

**Alexandria Benham**  
**Grade 8**  
**St. Odilia Parish**

### **The Unexpected Missionary**

When you think of the word “missionary,” what comes to mind? For many, the image is of a priest or sister leaving home and going to a foreign land to teach about God. Of course, this is a good example of missionary work, but one need not leave the country nor be in a religious order to do missionary work. Missionary work can occur near or far, by young and old, lay or religious. Mission work shows God’s love to those who do not know Him. The good news is we can all be missionaries when we spread the message of God’s love by our actions and our prayers.

My understanding comes from stories my mother tells about when she was a young girl growing up in the 1950’s. Her family prayed each day for vocations and for the missionaries. One particular missionary was Archbishop James Walsh, who was imprisoned in China for twelve years. Today the newspapers overflow with stories about China, and travelers visit China freely, but in the Fifties no one knew much about China.

My mother read books by Pearl Buck and envisioned a missionary life in China. When she married my dad and began their family, life took a different path; the hope of being a Chinese missionary seemed distant. God, however, did know her desire to show God’s love to the Chinese people. Little did she know that after she and my dad had four “homemade” children, they would hear a call from God to go to China and bring home their daughter.

This is where I come in! I am adopted from China, and I am part of how my mom fulfilled her missionary dream. My younger sister is also adopted from China, and Mom and Dad bring God into our lives every day.

Bishop Walsh wrote several books on mission life and his motto was “Suffer the little children to come unto me.” That motto and mission fervor run deeply in my family. My two older sisters have each spread God’s love to children by their work. My sister, Rachael, volunteered for two year in an orphanage in Nicaragua with *Nuestros Pequenos Hermanos*, and my sister, Chiara, volunteered with the Maryknoll Missionaries, teaching English to children in China.

My mom’s missionary desire and my sisters’ actions have influenced and inspired me as well. I, too, am a Catholic missionary. This summer I will travel back to my homeland and work at an orphanage for children with disabilities. I will show God’s love to the children by my actions as I fold diapers, prepare meals, hold and comfort babies, and teach simple songs and prayers to toddlers. Missionary work is a wonderful thing; it can be done at home or a foreign country, by adults and teenagers. Like in my mom’s case, it can be done in ways one would never expect.