

Dear Applicant to our Mission in the Dominican Republic:

Greetings from Santo Domingo! We are Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus who coordinate this missionary program, and we'd like to explain what it entails. Take your time reading this – and re-read it as often as you need to, so that its many points seep in! How we would like to have a relaxed conversation with you, but since that's not possible at this moment, please consider this epistle as our part of the conversation!

1) First of all, as the name indicates, this is truly a missionary program for lay persons who wish to share in the mission of Christ – and in the mission of our religious congregation which is “to help others believe and understand that God acts in them and in our world and to rejoice in God's presence.” Does that resonate with your desires?

2) To keep alive and cultivate this faith dimension (which, when the going gets rough, is sometimes our only light and strength!), we come together to pray. One night a week we have a spiritual “review of the week” among ourselves, when each one shares how God has been present (or seemingly absent!) to her during the week, what graces/gifts and/or difficulties there have been, etc. On another night the person leading the prayer may use suggestions from the RA Prayerbook or from another source, Biblical or otherwise, as motivation for a quiet time for reflection and meditation or sharing. These times of reflection and sharing are not complicated and are generally prepared by the volunteers according to their particular taste and preferences. Once a week we host a time of reflection and prayer for any neighbors who wish to join us, which our volunteers may or may not attend. Also, at least two weekend spiritual retreats per year help fortify the spiritual aspect of our missionary effort.

3) We are associated with *Fe y Alegría* (*Faith and Joy*), an organization sponsored by the Jesuits which has schools for poor children throughout the DR and many other nations of Latin America. (Our duplex house belongs to *Fe y Alegría*.) Ever since we began our work here in 1995, we have helped out in various areas: working in the nearby *Fe y Alegría* School as teachers, teachers' aides and “librarians”; teaching in a weekly literacy program for adults and youth; going once a week to a Haitian worker camp (batey) to help out in educational efforts there. (There are tens of thousands of Haitians in the DR.)

4) In 1998 *Fe y Alegría* asked us to concentrate our efforts in the batey, for it is well known here that the Haitians are the poorest of the poor in the DR, victims of racism and exploitation. The volunteers from the RA Program devote their time to helping the batey children, who are enrolled in first or second grade in the local public school (and most of whom speak Creole as well as Spanish) in a structured setting where we teach and reinforce the basics of Math, Reading, Writing, etc. using many materials and approaches from the Montessori method. We also tutor and offer “homework help” to older students. (For your information, we now have a primary health care center in the batey too, but the RA volunteers concentrate their efforts in the educational aspect of our batey program.)

5) The day for arriving here to begin your missionary program would be the Friday after Labor Day in September; departure would be on or after the 15th of June. For those who are going home for Christmas, our last day of work here is Dec. 22, so people can travel on Dec. 23. People should return by January 7. For your information, we do not teach during Holy Week, but go back to work on the Tuesday after Easter.

6) **Important! Missioners must be able to communicate in Spanish!** You must take responsibility for this, studying in the USA or here in the DR (before our program begins). If you choose to take a short 2- week refresher course here in the DR, the cost is shared equally among the missioner herself, the Response-Ability Office, and our own DR funds. The RA Office can give you more information. (Creole is not necessary, but if you have already studied Haitian Creole, great!; if not, concentrate on Spanish!)

7) We share all community tasks, each one taking her turn shopping, cooking and cleaning. Since the water is not on continuously, we all pitch in when it is turned on, filling pails and buckets (so as to have a reserve supply for when it is turned off again!). Our meals are simple; in our neighborhood we can buy eggs, bread, cheese, ham, canned tuna, rice, beans, noodles, potatoes, lentils; there are quite a few fresh veggies available such as carrots, tomatoes, green peppers, eggplant, squash, cabbage, onions, garlic, plus others peculiar to this tropical climate (yucca, plantain, yams...). Fruits include pineapple, papaya, oranges, bananas, mangoes, tangerines, grapefruit, lemons, melons, etc. In larger supermarkets we can buy all kinds of meat and poultry. All of us usually start out with good ol' American recipes, adjusting them to whatever is available; some missioners have then branched out and have become quite expert in Dominican specialties!

8) What are some of the difficulties we have experienced?

- a) The heat is tropical and during some months can sap one's energy.
- b) Extreme caution is needed with regard to water, fruits and vegetables, meat and fish. (We need to disinfect all vegetables and fruit!).
- c) Every Dominican home, including ours, is host to flies, ants, mosquitoes, cockroaches, spiders (and, once in a great while, tarantulas!), toads, lizards – and others of God's creatures!
- d) As of this writing, the situation regarding electricity has improved, but there are still power outages frequently, affecting all electrical equipment, including fans!. Flashlights and extra batteries are a necessity, and our several kerosene lamps are still very much a part of our lives.
- e) The water problem was alluded to above; further, we do not have hot water.
- f) Up to now, each one has had her own small room (with one or two beds, small desk and chair, mosquito netting, fan, small closet with two small drawers or shelves). But we have had to double up when visitors come, and would have to do so on a regular basis if we had more missioners than bedrooms. Think about how you feel about that....
- g) Since one of the purposes of this program is to experience life a bit more from the viewpoint of the poor (although compared to our neighbors we lack for nothing!), we do quite a bit of washing our clothes by hand - and try to put up cheerfully with the sudden loss of electricity and water. The people on our street are quite used to these aspects of life here. It's good for you to know that we do have a small washing machine. Heaven has arrived when both the electricity and the water are functioning at the same time! If not, as long as there is electricity, one can use the machine, using the water which we store in large tanks.
- h) Public transportation here is unique – and sometimes stressful. One has to adapt to very crowded public cars and busses, with drivers who are not always careful.
- i) The noise level (music blaring simultaneously from various houses, loud greetings and friendly conversations shouted to and fro) is quite high on our street, sometimes late at night and/or before dawn. There is loud early morning revving of cars and motorcycles – plus the barking of dogs, meowing of cats and the crowing of roosters! **Earplugs help!!**
- j) Many Dominican men are fascinated by girls from the USA (especially if they are white), considering them much more beautiful than their (truly beautiful) Dominican counterparts. (Racism and obsession with sex are realities that will become increasingly apparent to you during the year.) You will be called after, whistled at, stared at, spoken to quite suggestively or offensively, proposed to by all sorts of men, married or otherwise. All this requires of you a maturity and level-headedness beyond your years. If you seem to lead them on, you'll likely be sorry. You might go to a bar or discotheque alone in the States, but not here!

9) What are some lessons we have learned?

a) Continuing the topic of male-female relationships, you should know that there **are** opportunities for friendship and fun; you will meet young people whom you can safely go out with! We encourage you to socialize in a group setting; experience has shown us that entering into an exclusive kind of romantic relationship distracts the missionary from her goal and can be detrimental to community life. Think about this...

b) We “Americans” can be paternalistic and can create dependencies on ourselves without intending to. Giving things away to people (candy, pencils, crayons, money, etc.) causes them to love us (great for the ego!), but puts us in the superior position of those who have, while it keeps them in the inferior position of those who have not. We do not want the image of “Lady Bountiful” or cultivate dependency on us.

c) Informal attire acceptable in the USA for going into town or to Church is often seen as inappropriate here. We have been criticized and told, for example, that shorts are OK for around the house, but are not appropriate for going out. To the batey we wear slacks and special T-shirts (5 of which are provided for you with the Fe y Alegría insignia). Although USA styles are seen more and more here, we ask our young women to dress modestly and professionally, remembering that you are seen as missionaries and represent a religious group (our religious order!).

d) Experience has shown that to do our kind of missionary work and live in a faith-based community, one must enjoy good physical and psychological health, have normal energy levels, and be without unusual dietary needs that cannot be met here.

e) You will definitely go through a period of adjustment, the length of which varies from person to person; be patient with yourself and don’t waste time worrying about how things will be: we’ll be here to help you with all that is new and unfamiliar, and you’ll learn by doing – one day at a time! We have e-mail which is a great help!

f) One of the greatest truths that we are still learning is that we are here to “walk with the people”, to do things their way and not to impose on them our (supposedly) superior way. The Latin Americans put people and personal values over efficiency – and this can be both inspiring – and frustrating! The Dominicans suffer from a collective inferiority complex and therefore tend to defer to an American or other foreigner (except a Haitian!) as knowing much more than they do. We want them to see that we are here to humbly learn and work with them, and that we have not come with solutions to their many problems. This applies to a much greater degree to the Haitians.

Thank you for taking the time necessary to read this as it needs to be read. If you decide to apply to this missionary “adventure”, please return the enclosed response form (along with the other parts of the application packet) to the Response-Ability Office. Your response to each point need not be long; it can be as brief as “That’s fine”, “OK”, or “That would be difficult for me” – or whatever response expresses your honest reaction.

Finally, be assured of our prayers as you discern what your next step should be and where God is leading you. If you’ve gotten this far through all this verbiage, you have already shown something special about yourself!

Affectionately yours in Christ,
Sister Ann-Joyce Peters, SHCJ

Sister Mary Alice Minogue, SHCJ

Name:_____ **Response Form (Your part of the “conversation”!)**

(Please continue any answers you wish on the reverse side.)

1. Does this description (#1 of the letter) resonate with your desires? _____

2. How do you feel about Community Prayer and reflection? _____

3. Does this Paragraph (# 3) give you an adequate idea of our past activities? _____

4. How do these activities (#4) seem to you? Are you prepared to try your hand at teaching?

5. Comments about arrival and departure dates? _____

6. How is your Spanish? Can you make yourself understood? _____

7. How are you about sharing all these community duties? Can you cook? _____

8. Difficulties:

a) tropical heat: _____

b) extreme care about food: _____

c) insects, spiders, toads, lizards, etc.!! _____

d) frequent electricity outages: _____

e) water shut-offs; no hot water: _____

f) possibly sharing a room: _____

g) washing clothes by hand: _____

h) public transportation: _____

i) noise level: _____

j) Macho Dominican men: _____

Name: _____**Response form, continued**

9. Lessons we have learned:

a) Latin lovers: _____
_____b) Our American paternalism: _____
_____c) A modest “dress code” : _____

d) How is your physical health? _____

...your psychological health? _____

...your energy level? _____

Any eating requirements? _____

e) How do you see yourself adjusting? Easily? With difficulty? _____
_____e) How do you feel about “walking with” and “learning from” the people? _____
_____Anything else you'd like to say to us? _____

Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts with us. If God means you to participate in this lay mission, we can assure you that it will be an experience that will change your life forever! It is a great privilege to serve the poor and to live life more as they do. Our values slowly are transformed, our interests change and we see how true are the words of Christ: “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God...and all the rest will be added unto you.”

Useful Information for those accepted in the Dominican Republic Mission

We have consulted with present and past missionaries about what would be helpful for you to know as you make your preparations. We hope that the points included here clear up some of your doubts and questions; please know that you are welcome to e-mail us about any uncertainties you may still have, or phone us. Here's how you can reach us – and how you can be reached once you get here:

Sister Ann-Joyce Peters (or Sister Mary Alice Minogue or Sister Kathleen King)

e-mail: annjoycep@yahoo.com; telephone: (809) 548-9553

Address for ordinary mail: Escuela Fe y Alegría

Los Alcarrizos II, Santo Domingo

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Now on to some other items:

1. The Dominican Republic has no health requirements regarding shots that you must receive. Most experts in tropical diseases suggest you get shots for DTP, measles, typhoid, hepatitis A and B, and that you purchase pills to prevent malaria. You must begin to take the malaria pills about 4 weeks before you come here. Purchase what you will need in the USA and for an additional few weeks. We have found that, since the malaria pills must be taken every week during your stay here, if you are advised to take them it is more economical for you to buy them here; what they sell here is Aralen. They cost between 80 -90 cents for two pills of 250 grams each, about \$3.60 for 4 weeks, and about \$36 for a 10-month supply. See how that compares with what you'd pay in the USA. (The doctors usually prescribe 1 pill weekly of 500 grams; here they seem to have pills with only 250 grams, so that's why we double the dosage.) **Do** check with your own doctor (as some doctors say that malaria pills are **not** necessary for this part of the Dominican Republic) or with the CDC website: www.cdc.gov

2. Buy a roundtrip ticket, remembering that we begin the Friday after Labor Day and end around June 15. You do not need a visa to get into the Dominican Republic, just your passport. Upon arriving at the airport you must pay \$10 for what they call here a "tourist visa," which is valid for several months; about a week before leaving the country, one goes to a Government building to pay for any extra months that the tourist visa has not covered (usually the equivalent of \$15 or \$16), and on the day of your departure all must pay an airport tax of \$10 - \$20 at the airport (if your airline has not already included that in your ticket.) It's good to have these small amounts of money set aside and ready!

3. Speaking of money, all your living expenses ("room and board") are paid for by the Society of the Holy Child Jesus; in addition, you will receive a small monthly allowance (about \$90 – which does go farther here than in the USA!) to pay for personal items (shampoo, etc.), recreation (it costs between \$ 5 -\$6 to go to the movies), personal telephone calls, postage, etc..... There are telephone cards that can be easily purchased here for phoning the USA – or anywhere; it's not necessary that you bring them from the States. Telephone cards bought in the States are often not able to be used here, despite what you are told! You'll find the cards from here are fine! One last point about money: bring some USA money and USA stamps (because when people here travel to the States, we can ask them to take our letters -all stamped). By the way, you can usually exchange your dollars for pesos here in the house if it is not a huge amount! There are atm machines around also!

4. Clothing: Polyesters and synthetics are hot, so bring blends with cotton: loose-fitting, comfortable clothes which (as you will discover!) do not have to match! Clothes take a beating here - because of walking on dirt roads, scrubbing clothes by hand (although we do have a washing machine!), and drying them in the hot sun. So bring durable clothes, but ones that you won't mind if some mishaps occur.

a) plenty of cotton underwear;

b) at least 3 or 4 pairs of light-weight slacks for going to the batey; jeans are fine;

c) shorts for around the house; bathing suit(s), etc. for the great beaches here! (We have a supply of beach towels.)

d) 2 or more skirts; at least one nice outfit (in case you are invited to a wedding, etc.);

e) for your work in the batey, we will supply you with 5 light-weight T-shirts, with our insignia on them, which is the closest thing to a uniform that we have! We find it good to get them a size larger than you really need (more air circulation!). During the Orientation you'll be able to choose your colors and give us your size. For other occasions, when you are not in your "school attire", sleeveless blouses are fine. The bottom line is that it's better to dress more modestly than not.

f) a hat or sun-visor, to protect you from the sun.

5. Shoes:

a) flip-flops for around the house;

b) sturdy shoes for walking over dirt roads (which also may have pebbles, garbage, puddles, etc.);

c) sturdy walking sandals with rubber soles.

d) dancing shoes!

6) Other items:

a) Bible and notebook for journaling;

b) Toiletries: there are a variety of shampoos, soaps, hairsprays, deodorants, etc. available here, plus shampoo-conditioner combinations; sanitary napkins are sold everywhere, but **tampons are scarce and expensive. Bring a supply for ten months!**

c) Sunglasses, sunblock (needed daily), insect repellent, antibacterial hand gel, "wet-ones" for washing hands where there's no water, a plastic soap dish for your room, a supply of contact solution for contact lenses to last your whole time here; if you have an extra pair of glasses, bring them!

d) Your own favorite medicines that you take for headache, cold, cramps, etc.

e) Bring your own stationery supplies for your personal use (pens, corrector fluid, scotch tape, stapler, notebooks or pads, etc.), sewing supplies, umbrella, heavy duty flashlight and lots of extra batteries, battery-operated or wind-up alarm clock, small battery/AC radio/ tape or CD player or walkman (electrical outlets here are the same as in the USA). There is a computer for your use, but you may bring your laptop if you wish.

f) We have here for you sheets and towels; you may bring another set if you wish (twin-bed size).

We also have hangers, but you may want to bring a multiple-skirt-hanger to save room in our small closets. We have a desk lamp for you as well.

We hope this helps! Remember: do not hesitate to contact us!