



AMAZON RELIEF

2944 Fuller Avenue NE, Suite 205
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49505

*Caring for the Poorest of the Poor
Assisting Victims of Leprosy
Helping Families Break Out of Poverty
Educating “At-Risk” Children
Donations are Tax-Deductible
No Administrative Costs
November 2024*

Dear Friends:

It all began thirty years ago with a walk through a sewage-saturated field of mud. With my first step my sandals and feet were encased in sludge; and as I took my second step the smell of the sewage filled my nostrils. Still I told myself, “I can handle this. I’m a backpacker. I’ve been through rough terrain before.”

As I looked ahead the distance of about a football field I saw my “place of safety” — some planks of wood where I could ascend above the mud and onto a broken boardwalk. There I could walk above, rather than through, the sewage.

When I got up onto this boardwalk I realized, however, that my dirty feet and the smells were not the real problem. **I now stood in the midst of “The Green Hell.”** Here there were hundreds of shacks built on stilts over the sewage. These dwellings were constructed of discarded wood, cardboard, and tin. Some had four walls, some had less. Some had children dying on the floors.



I then met the families and learned more about their plight. **It wasn’t what I expected.** Much of the population was made up of families who had lived in remote areas of the Amazon jungle. When their children became school-aged, the families moved into this area where schools were available. Not having money, they built their dwellings over unwanted swampland. But when hundreds of families moved into the same area, the swamp became sewage. That was one problem. A second was that the parents thought that they would get jobs while their children were getting an education. But the parents, though they were intelligent, had skills for jungle living (hunting, fishing, and agriculture), but they could not read or write. Thus, jobs were few and far between. The result was irregular or no employment, and severe malnutrition within the families. And although schools were available and the children were as bright and loveable as any child in our families in the United States, these children had three huge hurdles. First, it was difficult to study because of the malnutrition. Second, the parents, being unable to read or write, could not help the children with their studies. Third, it was difficult for the children to study at home in the overcrowded, dimly lit conditions. The end result was that the children were dropping out of school.

I learned that there was a Catholic school in the area. Due to lack of funding, however, the school was scheduled to be closed a few weeks after my arrival. This created an opportunity. I asked the pastor of the parish, “If I guaranteed funding to operate the school for one year, would you leave the school open for the year?” He eagerly agreed.

That was the start. With the help of our initial donors, we took children into the school who were living in the area. We provided them with a daily meal, reducing malnutrition issues. We hired teachers who were familiar with problems in this type of community (medical and malnutrition problems, needs for tutoring, financial needs for school supplies, etc.). We had an excellent teacher-student ratio. We had great play areas. In fact, in later years government educational officials who visited our school told me that we had the best school in the city, and our students were academically ahead of peers in the public schools.



Now it's thirty years later. And thanks to you, our donors, the work being done in the Amazon has expanded beyond our initial school. Take a look at the enclosed summary of our programs. We now have many schools serving at differing educational levels. We also help victims of leprosy, we operate soup kitchens, we work with missionaries among indigenous tribes, we fund religious programs, and we fund missionary costs.

I have frequently described the work being done as three-fold: **(1) taking care of immediate needs** (e.g., needs for food, medicine, and housing); **(2) changing the future of the people we serve** (with an education jobs are available—breaking the cycle of poverty for the youth we serve, together with their future families); and **(3) working for the eternal salvation of everyone we serve.**

Also important is that as we have expanded over the last thirty years more people have become actively involved in our work. One of these is Dan Fredricks. He is an engineer and co-owner of an engineering company. He is also a ski coach for the local Catholic high schools. Dan has been a long-time donor to Amazon Relief who in recent years began traveling to the Amazon to assist with the work. In his words, he was totally “blown away” by the good that is happening, and he has offered his time and expertise (gratis) to help on a long-term basis. Dan is great to work with, and his business background and experience with youth give him excellent credentials and insight as we move forward.

Please continue to help. **You, our donors, are truly changing lives ---- not only for today, but for tomorrow, and, with God's graces, for eternity.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Jim'.

Jim Flickinger, OFS

P.S. All donations to Amazon Relief go directly to assist the poor in the Amazon. Nothing is taken out for any salaries or administrative costs.