MOVING FORWARD
In challenging times
In communities around the world, families struggle as their ability to earn a living has been disrupted by COVID-19. At the same time, we all have had to adapt to changes in our work, our lifestyle and our faith life. It’s been a difficult year, to say the least.

But if there’s one thing Unbound has learned in nearly 40 years of partnering with people living in poverty, it’s that when we face adversity together, the best in all of us emerges. The families Unbound works with are experts at innovation because their survival depends on it. They’re our teachers in this time of struggle, and one of the most important lessons is to keep moving forward.

This edition of Spirit is all about forward movement. You’ll read about individuals and families in our newest program country, Rwanda, where people are working to end the extreme poverty that followed the 1994 genocide and create a promising future.

In a moving story of the work of the Holy Spirit, Unbound preacher Father ’Rick LaBrecque recounts his trip to Guatemala last year to witness the priestly ordination of the seminarian he sponsored.

You’ll also learn about the innovative ways Unbound is reaching out to parishes in these challenging times, along with creative ways our preachers have spent their free time during the pandemic.

At a moment when the world has come to a halt, Unbound is moving forward. 🌟
Unbound scholar Seenu rides around her village in northern India on a bicycle she bought with Unbound support and funds she saved from tutoring younger students.

**UNBOUND IS**

an international nonprofit founded by lay Catholics and grounded in the Gospel call to put the needs of the marginalized and vulnerable first. We build relationships of mutual respect and support that bridge cultural, religious and economic divides. We invite all people of goodwill to join us.

**ON THE COVER**

Sarah and Moses, parents of sponsored youth Isaac, display the water tank they helped acquire for their village in Kenya. The tank, which was purchased through Unbound’s Agents of Change platform, has proven invaluable during Kenya’s extended drought.

Unbound scholar Seenu rides around her village in northern India on a bicycle she bought with Unbound support and funds she saved from tutoring younger students.
Today, Rwanda is one of the fastest-growing industrialized nations in Africa. It has an innovative tech sector, a vibrant modern capital in the city of Kigali and is considered one of the world’s leaders in ecotourism. Most importantly, the people of Rwanda have committed themselves to aggressive efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.

That commitment led to a decision on the part of Unbound to add Rwanda to the community of nations where it works to help people raise themselves out of poverty. After years of planning, Rwanda became the first new Unbound country since 2004. Rwandans recognize that many in the outside world know their country mainly for the tragic 1994 genocide that took the lives of an estimated 800,000 people. While Rwandans will never forget that dark chapter in their history, they’re determined to move forward from it.

Father Innocent Rugaragu, a Jesuit priest and chair of the Unbound board in Rwanda, noted how important it is for the people of Rwanda to have partners in solidarity at this point in their nation’s development.

"It's one of the poorest countries in Africa," Father Rugaragu said of Rwanda. "We have been since after the genocide. ... We have been on this constant journey to overcome extreme poverty. Partnering with Unbound has been an exciting part of our journey."

Unbound’s tenure in Rwanda did not begin without challenges, coming just before the COVID-19 pandemic. As it has everywhere, the pandemic created enormous...
difficulties for the working poor in that country, most of whom earn their livelihoods from informal jobs.

Chantal is the mother of 5-year-old Kevin, the first Rwandan child sponsored through Unbound. He was sponsored by Trevor from Kansas at a parish visit by Unbound preacher Father Bill Martin last January. The sponsorship has been a tremendous support to Kevin’s family, especially when they were separated after the COVID-19 shutdown.

“At the time of the coronavirus, casual jobs were stopped,” Chantal said. “We were affected with [a shortage of food] at home, and the worst part is that the father to my children was [away from] home. The lockdown found him ... where he had gone to do his casual jobs. He could not come back home.”

Fortunately for families in the Unbound program, funds were made available to them by way of direct cash transfers into individual child accounts, allowing them to use the funds for what they need most. This personalized approach to helping families is one of the distinguishing features of Unbound.

“If you see the current situation of our families, most of them were living by just small business,”
Anita Kivuye, coordinator of the Unbound program in Rwanda, said.

"It’s a daily business, which can just fall any time. So, when Unbound gave access to the funds, it helped them at least to buy food at home and other related [items], and some of them have given us the testimony that they were able to raise or continue with their businesses, which were disintegrating during the pandemic."

A spirit of optimism present in Rwanda today inspired at least one native son, Unbound staff member Moses Kasasira, to return home.

Kasasira grew up in Uganda, brought there by his father as a small boy on the cusp of the ethnic tensions in Rwanda that would eventually erupt into violence. His mother stayed behind, and the family has long since lost contact with her. She is presumed to have been killed in the genocide.

Sponsored as a child, Kasasira was able to go to school and, ultimately, graduate from university. He was eager to return to Rwanda when he heard about Unbound’s new initiative there. Working with families during the pandemic, he shares a message of perseverance with them.

“I always tell [the families in the Unbound program], please don’t lose hope. Don’t think you are alone. You know, you are not alone and, every time, opportunities come along the way.”

That sort of hopefulness is not hard to find among Rwandans these days. 🌟
Unbound staff member Moses was born in Rwanda but grew up in Uganda. He's now returned to his home country, where he's enjoying reconnecting with his family. Here he spends an enjoyable moment with his young cousin, Bonheur.
My sponsored friend became a priest

By Father ‘Rick LaBrecque

There are so many ways in which Unbound sponsorship brings joy to sponsors. For me, nothing can equal my joy in March of last year when I traveled to Cuarto Pueblo, a remote village in the mountains of north-central Guatemala. In the parish church of Candelaria de los Martires, Misael Gabriel Tarton was ordained a Catholic priest.

It was the culmination of a friendship begun several years earlier when I asked to sponsor a seminarian and Misael was assigned to me by Unbound. (Sponsorship helps seminarians with expenses like tuition, books and transportation that they might not otherwise be able to afford.)

We corresponded regularly and in December 2017 I had the joy of meeting Misael in person during an Unbound preachers trip to Guatemala. His sincerity, spirituality and likable personality only reinforced what I had learned from his letters.

I was thrilled to be invited when it was announced that Misael would be ordained a priest. It took me a while to discover where Cuarto Pueblo is, and how one might get there. The most practical thing turned out to be to fly to Guatemala City and take a bus for about five hours to the city of Coban. Once there, Misael’s family would pick me up en route from their home several hours east.

I enjoyed a day in Coban. The next afternoon, Misael’s brother arrived at my hostel and we walked to the plaza where his family and friends filled two minibuses. After a grueling seven-hour drive, we arrived in Cuarto Pueblo and were greeted by many of the townsfolk with food, music and fellowship.

In the morning, we went to the church for a hot Guatemalan
breakfast. People were continually arriving by private vehicle, old school bus and on foot. Some had walked for hours. There were many priests from all over the diocese and beyond. Shortly before 9, the bishop arrived and the procession into the packed church formed. As usual, the music was joyful and uplifting and everybody sang.

After the ordination by the bishop, all the priests processed up to lay our own hands on the new priest's head. When my turn came, it was a truly overwhelming moment of joy. Before the Mass ended, words of appreciation and tribute were spoken and Misael's mother, in her traditional Guatemalan garments, spontaneously went to the microphone to express her joy and gratitude to God.

Next, of course, was a fiesta with music, food and fellowship, and I was introduced as Padre Misael's "Padrino of the Seminary." All too soon it was time for the ride back. I was dropped off in Coban and took the bus back to Guatemala City the next morning. On Sunday I flew home. Two days later Guatemala closed its airports because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through sponsorship, our goal is to help a young person realize his or her goals by having the opportunity to develop natural gifts, talents and self-confidence. It is so gratifying to witness the realization of what might otherwise have been an impossible dream. When I received Padre Misael’s first blessing, I thanked God for the opportunity Unbound gave me to be his sponsor.

Father Frederick (’Rick) LaBrecque is a priest of the Diocese of Charleston, South Carolina. He has preached on behalf of Unbound since 2011.

Unbound preacher Father ’Rick LaBrecque stood with other priests in attendance at the ordination to the priesthood of Misael Tarton in Guatemala. Father ’Rick’s sponsorship support helped Father Misael during his seminary studies.

Unbound preacher Father ’Rick LaBrecque spent a pleasant moment with Misael’s family before the ordination Mass. From left are Misael’s mother, Father ’Rick and, holding his baby, Misael’s brother.
Preachers explore other interests during hiatus

The priests who preach for Unbound enjoy visiting new faith communities, but their travel was mostly curtailed in 2020 due to COVID-19. Here are some of the ways they kept busy in the past few months.

Capuchin Franciscan Father Cyrus Gallagher, who lives in Colorado and has preached for Unbound since 2008, is halfway through his project of reading “the 100 best books.” As if the task wasn’t daunting enough, Father Cyrus has chosen to read some books in Spanish to keep his language skills “fluid.”

Father Bill Martin resides in Vermont and has been an Unbound preacher since 1996. He’s learning to speak French and play classical guitar. In addition, Father Bill, who’s a retired U.S. Air Force chaplain and pilot, recently renewed his certification as a flight instructor.

Father John Graden, OSFS, lives in upstate New York, where he enjoys sculpting in clay. Father John is one Unbound’s first preachers, having started in 1991.

Father Jerry Hackenmueller lives in rural Wisconsin, where he enjoys doing various home projects. During his hiatus from Unbound he crafted a new birdhouse for what he calls his “sponsored bluebird family.” Father Jerry, who has preached for Unbound since 2013, designed the house to give the birds an advantage in their perpetual real estate battle with local squirrels.

There are many other examples of Unbound preachers finding ways to keep themselves active and engaged. As diverse as their interests are, one they have in common is the love of meeting the Catholic faithful and sharing the invitation to join the community of Unbound sponsors who “walk with” the world’s poor and marginalized.

Let’s pray that they’ll all be renewing that interest soon and in abundance. 🕊
Resources for parishes

Unbound stands ready to help pastors serve parishioners in these challenging times.

- Our priests are once again visiting Catholic communities, preaching the Word, sharing the Unbound invitation and offering pastors some much needed time off.

- Preachers are recording Masses that you can share “virtually” with parishioners. Their homilies help connect the faithful with the Church’s social mission.

- Bulletin inserts are available, providing an easy way to sponsor a child, youth or elder in need or donate to assist in the work of Unbound.

- A “My Outreach” page online is an easy way to help Unbound serve more people. Go to unbound.org/OurImpact/Participate/Fundraise for more information.

- Pastors can support the work of Unbound by sharing the opportunity to sponsor a child, youth or elder and we have special resource materials to help.

- Through the online platform Flocknote, discover resources for Catholics to participate in the Church’s social mission. Learn more in the library at Flocknote.com.

- Help the Catholic faithful learn more about how they can participate the social mission of the Church through Unbound: unbound.org/liveyourfaith

- Resources designed for Catholic schools help educate children about the Church’s social teaching and offer practical activities that help kids make a difference.

To find out more about any of these resources or to discuss how we can best serve your faith community, call us at (800) 466-7672 or email us at parishcontact@unbound.org.
Find us on Flocknote

Unbound content — including faith reflections, stories from around the world and family activities — is now available to all on Flocknote! Check it out at Flocknote.com.

Look inside this issue for more information about the many other resources Unbound offers for promoting Catholic social teaching and living in solidarity with the poor and marginalized.

Unbound is here for parishes in these challenging times!

Invite Unbound to your parish

CALL: (800) 466-7672
EMAIL: parishcontact@unbound.org
VISIT: parishvisit.org

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