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Sacred Stories

Bridge Building



spirituality

Suggested Sacred Text

But I shall sing of your strength, extol your mercy at dawn, for you are my fortress, my refuge in time of trouble.

Psalm 59:17

"Please, help my mom." That was the plea from the woman at our office door. Larissa came to us because she had heard about our social service outreach to the elderly here in Belize, made possible through a generous grant from the Catholic Health Initiatives Mission and Ministry Fund.

The next day, a colleague and I went to Larissa's house to visit her mom. To get to Larissa's house, we had to walk on a "London Bridge." In Belize, that's the term for a makeshift bridge that people use to cross wet or swampy ground. London Bridges are not very sturdy and are often a little scary to cross. We arrived safely and entered the

house, which was made of scrap wood and metal.

Larissa's mom was not in the house – she lived in a shelter in the back. We crossed another London Bridge to get there. If the first was a little scary, this one was extra scary.

Larissa explained that her mother, Maria, did not leave her shelter. Maria was blind and needed a wheelchair. She did not have a wheelchair, and even if she did, there was no way the London Bridges would support it.

The shelter that Maria lived in looked as if it would come apart and fall down at the first strong wind. She was lying on a bed that had a piece of sponge on it for a cushion. She had no sheets, and a nearby bucket was her restroom.

Our needs assessment started with basic repairs to Larissa's home, and we took measurements to add a new room that would be a much safer place for Maria to live. We also saw that there was

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no food in the home, and quickly connected Larissa with our food pantry.

Then, we made plans to make the bridge to Larissa's home stronger and safer. This was critical, because a safe bridge would make it possible for Maria to attend our support group and to go to medical appointments. Mother and daughter thanked us over and over.

As I have reflected on our encounter, I have come to realize that the bridge we rebuilt is so much more than a structure. It's a connection to the outside world and a way for Maria to leave her place, separated from most, and join a larger community that cares about her.

Her story is a reminder to me that God, the supreme bridge builder, is always inviting us to build people up and to bridge the loneliness and social isolation of our brothers and sisters. That is our mission: to be part of God's bridge-building, creating communities where all are welcome and cared for.

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Question for Reflection

How can you be a bridge to support others in their challenges?