A Note from Executive Director
Evan Cuthbert

Serving. Building Bridges. Leading. These are the ways that Rostro de Cristo volunteers, alumni, retreatants, neighbors and partners make an impact.

Serving by offering their gifts and education to local efforts that address the needs of the community, taking concern for each person we meet and seeking to serve their needs instead of our own.

Building Bridges by immersing into the local community, sharing food, and giving and receiving hospitality with respect and humility, and by listening deeply to understand their stories and create a place in our stories for them.

Leading by doing, and inviting, encouraging and empowering others to do it with them.

Beyond the numbers and images is a deep motivation to seek Christ in others and to share Christ’s love and mercy through our actions and words. The young adults who come to Rostro de Cristo are motivated by the need to live faith concretely and to be in genuine relationships with each other and our neighbors in Arbolito and Monte Sinai. Forever changed by this experience they carry these relationships with them. In turn they inspire us. They are light for our world which craves positive and courageous leaders committed to authentic service and building bridges with those whose lives appear distant from our own.

Your partnership with us makes their success possible. Thank you.

Serving Others

Last year these nine amazing women committed a year of their lives to serving the educational, health and pastoral needs of the local community by supporting the work of our partners. They hosted and mentored over 275 high school and college students who spent a week seeking to live the Gospel in Ecuador by walking with and learning from our neighbors.

Thank you for supporting them through your prayers, encouraging words and generous financial contributions. And thank you Caro, Clari, Jess, Kate, Katie, Lizzy, Mattie, Sarah, and Vale for living so authentically and for blessing us with your love, compassion and commitment.
Before this experience, I never knew what it meant to feel God around, you know? I never truly felt his presence no matter how many times I did the Examen or meditated. I saw God a lot in Ecuador. I saw God in the strength of the neighbors our group visited and spoke to. I saw God in their struggles. I saw God in their love. I described this feeling as ‘warmth’ a couple times, and now I think that was just a big hug from God through the people I had the opportunity to meet.

-2019 Retreatant

Tamara Setiady, a Campus Minister from St. Ignatius prep in San Francisco, CA, shares her experiences leading a retreat group for seven high school students.

After a powerful nine days in Guayaquil, boarding our flight to Quito felt disorienting. Feelings of uncertainty towards our departure only compounded when we were surprised by a final goodbye with Kika and her daughter Kirstie at the airport. After jumping out at us from behind a trash can, Kika and Kirstie had hugs and jokes to go around. Tears started to roll down our cheeks. Kika was in true form that morning. In one moment, she and Kirstie grabbed our U.S. passports and posed with them for ridiculous “selfies.” In another moment, still with our passports in hand, she told us, in her matter-of-fact way, that she had never been on an airplane or to Quito.

With arms draped over our shoulders, Kika and Kirstie stayed with us until we passed the security checkpoint. As the line moved forward, we turned back, waving until we could no longer see them. This was a profound moment that our students would recall. Our privilege gave us the freedom and resources to travel where our new friends, Kika and Kirstie, could not go, even in their own country. Why? What did this mean for us?

Over our two weeks in Ecuador, Rostro de Cristo inspired our young people to develop hearts of compassion to bear witness to marginalized persons and their stories. As students at a Jesuit high school, I watched these young people grasp a new meaning to being “women and men with and for others” through neighbor visits, preparing meals with ingredients from local tiendas, and yes, through at least four dance parties led by Jim “Jaime” Lochhead, Rostro alum and leader of our group. In Guayaquil, our students were transformed by learning how to accompany, to walk with, and to have their hearts broken by stories of joy and suffering.
Forming Leaders

Maureen (M.E.) Regan was a ‘13-’14 volunteer in Arbolito who graduated from Boston College with a Master of Science in Nursing. M.E. is now a Family Nurse Practitioner for the Institute of Family Health in the Bronx. Below, she reflects on her experience with a dear friend and neighbor in Arbolito.

Carolina is my friend and neighbor who continues to be one of my greatest teachers. She is a woman who grew up a subsistence farmer in the verdant, chilly mountains surrounding Ambato. Her childhood was spent helping work the earth, and it was cut short so that she could sell the family’s small surplus of produce in the city. She started selling knickknacks and snacks on the street, and through life’s twists and turns ended up in Durán, with a partner she endures, three beautiful children and a small tienda that provides for their most basic needs.

Carolina has a way of inviting me in to relax, whenever I am in her field of vision from the tienda. I don’t know where she learned to do that in her life. Her body bears the evidence of hardship, abuse and chronic stress. To keep her gaze outward and unfailingly beckon me in with her earth-shattering smile is nothing short of radical. She reminds me that we are far more than what nos tocó—than what life has passed our way.

My concepts of mercy, justice, goodness and healing continue to grow in light of the relationship I have with Carolina and la familia Rostro. I now work as a Family Nurse Practitioner at a health center serving part of the Bronx—where a couple of other RdC alum have worked before me (Kristen Samansion and Amanda Rider)—and at a building for adults who were chronically homeless. Our healthcare system (often described as a sick care system) can make it difficult for people to pursue wellness. I try to channel Carolina’s quiet energy when I am in my clinic’s exam rooms. It takes a persistent and defiant flame such as hers to allow the transformative light of God into dark or chaotic places. I trust that the love I have encountered in my life and in my friendship with Carolina will continue to be a source of healing and liberation for myself and others.

Current Volunteers

The 2019-2020 Rostro de Cristo volunteers come to Ecuador from all across the United States. In addition to walking alongside their neighbors in Monte Sinai and Arbolito, they are serving at six different work sites. Learn more about this year’s volunteers on our website.

M.E. with a resident at Damien House.

Maddie Cahue colors with one of her youngest students at Manos Abiertas After-school Program.

Stephanie Sickinger helps a student with a reading assignment.

When I was in the midst of launching Rostro de Cristo years ago, I wrestled with the question, "How can one be prepared to enter into a world so radically different from one's own?" A world marked by poverty; a world in which the culture, language, community, diet, climate and so much more lacked little or no resemblance to one's own life experience. At that time, it was assumed that the preparation needed was minimal. One just needed the desire and motivation.

After the initial Rostro de Cristo volunteers and retreat groups were welcomed and guided through their days in Guayaquil, it became obvious that more preparation was essential. So as the years past and the program grew, more developed plans for orientation and support were incrementally added.

Experience has made it clear to the Board that to fulfill the Mission of Rostro de Cristo, significant resources must be spent to develop and implement excellent orientation, formation and support programs. We have found that the effective, transformative experience Rostro de Cristo offers is dependent on the quality of such preparation for student retreat groups. And the depth and power of the volunteers’ experiences are deeply impacted by quality preparation along with ongoing support while in country.

Rostro de Cristo supports our volunteers with more than 300 hours per year of retreat experiences, days of prayer and reflection and providing ongoing support for the volunteers during their year. Because our program, at its core, is Christocentric, formation experiences address areas of spirituality, faith, prayer and each volunteer’s relationship with Christ. Flowing from this relationship, volunteers are aided in entering into the Ecuadorian culture and life in the communities where we live and work by training in pastoral ministry, intercultural living skills and health and well-being.

Because of this major aspect and commitment of us all, the Mission of Rostro de Cristo is stronger than ever and is being accomplished more effectively than ever—all by the Grace of God and your generous support. Thank you for your essential collaboration.

Fr. Jim Ronan
Founder and Chair of the Board of Directors

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Fr. Ronan with Fr. John Cudjoe. Fr. John is a Divine Word Missionary from Ghana. Beginning in January of 2020 two returning RdC Volunteers will begin a pilot program in his parish on the outskirts of Guayaquil.
Our Directors

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Our Mission: To inspire a lifelong commitment to a faith that works for justice through transformative, intercultural experiences living the Gospel of Christ in solidarity with marginalized communities.