

Living Our Franciscan Values

Joseph Pantaleo '03 Bringing the Dental Care to the People of Lare, Kenya



Joseph B. Pantaleo '03 is the founder of Tomorrow's Smile Today—a non-profit organization dedicated to promote dental education and service to those areas, nationally and globally, where there is no access, or very limited dental care. From an early age, Joe has been witness to and inspired by the Franciscan spirit; first as a student at St. Francis Prep and afterwards, while studying at St. Francis College. Joe says, “Without the experience and role models of being taught by the Franciscan Brothers, I would not be the person I am today.” Adding, “I have always tried to live as an example of St. Francis in my daily life.” Joe operates his private practice in 30 Central Park South in Manhattan, he is also the Director of Dental Care at Jamaica Hospital Medical Center and holds an attending position at the Mt. Sinai Dental Department.

This summer, (June 25th – July 9th) he and a friend and colleague in the dental profession, Meredith Gantos, traveled to St. Francis Secondary School in Lare, Kenya along side a contingent of Prep faculty/staff on a special mission. (See related story on page ##.) Their mutual aspirations as a dental professionals extends beyond providing excellent care within their respective private-practices. They felt the need to provide reach those abroad in

remote areas who have no access to dental services at all. Joe recalled, “When I first met Meredith, her spirit naturally made me gravitate towards her and I have witnessed her charitable personality while working with her.” Their shared goals in Kenya were to provide basic dental care and education to the people in this remote community.

In the process, they learned about the Kenyan culture, traditions, and needs of the students and were inspired by presence of our shared Franciscan spirit. Joe's vision is

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to provide dental services to the students and people of Kenya twice a year—the same standard of care that is employed in the United States. He imagines establishing a dental facility that is incorporated within the Franciscan schools in Lare and Molo that would ultimately attract a team of dentists, hygienists and assistants to provide the

community with dental education to integrate in their daily lives and perform dental treatment to treat and fight infections.

Mission Complete

Their first dental mission to Kenya with Meredith Ann was nothing shy of successful. They were able to screen every student from St. Francis Secondary School- Lare and Santa Clara Vocational School. Joe exclaimed, “98% of the students we examined never saw a dentist their entire life.” They were able to conduct a Dental Education Class to each grade and distribute toothbrushes and introduce floss to a community that has never heard of or even seen floss!

Reflecting on his experience he said, “Sometimes I feel selfish on these missions because these kids teach us lessons that are invaluable. All I can say is you never know the daily battles any one person is facing. So slow down, enjoy the present, and be patient. We enjoy a life of electricity, a bed and warm showers. These students pray for rain for the crops to grow and when it rains, the electricity goes out.” That was a constant battle even they had to fight during their two week mission. Despite the daily inconveniences and hardships, Joe said, “I cannot wait to go back and give more of what I can for these kids.”

Joe is another great example of someone who has taken inspiration and been called to action after repeatedly hearing the Prayer of St. Francis, “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.”

Congratulations and thank for all you and your colleagues do for our brothers and sisters in Kenya, Joe!