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# **SAMARITAN WORLD**

News for the friends of International Samaritan



## **Thank You, Fr. Vettese**

*As he retires from International Samaritan,  
a look back at 25 years of service*





## “Why doesn’t someone do something?”

*How often have you heard someone say that?*

*How often have you said it?*

When we say this, we usually think we are too busy with our jobs or families to be the ones to act. Fr. Don Vettese is a prime example of someone who, despite being very busy, still managed to do something.

In the early 1990s, Fr. Vettese was carrying out his assignment, running St. John’s Jesuit High School and Academy. During that time, he traveled to Guatemala City with a group of students. There, in the presence of a bleeding child surrounded by trash and stench, Fr. Vettese connected with the Divine in a profound way—what he calls “conversion.” Fr. Vettese heard the answer to his prayer: it was the young high school students from Toledo, Ohio, asking the same question, “Can’t we do something?”

Fr. Vettese emailed the mayor of Guatemala City asking whether there was something he could do for the poor people scavenging for a living in the city’s dump. The mayor was planning to build homes for those people, but he didn’t have the money, so Fr. Vettese offered to fundraise it. Colonia San Juan was built, and the mission of a lifetime was begun.



Guatemala City, 2005  
Fr. Vettese at the Santa Clara Nursery



## The Origin of Central American Ministries

For Fr. Vettese, the call was undeniable, unavoidable. In the face of such massive need, despite being busy, he took the first step and did something. One thing led to another, and over 25 years nurseries, medical clinics, housing, elementary and secondary schools, skills training, micro loans, and scholarships helped a generation of good people to no longer exist on garbage. They deserved better, and they made their lives better with help from Central American Ministries.

## Becoming International Samaritan

Eventually, Fr. Vettese took his Jesuit-supported mission beyond Central America to include Africa. To reflect its expansion, it became International Samaritan, named after the parable about the outsider who stopped to do something to help. Fr. Vettese explained, "The story of the Good Samaritan is the best example of our mission and vision. That is why I selected the name. The meaning of the mission is in the name, and the story. It is not about geography, or about doing a food program or school; it is about doing anything we can anywhere for those in greatest need." Fr. Vettese worked for 25 years to help people all across the globe. Though he is retiring from International Samaritan, the work is not finished. Now he turns it over to his successors, who will be challenged to do *something* every day.



Guatemala City, 1996, Alvaro: Photo taken by Fr. Vettese; featured in the Toledo Blade

# Building Programs Across the Globe

### GUATEMALA

Santa Clara Nursery  
Francisco Coll School  
Santa Maria Basico School  
Step by Step Scholarship Program  
Volunteer Service Immersion Programs  
Housing Programs  
Mecidal Missions

### JAMAICA

Volunteer Service Immersion Programs

### EL SALVADOR

Precious Angels Nursery

### HONDURAS

Step by Step Scholarship Program  
Richard Flascck Medical Center  
Nursery San Ignacio Loyola  
School Escuela RR.MM.

### PANAMA

Microloan Program

### NICARAGUA

Reina Sofia School  
Jose Artigas Center of Education  
Colegio Nueva Vida  
House Construction  
San Francisco de Asisi School  
Step by Step Scholarship Program  
Volunteer Service Immersion Programs  
Medical Missions

### PARAGUAY

Housing Projects  
Volunteer Service Immersion Programs

### EGYPT

Home Improvement Program

### ETHIOPIA

Step by Step Scholarship Program

### HAITI

Food Program



## Dear Friends,

More than 25 years ago, I accepted the call to serve the people living in Guatemala City dump.

What happened then touched my heart and soul more than anything before or after. Conversion experiences often help us define who we are and where we go. With the encouragement of a group of high school students, I made a commitment to do something to alleviate the profound suffering I felt.

Somehow, I knew the Holy Spirit was working through me. Becoming one with those living in such indignity, hopelessness, and despair was radically converting my soul -- my way of seeing the poor, of feeling one with them, of desiring to commit myself to their service. God was at work. His presence was undeniable, His will compelling, and His voice crystal clear.

There was no money, no strategic plan. I knew nothing about the Guatemalans, their culture, or the 78 different indigenous languages the people spoke in the dump. I just knew I had to follow the Spirit, step by step. I had to trust God to lead me.

Thousands answered the call to serve: local and national governments, our own board and professional staff, volunteers, and donors. Enormously generous people of good will -- so many generous hearts -- joined me. Their commitment and accomplishment is humbling. I am called "the founder," but I believe that the only true founder of anything good is God.



We started with the 40 homes of Colonia San Juan, and resulted in communities of nurseries, schools, and housing. A generation later, people are growing out of poverty into productive, meaningful lives in eight countries, from Central America to Africa.

I am deeply grateful that I chose to listen to the call to serve these people, but they served me in much greater ways than I served them. They taught me generosity. They taught me to have more faith in God leading the way. They taught me how much goodness there is in humanity. And they taught me compassion.

I learned that, for me, being with the poorest people on earth has made me more human and closer to God, with a spirituality that has marked my memory, and my soul, for life. The impression of Alvaro -- that filthy, sweaty 10 year old with hands bleeding because they were cut from scavenging through glass and tin to find food as his mother sat behind him nursing her baby on a mound of trash -- burned into me. That, I believe, founded this mission.

St. Ignatius teaches that God is in all things. Yes. But I believe God is in the poor most of all. And God is with me as I transition to the next phase of my life.

Yours in Christ,

*Father Don Vettese, S. J.*

Founder of International Samaritan



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## Help continue the work of Fr. Vettese

As he retires, your contribution to the ongoing programs of International Samaritan will help continue the good work of Fr. Vettese for years to come. Help us carry on his legacy by signing up on our giving envelope or visiting our website at

[intsam.org/donate](https://intsam.org/donate).