, PALLASCA, OCROS, JANGAS, LLUNCU, TICCLOS, CORPANQUI, MARCARA, SHILLA, HUAYPAN, TOMA, TUYO, YUNGAY, ANTA, HUANUCO, PUNCHAO, LLATA, RAHUAPAMPA, PACHAS, QUIVILLA, CHAVIN, VILCABAMBA, LUCMA, CCAYARA, PUCYURA, OYARA, HUAMAYBAMBA, INCAHUASI, TOTORA, MAMARA, CUZCO, CHIMBOTE, TANGAY, PUCALLPA, CAJAMARCA, POLLOC and LIMA.

Fr. Ugo's arrival in 1976 as pastor of Chacas, made an important change in the way of working and helping the poor. As the above list testifies, OMG has experienced the most widespread growth and development in Peru – the country where Fr. Ugo has resided for more than forty years! Due to the significant expansion of OMG's missions and work, Peruvian examples will be cited in the upcoming pages, which attempt to describe the essence and scope of OMG's programs. However, it is important to remember that most of these initiatives are also functioning in Brazil, Bolivia and Ecuador.



Work in the mission

“Coming to live with farm laborers has been an exhausting journey, learning sometimes with a quick step, sometimes with the slowest one, to offer a hand... The children’s dirty hands and bare feet, their sad eyes and their clothing torn and tattered have moved me. I became convinced that I needed to take care of them. Little by little I hosted in my house (the parish rectory) the poorest among all of them, so that they could learn a craft. They even helped me gather the other children in the small villages abandoned along the mountain range to get them to play, sing, and pray. This is how the Oratory came to life.”

Father Ugo

Oratory of the Andes

Father Ugo began the oratory initially to help those boys and girls who did not go to his school (page 24). Oratory is an activity held over the weekend for children and young people. In essence, it is to “work together with simplicity and joy, following the example of Saint John Bosco”.

The oratory was born in 1985 with 450 children, and today, it is in every OMG mission. The number of oratorians is about 40,000. Children sing, play, eat, pray, and learn to help the needy.



“Oratorio de los Andes” is a path that children begin after receiving First Communion. In the first three years they learn catechism together and begin to help the elderly and needy by distributing food, cleaning houses, collecting firewood, etc. Young people build houses for the most needy families in their villages, each year building as many as 300 houses.

In order to buy the construction materials, (wood, tile, doors, etc.) the “Adventure of the Shelters in the Cordillera Blanca” formed. Thus far, the Oratorians have erected five mountain shelters (page 49), the profits of which go to buying building materials for homes built for the poor.

Each year during school break in January, February and March, the oratorians are offered the opportunity to work. They receive room and board as well as a cash stipend. The boys work on forestation and the girls on sewing and embroidery with the assistance of their catechists.

Educational work

“...I came to Peru. I had looked at the map and decided, here Chacas! Bishop Mons.

Fransnelli said to me ‘Ok!’ and I came.

When I remember the details, I become moved. The first thing I liked was the land and landscape: hills, rivers, and roads. Country life, fresh air. Then, what the people were like, how they dressed, how they worked and carried themselves. I came with special glasses: I could see the poverty. How I remember. I am grateful for the ancient and somewhat damaged altar piece of our dear ‘Mama Ashu.’ It was her voice that had called me to concern myself with the young living in poverty. If I could teach them the art with which the ancient ancestors had honored Mama Ashu, they could earn a living without having to escape to Lima or to the coast.

How many children did Mama Ashu bequeath to me! ‘They already call you Father,’ she said, ‘do not make this a lie: lift them up, feed them, give them schools and work, teach them to pray, and to have good hearts.’ I continue to serve as a father to thousands, some who call me papa...”

Father Ugo



School-Workshop for boys

In 1976 Fr. Ugo settled permanently in Chacas as a local pastor. He was immediately confronted with the poverty of the villages. Because of lack of work, many young people were leaving their villages to look for employment in the big cities. In most cases, this large migration away from the Andes led to break up of many families.

Fr. Ugo called on his Italian friends, many of who were artists, to come to Peru in order to start a school together with Peruvian carpenters.

In the school, a classical education was taught with intensive training in the ancient arts of wood and stone carving and master carpentry.

The first class was composed of eleven of the neediest young boys in the village. To these days the school still follows a Salesian form of education and morality according to St. John Bosco.

Since its inception, the “taller” functions as a free boarding school where students receive, for a period of five years food, lodging, medical care, clothing, classical education and professional training in the arts. This is very different from what they have in their own homes, where they often eat only twice a day, typically a watery soup because there are many mouths to feed. At home, they sleep lying on a blanket spread on clay floors because the only bed in the house cannot accommodate everyone.

In the school they learn hygiene to avoid diseases such as cholera and tuberculosis.



In the five years of living together the hope is to make them feel at home. To date, over 5,000 boys and young men have attended the OMG operated schools. The Government of Peru recognizes the graduates by extending certification as master carpenters, master wood carvers and master stone carvers. Young men leaving school are given a chest filled with wood tools. They may work in the family of ARTESANOS DON BOSCO, PERU or they may choose to go abroad or start their own studios.



Fr. Roger Brito as a young boy studied in the school of OMG in Peru. He now works as a priest at Saint Clement Church in Lansdowne (Baltimore) MD.

“I am a priest thanks to the charity and goodness of Father Ugo and all the young people of Operazione Mato Grosso who work as volunteers to support missions in South America.

In 1996 I was very lucky to enroll in the school called “Taller Don Bosco” in Chacas. It was one of the greatest privileges of my life. Being in the “Taller” was the opportunity for me to learn about Father Ugo and for him to know my poor heart and soul, lost in poverty. Knowing Fr. Ugo, for me, was like meeting Saint John Bosco. I will never forget a beautiful phrase that he used to say and still says:

‘The young are my heart.’

It is such a big adventure to belong to the heart of Fr. Ugo because he taught me the most important thing in my life: CHARITY. This, to me, now a priest, is the only way to find God. With Fr. Ugo I met OMG, a movement where people give their time, energy, and their lives, all for free. It was through them that I was rescued from the poverty in which I lived. “

Fr. Roger Brito Fernandez



School-Workshop for girls

In 1982, the first female' school began in Yanama. The taller, or workshop, works in the same way as the one for the boys, inviting girls of the neighboring poor villages to a free education.



The girls vary in age from 12 to 18, who have completed primary school, but may not have had, or may have been denied, the opportunity to continue their studies because of extreme poverty. Here the students learn embroidery, sewing, tapestry weaving, and making sweaters and other garments. After finishing their studies, the students – by now, young ladies – may choose to become members of “Familia de Artesanas María Auxiliadora”



Other schools-workshops

Over time other schools in different specializations have been created, for both girls and boys.

Restoration and Painting schools-workshops: In Peru there are many abandoned churches in disrepair. The first restoration workshop and art school, to restore these houses of worship, began in Tauca.

Mosaic School-workshops: Students are instructed in the meticulous art of mosaics.

Plumbing School-Workshops: Using the principles of basic hydraulics students learn the skills of plumbing and plumbing repair.

Brickwork School-Workshops: Students learn to read schematics of projects and learn the process of building.

Electromechanical School-Workshop: Using the principles of basic electricity, students learn how to wire structures, install and repair electrical systems.



“Being a part of the Operazione Mato Grosso, as a volunteer at two different orphanages, several years in a row not only changed my perception on life but also led me to desire to dedicate my life to helping others in need.

During my junior year of high school I decided to volunteer at OMG orphanage in Yanama, Peru not knowing how great of an impact it would have on me. The staff and the children interacted with each other as a family; it was not only a place for the children to live but also to grow as individuals in a safe and nurturing environment. While there, I formed lasting connections with the children whose positive outlook on life and drive to learn was truly inspirational.

Due to the impact the children had on me and I had on them, I chose to volunteer at yet another orphanage the following three summers. The Hogar Osma became a home away from home for me for the duration of my stay. Along with caring for the children’s physical and psychological needs, I was given the opportunity to bond with them, to get to know their dreams and aspirations and encourage them to pursue these. While many of the children have since been adopted I will forever treasure the memories they, as well as the staff, gave me. Volunteering with Operation Mato Grosso was an experience unlike any other; it allowed me to grow as a person while simultaneously helping young individuals feel safe, secure, and appreciated and I am eternally grateful for this.”

Leyla Eskenazi
California, US

Private Technological Education Institute “Don Bosco”

The institute began in 1988 as advanced studies for graduates in the areas of carpentry, carving and sculpture.

The Peruvian Ministry of Education approved the following specializations:

- **Artistic wood constructions**
- **Conservation and restoration**
- **High mountain guides**
- **Technical Nursing**
- **Electrician**
- **Conservation of archaeological sites and antiquities.**



Kindergarten and Pre-school programs

The most dramatic and visible image of poverty worldwide is often seen in children, in particular their education at a young age or lack thereof. During the day, parents are forced to leave home in search of work, expose the children not only to a lack of any form of education, but also to many dangers.



In 2014, having seen this situation, Fr. Ugo de Censi with the others volunteers decided to build, manage, and administer five kindergartens in the city of Chimbote (see page 73). There were already several kindergartens in the remote and poor villages of the Andes, each of them successful in addressing the needs of the youngest of children.

The kindergartens are located in Illauro, San Martin, Chambara, Huacrachuco, and other towns where the public school system cannot provide a sufficient number of kindergarten slots for all children.

These schools, like the others run by OMG volunteers, offer free education, food and schools supplies to needy children.



Private Pedagogical Institute of Higher Education “Don Bosco,” and University

This was created in 1989 to train teachers willing to practice in the villages of the mountains. Fr. Ugo saw this need while looking at the sad reality of education in the Andean villages: the education of children was poor because many teachers were not well prepared culturally and because most of them preferred to teach in the cities.



Teachers in the institute are prepared in the following specializations:

- **Primary education**
- **Secondary education**
- **Religion**
- **Social science**
- **Education For work**
- **Mathematics**
- **Communications**

University

- **Health Sciences Faculty (Nursing and Midwifery)**
- **Education and Humanities Faculty. Teach principles of education for pre-school, primary and continuing education.**
- **Archeology and Conservation of historic sites Faculty.**

A number of years ago I received an invitation to an exhibit of handcrafted furniture of Italian design and Peruvian embellishments made by artisans in various studios in Peru. It was there I met people who changed my life, became my closest friends and who taught me the meaning of love and charity.

From them I learned of the dignity of the volunteers who choose to give up all the privilege and opportunity of a Western life style and instead devote their lives to changing the awful reality of the poor. It is their commitment to an ideal of a better life for the hopeless that is so deeply moving.

I learned that the true measure of who we are is in our acts of kindness and sacrifice for others freely given through the generosity of our spirit. Where does this generosity and kindness come from? I don't know yet. I am still searching and learning from my friends.

I'm old now, my hair is gray and my step is slow but I still marvel at the young volunteers who keep coming, who give up careers, leave behind comfort, and sacrifice for others. They keep me going.

Elaine Smith
Baltimore, US

Family of artisans Don Bosco and Family of artisans Maria Auxiliadora

Following the first graduation of children from the five year taller (workshop), Fr. Ugo founded “Family of artisans Don Bosco” an association functioning as a family of artists who work in the parish rooms, dedicated to their art, each other and their community. He wanted to call the cooperative “family” because he had always wanted the artisans to feel like they were in their own home. He wanted a family atmosphere among the people working there, not only an economic relationship.



Agriculture is the primary source of work in the mountains, and many families look for better opportunities on the coast to find a better job and a better school for their children. What they find, however, is that the cost of living on the coast and in the city is much higher. Families find themselves bankrupt, perhaps forced to sell the few animals and land they left behind in the sierra, or mountains.

“Family of artisans Don Bosco” and “Family of artisans Maria Auxiliadora” were created to permit the young to remain in their villages while earning an income and improving life for themselves and their families. They are no longer forced to migrate to earn a living to the big cities of the coast or Western countries.

Currently the two “families” together count about 700 artisans.

To give a concrete answer to the needs of young and future work, various specializations were created:

- **Wood furniture:** there is a strong tradition in South America of craftsmanship in wood. The wood used is top-quality, extracted from the Amazon rainforest in a certified renewable manner. Each artisan works entirely by hand from the original sketch to the finished product. The artisans create modern designs combined with traditional embellishments.



- **Wood Carving:** some artisans have specialized in sculpture. It is a difficult and ambitious art. Wood is the most suitable material for young artists to express themselves and delight viewers. Fr. Ugo had the great idea of offering youth a way to discover the highest values of life through the beauty of art. They start by sketching ideas for wood sculptures on paper.

These designs are created in three dimensions in clay, the most suitable material for creativity. In the full-scale clay model they define motion, volumes, and proportions. Moving on to the wood, details are perfected, and faces and hands become more expressive.



- **Sculpture in stone:** began in 1996 and it has quickly developed. The sculptures are created in Jangas and Anta, two towns in the Ancash region.

Currently, there are 60 artisans trained in Artesanos Don Bosco specialists' workshops.

The training and technology used by the artisans comes from Italy and aims to combine the art of Italy with the skills and ingenuity of the Peruvian artist.

They work with materials such as Huancayo Red Marble, Travertine Marble, Botticino Marble, Carrara Marble, Onyx Chicha, among them.

These materials are used to produce sacred art sculptures, interior and exterior sculptures, molding, decorative woodworking and kitchen decor.



- **Embossed copper:** in 2006, in the district of Huantar, just a few miles from the famous archaeological site of Chavin de Huantar, a school was started with the specialty of “art metal”. The first class had 26 students.

Until now, the artisans have created works in copper, brass or silver with techniques and skills of the Italian tradition.

They also create artistic silver for churches, private homes and personal furnishings.

They make various types of panels, plates, boxes, and doors that can be embossed or engraved. They also personalize objects of liturgical use and create unique ornamental objects (for the table) of any dimension upon request.

Objects can be metalwork, as well as mixed constructions of metal and stone, wood or glass, depending on the practical and aesthetic purpose of the product.



- **Glass manufacturing:** some expert artisans come to Chacas from Murano, Italy, a town near Venice, known for its excellent glass works. The experts teach the art of blown and sheet glass used in churches and art glass composition.

- **Fusion glass:** in this technique, pieces of glass are superimposed on one another, on a transparent base and little pieces of colored glass are then baked together for a homogeneous fusion.

- **Artistic Stained Glass:** There are numerous artisans who have specialized in this art; they work mainly for churches in Peru and the US.



- **Textile, knitting and embroidery:** handmade apparel and accessories of high quality with native materials.



In 2009, the couture house of Valentino commissioned clothing according to their designs. There were two fashion shows, one in the city of Arequipa, Peru, and another one in Florence, Italy, where the models wore the clothing of a prominent Italian designer.



Sale of products

The products of the Family of Artisans are sold primarily in Italy, thanks to the work of many volunteers who show them in traveling exhibitions. This became “DON BOSCO 3A Onlus,” an association in charge of furniture sales in Italy.



There are permanent exhibitions of the products in three Latin American cities -- Lima, Quito and Cuzco. The largest display is in the Barranco neighborhood of Lima. In a centuries-old colonial mansion, one can see how Andean villagers transform wood blocks into stunning furniture.



Since May 2008, furniture has also been exported to the United States.

“Artesanos Don Bosco US” is a permanent exhibition space located in Baltimore, Maryland, OMG’s only presence in the U.S.

The objective of the exhibition is to establish a market, allowing the work of the artisans to be made known in North America.

The exhibition has on display an average of 30 furniture pieces, presented like an art gallery and furniture show that displays functional pieces such as a table, bed, bookshelf, writing desk or chair. Volunteers run the exhibition so that overhead costs are restricted to rent, utilities, and other business needs.

Until now the most attractive market is that of sacred art in wood, stone, metal and glass.



There are 16 currently churches where one can admire the works of the artisans including:

- St. Peter and Paul in Easton (MD);
- St. Christopher in Kent Island (MD);
- Our Lady of Mount Carmel in San Diego (CA)



Other Works

There are many activities Operation Mato Grosso started in the Sierra to promote the development of this region. From aid in agriculture to tourism, these different services allow for a decent life for all.

“I stole this time to write to the people who constantly knock at my door asking for food, asking for medicine, asking, asking, asking ...

I am stunned by these continuous assaults. It’s hard to get out of the house, for soon I see someone following me, looking for me, asking for something. I do not know what to do ...

I would run away from all this, because I cannot always say “yes” and on the other hand I well know that I cannot deny them help ... I’m called to give everything away, knowing that tomorrow I will start all over again and I have to give it all away again. The poor inflict me with a continuous pain that I would like to lessen, but it is not up to me.

It is noon. I go to eat with the students of the school, and there is a little old lady here at our doorstep. She does not speak, though many others ask until you get tired.

I go to take a bowl of soup for her...”



from a letter of **Fr. Daniele**
(page 70)

Cheese factories: Several stables were built to breed cows and then produce cheese, mozzarella and other dairy products. In Huachucocha close to the village of San Luis, there is the biggest of our stables with more than 80 cows. About 20 people work in this stable; and after more than 10 years of experience, they can produce excellent products, which are sold to restaurants in different tourist cities of Peru (Huaraz, Lima, among others).



Committee of potato producers: This entity is formed by village volunteers who continuously monitor the crop in their assigned farming group. The project supports the farmers by providing proper technical direction as well as providing them with the materials necessary for the development of potato cultivation including seed, fertilizer, insecticides, and fungicides. The farming group provides and works its plot throughout the season. There are shared tasks so that at the time of the harvest the product is distributed equally among the poor. Currently there are 150 farm groups involved in this project.

Reforestation: is among one of the activities of the Oratory. Young people perform this work during the summer holidays. Each year over a million trees are planted. There are eight nurseries producing 500,000 seedlings per year. To date, more than 1,200 hectares of land have been reforested.



Installation of water connections: to all the houses in the small villages. After the cholera epidemic in 1991, this work received a major boost.

Irrigation channels: to allow for cultivation of large areas that could not otherwise be used.

Repair of bridges and roads: this is a very important job in the High-Andes because roads and bridges deteriorate and impede traffic in the rainy season.

Hydroelectric power plants: Currently there are three hydroelectric powers plants. The power serves the provinces of San Luis and Chacas, where no state electrical services were previously provided.

Construction and renovation of churches is a major function of OMG providing employment to thousands. The biggest project until now is the construction of the Chimbote Cathedral in Nuevo Chimbote.



All the various specializations of the “Familia de Artesanos” participate in the construction of this cathedral. Inside, people can admire their works of brickwork, carpentry, sculpture, decoration, painting, stone carving, stained glass, embossed copper and mosaic. The cathedral was consecrated in August 2007 by then-Secretary of State of the Vatican, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone.

At the inauguration ceremony a chorus of 1,200 young people belonging to the OMG schools performed.



Furnaces and kilns: where bricks and tiles are produced; giving work to several people. Llamellin is home to one of the industrial furnaces. It is at over 9,000 ft. above sea level, the only one of its kind at such an altitude. It can produce 35,000 bricks and 18,000 tiles per week. About 30 people work there, thus able to support their families.

Sawmills and their equipment have been donated by some Italian companies, thus allowing the raw materials to be used in our building projects.

Furniture factory: it welcomes artisans who have come to the densely populated capital city of Lima in search of fortune and haven't found work. They make furniture that is sold in Peru.

Homes mission support: These are supply houses used for purchasing and meeting the needs of the various missions that are far from the cities. They also house the volunteers who are in transit.

Food aid: for school children and the poor. The food comes from Italy and is collected by volunteer groups and shipped to South America in containers.



Distribution of uniforms and school supplies so the divergent economic situations of the children cannot easily be discerned. In addition to schools established by OMG, uniforms and school supplies are also distributed among public school students.

School building is another major function of OMG. Beyond the construction of school buildings, OMG provides furnishings, supplies, uniforms, etc. In addition OMG offers the same supplies to the public school system.



In Yungay there is a school run by OMG volunteers. It's different from the other schools because this one has an agreement with the Ministry of Education, which is responsible for covering part of the school's expenses. A Pre-school program, Pre-K, Kindergarten, Elementary, Middle and High School all serve about 450 students.

The school was born to help the poorest children living in the villages around Yungay. However in recent years, parents who earn salaries as police officers, teachers, workers or employees of City Hall have also enrolled their children in the school because of the high level of education.



This past summer in July of 2015, I was given the privilege to journey to Peru with the mission of Operation Mato Grosso.

In Yungay Peru, I taught English in the public school, run by OMG volunteers, helped with the Oratorio, and went wherever they needed me.

These children were so eager to learn, and it opened my eyes to how I can truly live each moment with purpose through serving others.

I would say following God's call in obedience to Peru was the most freeing decision I ever made; because, I knew it was exactly where the Lord wanted me to be and He truly opened my eyes to true love.



Fr. Hugo told me to listen with my eyes, to truly see the person. This advice freed me from worrying about not understanding the language, but instead allowed me to live in the universal language of love, where communication comes through a smile, a helping hand, and just being present with the individual. On this mission in Peru, I learned the core of charity, a deeper realization of how to give and receive love, by living every moment with love.

***Anna Melka
Baltimore, MD***

Paper Enterprise: established in the coastal city of Chimbote in the summer of 2006, by a chance encounter of three people:

Fr. Samuele, who sought to find an economic activity to combat unemployment afflicting the youth of his parish;

Arturo Ballabio, who for many years has worked in the missions of OMG in South America; and Angelo Moncini, who for 40 years has been an entrepreneur dedicated to the field of stationery.

They drew up plans for a workshop and paper mill in Nuevo Chimbote. The most innovative aspect of this initiative is the mill, which can produce high quality handmade paper able to compete with the most renowned centers of European papermakers. It is managed as a modern company inserted into a charitable social context, the parish.



The technical support of professionals from the Italian towns of Fabriano and Maslianico (two of the oldest and most renowned paper-production centers) has been fundamental. In addition, it has a volunteer team of technicians from Italy that focus on paper production using only cotton fiber to completely minimize environmental impact and deforestation.

The products offered covers the entire range of high quality paper and the resulting variations using Cartotecnica and graphics (Christmas cards, wedding invitations, paper for artistic endeavors, confetti boxes, paper writing, etc.). This is all possible because a Cartotecnica laboratory, a center of graphical instruction, and a school for watermarks have been set up. The result combines creativity, Peruvian chromatic sensibility, and European production techniques.

Nowadays, this paper enterprise ensures the work of a few dozen young people divided into two groups: those adults who work full time who can now support their families, and school-aged children who spend their free time in an environment away from the dangers of the street, while at the same time, contributing to their family's income.

Shelters: at the foot of the snow-covered Peruvian Andes, thousands of volunteers for Operation Mato Grosso over the years have volunteered to build five shelters. The shelters offer relief for mountain climbers and allow for acclimatization prior to climbing to higher altitudes. Profits obtained from the mountain climbers hosted in the shelters provide the necessary funds to buy the materials for building houses for the poor.



The Shelters are located in the Cordillera Blanca (Ancash-Huaraz):

- Peru Shelter - Pisco (15,635 ft.) 80 beds, hot water, and meal service. Two hour walk from Llanganuco, the turquoise glacial lakes in Huascaran National Park.
- Ishinca Shelter (14,272 ft.) 60 beds, hot water, and meal service. Three hour walk from Collon, near to the departmental capital, Huaraz.
- Huascaran Shelter (15,321ft) 60 beds, hot water, meal service. Four hour walk from Musho at the base of Peru's highest mountain; Huascaran South (22,205 ft.) and Huascaran North (21,870 ft.)



- Giordano Longoni Campsite (16,404 ft.) a campsite located in the Quebrada Ishinca, near Ishinca Lagoon; it has 18 beds and has a fireplace, offering accommodation only; it is a 5-hour hike from Collon (2 hours from the Ishinca shelter).
- Contrahierba Shelter (13,452 ft.) located near Yanama, only an hour's walk away; it is the last one built by the Oratory boys. It enjoys spectacular views of the Andean Cordillera and is built within walking distance of a huge archeological complex. Archaeology Faculty (managed by OMG). Headquartered in Tomanga mission, this ceremonial center is gradually being restored over the last three years.



- Mountaineering Center “Renato Casarotto” located in Marcará and inaugurated in 2010, it consists of a hotel, restaurant, and trained guides to organize trekking throughout South America.

There is another ongoing project: to build a new house in Huaraz that will function as a hotel and tourist office.

Everything is possible through the help of the high-mountain guides, who have been trained through the project “Don Bosco in the Andes”. It is an initiative that was created in 1997 for the education and training of young men, as Andean guides.



Conservation of archaeological sites and antiquities: thanks to the young people who have studied this specialization, we have been able to start work to preserve and to value some of the most representative ruins in Conchucos region.

*An ongoing adventures: **Contrahierba** adventure*

There is a place in the Yanama mountainside (one of OMG's missions); where young people, with the help of OMG volunteers, are building an "Inca village". The village is being modeled after a nearby Incan village found in the previously mentioned ruins. Old roads are also being repaired.



Since Fr. Ugo's arrival in Chacas, he has had the idea that tourism could be a good income for the people living in those villages. The Great Inca Road passed right over those mountains.... This road was the most extensive and advanced transportation system in pre-Columbian South America, about 24,800 miles long, connecting all of the Inca Empire.



What is the purpose?

Tourists who will walk along the Inca Road will pass through this new village. Here, they will be able to just visit it or spend a day or more living like the Inca people in the past: living in a house made by stones, working in the field, cultivating the Inca's products, bringing water to the house from the source, all without electricity. In essence, they will be able to step back more than 500 years, before the so-called "civilized world" came to these places with the Spaniards.



Who is working there?

Since the summer of 2014, there have been a lot of young people - Peruvians, Italians and the last summer also a group of North Americans - who are giving their time to this project. Work here runs from May to September, during the dry season.



Every week there are different groups, from different places; from the cities of the coast, from villages of the Andes, from our schools, etc.

Working together, doing something to help the underprivileged is a way to learn from the others, no matter what their social conditions, educational degree or nationality.

Disease and neglect

When Fr. Ugo moved to Peru, he was shocked by the dramatic health situation and vowed to work to improve it. The small mountain health clinics could not do so much, particularly in severe cases. Very often patients died in transit. In the parish he had some medicines that a nurse was giving to the people according to their needs. When he started the school and had students living there, the problem increased.

Fr. Ugo often suffered because he found himself unable to fight against the severity of various situations. He was forced to send students to Huaraz or Lima, without secure means when transportation networks were worse than now. Soon, he was dreaming of building a hospital where the poor could be cared for free and with love.



“Mama Ashu” Hospital, in Chacas

In 1982 a friend of Fr. Ugo came to Chacas to visit. This man was a doctor and he felt moved by the health situation of Chacas.

He went back to Italy with the firm intention of doing everything that was possible to help to build a small hospital.



In 1985 Fr. Ugo signed an agreement with the Peruvian Ministry of Health pledging to restructure the old health center of Chacas and to provide an Italian volunteer doctor. In that year the first couple of volunteers came to the center. They were a doctor and a nurse who brought a full container of medicines and supplies to equip the health center. Since then many Italian doctors and nurses have volunteered in Chacas taking turns in order to cover the needs of the hospital.

Many of them, after returning to Italy have joined support groups. Their goal is to provide materials, medicines and funds to support the hospital.

The hospital works thanks to:

- an agreement between Operation Mato Grosso and the Peruvian Ministry of Health, which is responsible for paying the salaries of hired Peruvian staff.
- volunteer Italian doctors and nurses
- Supporting groups, previously mentioned, that work to send medicines, equipment, materials and money.



The number of patients grows daily. They have full confidence in the personnel of the hospital. Every day many patients come from remote areas, certain to find relief from their illness.

People know that their concerns will be taken seriously, in order to find a solution. If their cases require sending them to Lima or Huaraz the hospital will assist them. They also know that the hospital of Chacas will never deny aid to the poor, and the only payment required is according to their means.



The construction of the hospital, began in 1989, and was completed in October 1994. Currently, the hospital, which is located 10,990 ft. above sea level, is the only medical presence in the Andean province of Asuncion (Ancash). It has 60 in-patient beds, outpatient services, an emergency room, radiology, laboratories, delivery room, two operating rooms, three-ultrasound instruments, a pharmacy and a dental clinic.

“Papà Carletto” Hospital in Yanama (Peru)

Built after seeing the suffering of many ill residents -- children, mothers, and elderly -- living in the area.

“Claudio Benati” Hospital in Zumbahua (Ecuador)

Located in Ecuador and in operation since 1992, it belongs to OMG and has an agreement with the Ecuadorian government. As in the Chacas hospital, here there are Italian and US volunteer doctors working.

Escoma Hospital (Bolivia)

Also in this Bolivian town a large hospital in the style of others has been built.

House “Virgen of Guadalupe” in Lima

Sometimes given its remoteness, the Chacas hospital cannot cure patients, and complicated cases need more attention in the capital, Lima. Hospitality is provided not only to the patients but also to any family members. In addition, volunteers accompany patients to the city hospital.



Health clinics

In places far from hospitals, OMG has opened health centers where volunteer nurses or doctors take care of patients. In almost all missions there are ambulances for transporting patients to the hospitals.



House “Saint Theresa” in Pomallucay

The “Santa Teresita” house began as a special structure that could accommodate the abandoned elderly and the terminally ill. It is currently home to more than thirty elderly who receive necessary medical attention and are accompanied with love and dedication for the last years of their life. Also, this house welcomes abandoned children and the seriously ill. Other volunteers have opened similar houses in other missions.



House for Disabled Children “S. Danielito” in San Luis

In 1996 Fr. Daniele hosted Eloy, a nine-year-old boy who suffered from quadriplegia. He found Eloy in a very poor house, crawling on the floor because he couldn't walk. When Fr. Daniele was assassinated in March of 1997, other OMG volunteers thought to accommodate other disabled children.

Currently there are two houses with 18 children in residence aimed at providing enriching experiences: occupational activities, work in the garden and with animals, physical therapy, music therapy and educational activities.

This labor of charity is challenging, not only because of the difficulty posed by the need for adequate staff training, but also because of the lack of immediate access to infrastructure support and the fragility of the children's health.



House for orphans

Many children in Peru live in difficult conditions. Some are orphans or street children; others are the sons and daughters of migrant farm workers, remaining in the city, looking for jobs that they may never find. Others are young workers, or children with disabilities. Not all children in need live within the cities, many also live in the Andes Mountains. These children should receive care, protection, special attention, and love.

Father Ugo noticed this need, and decided to do something for the children. He began as a family, with some children in Yanama, but then the family became larger, and other homes opened in Tomanga and Llamellin.

OMG currently has 12 orphanages, located in the four countries where it is present.

The children go to the town's school, but are guided by the teachers of another OMG program called ISPEC. Once they have completed elementary school, the children are admitted into OMG workshops and continue their education.

In Nana, near Lima, a house has opened for orphaned and abandoned children, now numbering 20.

The Ministry of Justice of Peru and the Technical Secretariat for Adoptions has officially recognized this house by allowing children to be adopted or affiliated through it.



“To say that volunteering at the Operation Mato Grosso Orphanage in Yanama and then the Hogar Osma in Nana for four consecutive summers changed my life would be an understatement. The children at both orphanages taught me the true meaning of gratitude and how to find happiness despite hardships. They were full of hope and love, due in large part to their caregivers who did everything they could to make each and every one of them feel special and appreciated. Indeed, the staff and the children were a family in every sense of the word, a dynamic that was inspiring to see. I not only learned so much from the staff and children on how to better myself as a person, but also formed unbreakable bonds with them that I will cherish for the rest of my life. It was an honor and a privilege to meet such incredible human beings and I could not be happier that I chose to volunteer with Operation Mato Grosso.”

Yael Eskenazi
California, USA

The spiritual path of the work

“... here in Latin America which is constantly and deeply Christian, it is even more important to be with the people, even if you are not religious, you must have a deep respect for their religion.”

“Here in Latin America it is nice to be a priest because you are on the side of the poor and you are their voice”

Fr. Remo



Through his work with the people, Father Ugo soon observed their pious and devout nature. To further nurture their souls, Father Ugo started teaching catechism to the campesinos. Additionally, he began to rebuild churches, shrines, and cathedrals so that they could follow their reverent traditions.

Consequently, the parish quickly became the center and heart of each mission.

Pomallucay Sanctuary

Peruvian tradition tells us that the image of Christ of Pomallucay was brought to Peru, from Spain, four hundred years ago. Upon the icon's arrival, everyone wanted to build a special chapel where it would reside. Within Pomallucay, was a lagoon full of reeds and there, Christ began appearing every day. To the people, these appearances were a sign from God indicating the chapel's location and this is exactly where the chapel stands today. Its construction was completed in 1992 by the teamwork and dedication of OMG volunteers and hundreds of Peruvian workers.



Pomallucay seminary

Over the years, through the educational work in the oratories, workshops and schools, and Father Ugo's inspiring example, some young men made the decision to become priests.



In 1992 the construction of a seminary started near the Pomallucay sanctuary. It started with a group of 12 boys.

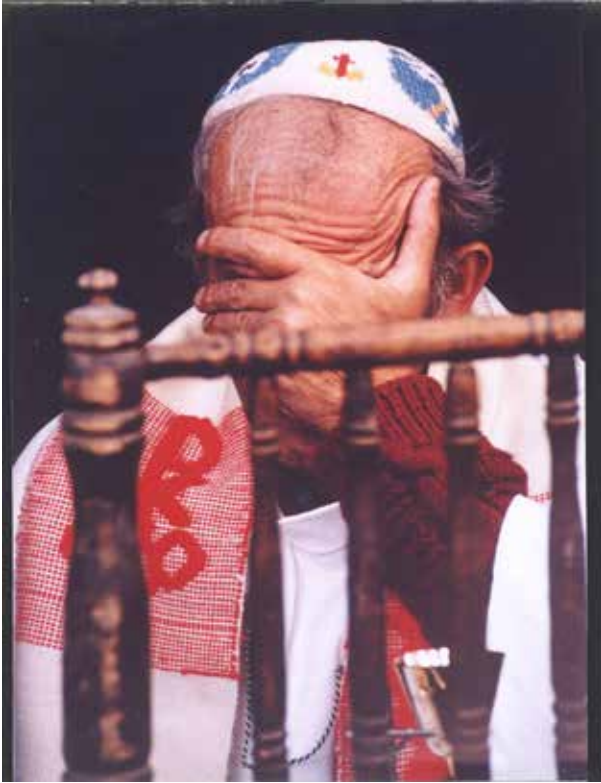
Today in the seminary there are Peruvians, Ecuadorians, Brazilians, Bolivians and Italians studying for the priesthood. When the young people finish their studies in Pomallucay, they become diocesan priests and today are serving in several South American countries, Italy and US. The road to the priesthood is a free and conscious choice, born solely by the desire to give one's own life to others.



Nazareth House

Young women also wanted to give their lives to God and to serve others. They formed a group of religious sisters and the “Nazareth House” was built for their purposes. The “hermanas campesinas” dedicate their lives to helping the poorest people cultivate their land, assisting and enabling the sick to remain at home, and spending part of the day in prayer.





I would like to tell you all a parable that might help you understand how I feel.

“A great lord has taken a large number of orphans into his beautiful palace. It is getting late. It is today. All the children are playing outside in the park: some play war, others play love, others play with money, some waste time, and others tell jokes... It is almost time for dinner. I called to three friends: ‘Let us go help father prepare dinner.’

I enter the house and look for father, but he is nowhere to be found. I run down, telling the others:

‘Father is not there!’

They replied: ‘Leave us alone, let us play.’

I could not be at peace. A man passed by and said: ‘I know where your father is, come, follow me...’ I gathered some friends and went back to where the man was, but he was no longer there, he had left swiftly. I felt such despair...but then I looked more and realized the guy had left two footprints in the ground. In one ‘Truth’ was written and in the other ‘Goodness’. So I follow these words and I know God will have compassion for me because I am a little boy. He will come out like a miracle, to console me.”

Father Ugo

Martyrs of Charity

...to remember all the people who have given of themselves and their lives to work in the OMG missions. And in a special way, we remember those whose lives have been ruthlessly taken for defending the path of Charity.



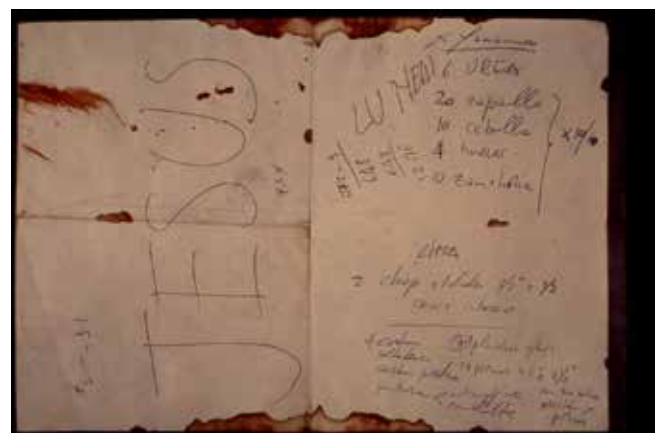


Giulio Rocca was born on March 30, 1962 in Isolaccia, a small town in northern of Italy. He lived in Jangas, Peru, as an OMG volunteer responsible for procurement of all the supplies needed for the missions of that region.

At 10pm, on the night of October 1, 1992, five armed men entered the Jangas mission. They accused OMG's works of charity of "numbing people's consciousness" and hindering their attempt to replace what it saw as bourgeois democracy with "New Democracy".

The men belonged to "Sendero Luminoso" (Shining Path), a Maoist guerrilla insurgent organization in Peru from 1980. They believed that by establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat, inducing cultural revolution, and eventually sparking world revolution, they could arrive at pure communism.

The terrorists forced Giulio to accompany them. Not far from the house, he was murdered by three gunshots to his head. He did not believe in the future of the terrorist project; his heart was convinced of the truth: charity, kindness and personal conversion.



Letter written by Giulio to Mons. José Ramón Gurruchaga, Bishop of Huaraz three days before his death.

Jangas,
September 27th, 1992

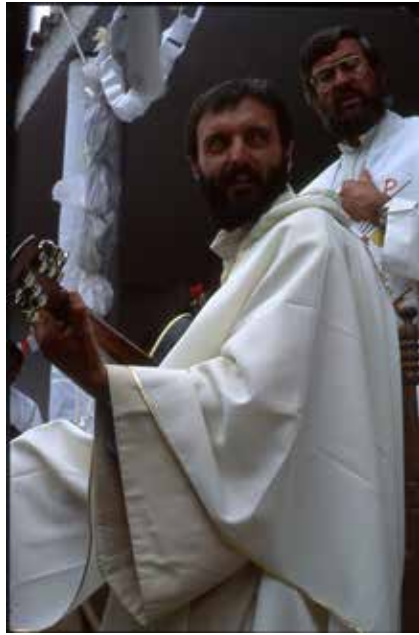
“... the fact that I found Operation Mato Grosso and in it, many good friends is for me a stroke of luck. I started working with an OMG group without realizing it, when I was 16 years old. During the early years I was very interested in working for the poor and in the friendship that I have had with many other young people. Following this path I also discovered other values, which are now fundamental to me, like work, sacrifice, the search for the true meaning of the life, and in the last year, religious values.

I live with the poor every day and I feel called to renew the promise that I made to help them. At 30 years old it seems that nothing is worth more than following Jesus.

In the last days I was in a very important retreat, because everyone there had the same desire of a priestly vocation. I gave my obedience to Fr. Ugo.

For me, I feel like I belong to your diocese and I want to continue under your leadership, Monsignor, so one day, if it is God's will, I could be a priest in the Diocese of Huaraz...”





Daniele Badiali was born on March 3, 1962 in Faenza, Italy. In 1977, when Daniele was 15 years old, he was active in an OMG work program. In 1984, he decided to go to Chacas, Peru, where he stayed for two years assisting the students of one of the schools. During that period, Daniele was greatly impressed by Father Ugo's life and work. Before returning to Italy, Daniele asked him for advice. "What should I do with my life?" Fr. Ugo replied, "... you could be a good priest."

Upon his return, Daniele completed five years in the seminary of Bologna, Italy. Following his ordination as a priest, Fr. Daniele was assigned to the parish of San Luis, in Peru. There, Father Daniele walked from village to village tirelessly taking care of those in need as he had learned by watching Fr. Ugo's life. Fr. Daniele strongly believed that the way to meet God was not through the mind, but through one's heart with the intent to love others. The people of Fr. Daniele's parish experienced his love and he, in turn, was much loved by them.

During the night of March 16, 1997, Fr. Daniele, accompanied by some volunteers, headed home after celebrating Mass in one of the villages. While the group was driving, a masked man forced their car to stop and demanded a hostage for ransom money. An Italian volunteer was ready to go as a hostage, but Fr. Daniele advanced and said, "You stay, I go."

Two days later, on March 18th, Fr. Daniele's body was found beneath a pile of stones in Acorma, a location within his parish. His hands had been tied and he had been killed by a gunshot wound in his neck.



Letter written by Fr. Daniele to Fr. Ugo after Giulio's death.

October 11th, 1992

“In my heart, Giulio's death stands as a defining moment, one that I cannot forget for as long as I live.

This path leads to martyrdom, the highest expression of Christian life.

In the Catholic Church, martyrs have always been venerated with a special devotion.

Giulio died a martyr; he did not choose it, the circumstance led him to die a violent death similar to the deaths of many martyrs. Now the OMG path is clear to me: losing our lives to martyrdom. All that scares me, but at the same time I feel a great peace within me: it is not us who choose the way, everything is a given. For this I feel that I cannot stop and do not want to lie to anyone ... we are called to choose: either with God or with a world that refuses eternal life, sacrifice and love. Courage everyone, do not lose heart. We have now a holy protector who will help us.”



“What can I say to the children to inspire them?”

They were abandoned and living a life in extreme poverty as orphans. So I say to them: ‘If you cry for yourself, you will not resolve anything. There is always someone less fortunate than you. Look at those big muscles you have! Roll up your sleeves child and get to work! Afterwards, with your work, you will be able to help those who are less fortunate, those who live here, your neighbors.’

Building shelters and helping earthquake victims rebuild their homes has been very successful. We should never let people think that there is no one behind them who needs help just as much as they do, if not more. Someone who is wealthy wants to keep climbing higher and higher, getting wealthier and wealthier.

But if you say to them: ‘Look there are people who are less fortunate than you,’ he or she will continue climbing with one hand, and lend out his other hand to help those in need.”

Father Ugo

Recent history: Operazione Mato Grosso begins among Peruvian young people

In the first months of 2015 many young people from the high Andes villages, from high school and from colleges in Lima traveled to Chimbote to spend part of their vacation as volunteers to build five kindergartens. Some 1800 volunteers took part. Some stayed a week; others stayed a month or their entire vacation.



Chimbote is a city on the northern coast of Peru. In the last 20 years it has seen unusual development due to massive migration of the rural population.



Currently, 60,000 people live in desert areas in almost total absence of all the basic services such as potable water, electricity, roads, sewers and public schools. The most dramatic situation is definitely that of pre-school children, who are generally unsupervised.

Last year, with the wish to help those children, Fr. Ugo turned to the young Peruvian people the proposal to build five kindergartens.

Today, these schools welcome 450 children aged three to five years old who otherwise would have been on the street all day long with nobody who cared for them.

This project is ongoing. Peruvian volunteers are working to raise money to build a school for young people aged 14 and 18 years old. After that they will begin to build houses for the residents, an entirely new city, a City of Friendship as Fr. Ugo calls it.

Thus the Father Ugo' biggest dream ever is becoming reality.

Since his arrival in Peru, in 1976, his work was not just to combat poverty, to solve community health problems and defeat the other poverty-related issues. From the beginning, he has always had the desire that the “poor” would understand why thousands and thousands of volunteers have come to Peru, leaving their comfortable life of the so-called ““first world””, civilized world, and come to help the needy. He always tried to help them look at the needs of others: “there is always someone poorer than you.”



What counts in life is not to become the richest, the most famous or the most powerful, but trying to help those who are poorer than you, discovering in this path a new world where the economy does not dominate life, in a few words. ...Doing Charity...



Operazione Mato Grosso was born as a movement of people who want to do something to help the needy. During the years, its volunteers have found an alternative way to live their lives.

It does not have written rules, nor a statute nor applications to fill out. All people who join bring their contribution; something of their own, history, experience, roots ... People get sincere friendship, dreaming together that the life can be unique and amazing.

Over the years since this adventure began, several associations were born to support the work done by volunteers (to allow producing and selling products, high mountain guides, etc.), Fr. Ugo has maintained an interest in keeping it in the hands of the young people.

When interviewers ask him: “Do you fear that once you are gone, Operation Mato Grosso will all disappear?”

He used to reply:

“Everything started off as an adventure, a marvelous adventure. Since 1967 we have been running things without predefined rules and without an organized central government. I repeat it often: when I am no longer here, you will have to figure things out on your own, dealing with problems every now and then.

Ask God for guidance and he will take care of everything.

It is a natural process. Working to help others in need, God is present in every moment, and he becomes a thirst in you to always get closer, to know him through your hard work and in giving of yourself.”



This is why he never wanted to form an organization recognized by the State or a congregation inside of the Catholic Church.

“OMG was born by young people and must be in their hands. They must feel free to do, undo, change things forever.... this is the OMG’s spirit. It will keep alive in the hearts of the people.”



Leaving the last page blank means that the history is not finished but it is still ongoing... maybe you will want to become part of that.

Contact and join in the Charity work

“Artesanos Don Bosco”

828 S. Charles Street

BALTIMORE, MD 21230

410 563 4577 410 236 0271

www.artesanosdonbosco.com

info@artesanosdonbosco.com

Italy

“Associazione Don Bosco 3A”

Via Fratelli Capponi

25068 Sarezzo, BS

0039 030 802465

info@donbosco3a.it

Brazil

Goaina – Av. Joao Leite n. 21 Chacara N.S. Auxiliadora 74672-020

(014) 6232647298

omg@uol.com.it

Ecuador

Casa de Quito

0059 312290620

omgqui@interactive.net

Bolivia

Casa de Cochabamba

Av. D’Orbgny, 1451

0059 144140724

cbba@omgbolivia.org

Peru

Casa Don Bosco

Av. Alejandro Tirado, 158 Santa Beatriz – Lima 1

0051 14710515

omglima@omgperu.com

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank all the people who contributed to making this book possible:

Testimonies

Nicholas Bruce, Father Roger Brito, Leyla and Yael Eskenazi, Elaine Smith and Anna Melka.

Translations

Dr. Thomas Ward and his students at Loyola University Maryland

Edits

Nicholas Bruce and Angela Ferioli

Final reading and correction

Dr. Thomas Ward

and to all the volunteers who have participated in this adventure of Charity since its beginning. And to those who still participate.

Baltimore, March, 28th, 2016



The number of people, friends or strangers who come to visit our missions here is always growing. Many times they come to help. Looking at the work we do is not sufficient to get to know us. It is the spirit that moves us to get rid of the errors and defects that tarnish the ideal. Your help is needed to continue down this path; abandoning it would be to remove God from our lives.

My greetings, on behalf of the OMG people, are sincere and heartfelt.

Yours truly,
Father Ugo de Censi