My brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank you for letting me speak to you today about Franciscan Works and Liberia Mission. St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Corinthians “So faith, hope, and love remain, these three, but the greatest of these is love, the greatest of these is love.” Today, I'm going to share a story with you about a great love story. Actually, it’s about your love and how your love touches the lives of others, of the least among us, the poorest of the poor in Liberia, West Africa.

Liberia is a troubled country ravaged by three consecutive Civil Wars. Names like Charles Taylor, terms like Child Soldier, and movies like Blood Diamonds stir memories of those brutal times. Into that chaos, Jesus called us to bring His word, His hope, and above all His love. We began our work in November of 2003, gathering orphans off the streets of Monrovia. Our Mission was founded to provide a loving home, a Catholic education and life skills training for the poorest of the poor. We went because Jesus called.

The only way we could answer that call was because of people like you. We went in His name, but we also go in your name. We feed hungry souls, minds and mouths. From a handful of children 17 years ago, today we educate over 500 kids annually. The children of the Mission are brought to us by Sisters and Priests from around the country.

Some children are orphans, some come from AIDS hospice, some have parents with no means, but all are desperately poor. The Mission consists of our Chapel, St. Michael the Archangel, our Catholic school, St. Anthony of Padua, our girls dorm, St. Bahkita, our boys dorm, St. Martin de Porres and our student-operated farm, St. Isidore, where the students grow casaba, pineapple, cucumber, pepper, corn, bitter ball, and potato greens. They also raise pigs, cows, sheep, goats, and chickens, and a lot of the produce goes to our kitchen; they also sell it in the marketplace.

According to UNICEF only 54 percent of the children in Liberia will complete Primary School; only 58 percent of the schools have safe water; 56 percent of the schools have functioning bathrooms.

Our motto is God, Education and Work in that order. We raise these young people in the faith, educate them and teach them life skills training so they can break the cycle of poverty that has a stranglehold on this small nation. My fellow Catholics have so many worthy causes to give to, so many in need right here in the United States. We respect that, but I also ask you to consider this work of the Church with your prayers and with your pocketbook.

Pope Francis is calling us to go to the peripheries and there are many peripheries. Our Holy Mother the Church puts two great patron saints of Mission before us and that's no coincidence. St. Francis Xavier traveled the world and converted hundreds of thousands of people; St. Therese of Lisieux never left the confines of her convent. It takes both kinds. I'll leave you with a quote from St. Teresa of Avila, “Christ has no Body now, but yours. No hands, no feet on Earth, but yours. Yours are the eyes with which He looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good. Yours are the hands which He blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are His body. Christ has no body on Earth, but yours.”

We can't do this work without you. Please help us. Thank you for your time and generosity!