

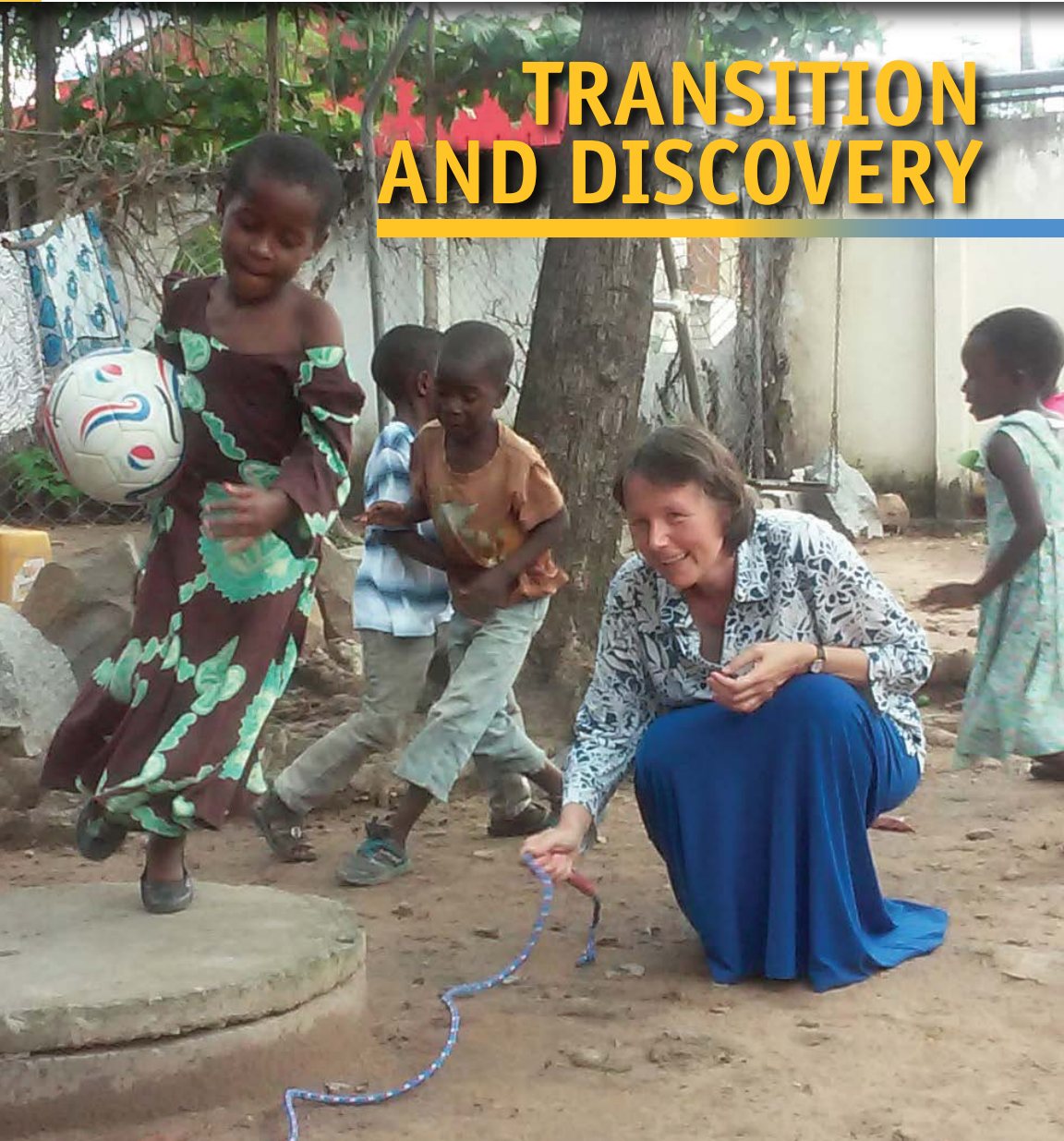
VOC

Voices Of Compassion



maryknoll lay
missioners

TRANSITION AND DISCOVERY





A GOLDEN STRING



THE BLUE GUITAR



ONLY THE BAREST NECESSITIES



MISSION POSSIBLE II



ON THE ROAD...AGAIN



WE ACCOMPANIED THEM THROUGH THE NIGHT



MY PATH



A JOURNEY TO MISSION

Cover photo: Lay Missioner Susana Carpenter's students play "Jump Over the 'Snakes'!"

Photo credit: Kristle Bulleman



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MKLM Mission Statement

*Maryknoll Lay Missioners is a
Catholic organization
inspired by the mission of Jesus to
live and work in poor communities
in Africa, Asia and the Americas,
responding to basic needs and
helping to create a more just and
compassionate world.*

PLEASE REMEMBER

Maryknoll Lay Missioners (MKLM) is a separate and distinct organization from the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers and Maryknoll Sisters, although we often join together to serve in mission. **MKLM raises all of its own resources to recruit, train, send and sustain our Lay Missioners.**

We need your support!

**Donor Care Manager
Richard Gatjens**

P: 914-236-3449

Email: rgatjens@mkmlm.org

EMBARKING ON A NEW JOURNEY

by Matthew T. Boyle

Dear Friends,

I am so very grateful for the tremendous outpouring of support from each and every one of you, presently and throughout the years. Your prayers and generosity are a Godsend, encouraging and sustaining our Lay Missioners as they continue to serve those in desperate need across Asia, Africa and the Americas.

As I transition into the role of Executive Director, I recognize that I am embarking on a new journey in my life. This journey of transition and discovery will certainly challenge me and will enable me to grow in faith, wisdom and compassion, in much the same way our missioners do as they transition from the comforts of their everyday lives to lives filled with new challenges that are met with deep faith and love.

I would like to take a moment to thank my predecessor, Sam Stanton, who led Maryknoll Lay Missioners for the past eight years with love, compassion and much wisdom. Sam's enthusiasm for mission, his passion to bring hope to others, and his selfless stewardship of MKLM, have been an inspiration to us all. Sam has certainly shown us a vision of possibilities for MKLM's future.

In this edition of *Voices of Compassion*, I invite you to join us on journeys of transition and discovery taken by our Lay Missioners, as they share their talents and become blessings for others in

the world. By leaving the comfort of their homes and finding new homes among the people they serve, the missioners of MKLM make transitions that lead them to deep personal encounters. By seeking Christ in others, embracing their crosses and following Jesus, they become examples and witnesses to the people they serve.



Matt and Lay Missioner Claire Stewart help refugee children discover their artistic talent - Brazil, 2016.
(The children's identity is being protected)

Photo Credit: Kim Fischer

In September, I had a wonderful opportunity to visit our team of Lay Missioners in São Paulo, Brazil. It was so inspiring to view firsthand how our ministries are truly changing the world, in many instances one life at a time, and I want to share with you one of the many memorable moments that I will never forget. It was going to a prison and



Matt (center), with Lay Missioner Peg Vamosy (left) on a FAB Immersion trip in El Salvador in 2014

Photo Credit: Deacon Don Weigel

partaking in prayers led by our Lay Missioners Claire Stewart and Jim Kott. About 200 inmates, some with their plastic rosaries, lined the prison courtyard hand-in-hand to say the "Our Father" and "Hail Mary." They then joined in song with one fellow playing guitar, and a few of the others chimed in with rhythm on the asphalt, banging empty plastic soda bottles. The compassion was clearly tangible, as we all for that one moment were witness to something much bigger than ourselves. I was reminded of Pope Francis' visit to a prison complex in Rome, where he washed the feet of twelve prison inmates.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Voices of Compassion* and I pray that the stories of transition you read will challenge you to wonder how God is calling you on your own journey of discovery. May you embrace whatever the journey may be and wherever it may lead.

As I embark on this new challenge with great enthusiasm and much hope, I ask you to keep me in your prayers, as I will keep you in mine, along with all of the people we serve and our Lay Missioners in the field.

Together in mission,

Matthew T. Boyle
Executive Director

A GOLDEN STRING

by Maryknoll Lay Missioner
Susana Carpenter, Tanzania

"And I give you the end of a golden string."

William Blake

Do you remember how the Magi in Luke's gospel followed a star, a new star in the sky, until it came to rest above the stable of the infant Jesus?

Here in my new life as a Maryknoll Lay Missioner in Tanzania, I've come to feel a resonance with these three travelers. They saw a light they desired to follow, but they did not know where it would take them. Just, they believed, to the child who would transform their world. Like the Magi traversing lands new to them with foreign companions, I am a newcomer, a guest, a stranger who is encountering new customs, cultures, and forms of life.

Sometimes the path is easy and sometimes it is difficult, but I travel with happiness, with eyes open to the light by which we begin to see God in all things, all creatures, and all people. As the Magi offered their gifts to the Christ Child, in my clumsy manner I offer what I can to the small children I teach, and to others I meet along the way.

These Magi no doubt had families and friends at home who sent them warmly on their journey and contributed to the gifts they offered the child. No one, in this life, goes it or makes it alone. Every day I am blessed to

remember and draw strength from my friends and benefactors back home who share their prayers and thoughts for me and my mission, and who even share their treasure, too. All of these gifts I, in turn, pass on to the thirteen children entrusted to me, our little brothers and sisters in Christ.

HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN?

I was invited to live in half of a newly built duplex on top of what may be the highest hill in Mwanza. Ten years ago, there were only deer, rabbits, jackals, and other wildlife here. Two years ago, there were no foreigners here, only the



Rehema (left) and Lay Missioner
Susana Carpenter (right) with
children in the classroom

Photo credit:
Kristle Bulleman

Tanzanians. Three months ago, there was only one foreigner, an American Maryknoll priest, Fr. Jim Eble. And now, I have joined them.

I travel on foot and am the first non-Tanzanian to ride the daladalas (minivans) and pikipikis (motorcycles) in this area. There is no paved road, but there are some slightly worn paths winding through the huge rocks and rain-beaten caverns. Every day is an “off-roading” experience, as we careen up and down the roughest terrain of Mwanza. After twenty minutes, I reach the paved road at the bottom of the hill and find my way to Shaloom (pronounced “Shalom”) Kindergarten.

No matter how early in the morning, thirteen students, all of whom are impoverished and many orphaned, run to the gate to meet me and begin their school day. I have given up on setting up the classroom early! Instead, we enter together and, as is the local custom, slip off our shoes---theirs mostly broken---and line them up by the door. Then the children gently swing their feet a bit as they sit upon the classroom benches. I lead a spontaneous prayer which Christians and Muslims echo alike. My Kiswahili grammar is rough, but the children valiantly sense the deeper meaning, or at least go with the flow. Then, one by one, I call them to choose a puzzle, a set of blocks or cards, a book, or such, to enjoy in the first hour. I am blessed to employ two Mwanzan women. Rehema is my co-teacher. Though her education was scant, her talents are great. She begins by guiding the children in their play. Mama Jerad, the mother of

our student Jerad, recently began to cook and clean for us. She is deaf and her life has been very difficult. Thankfully, we were able to offer her a job. She cleans vigorously and well. She is learning the rhythm of boiling plenty of water to purify it for drinking each morning, and preparing the children’s food and beverages.

Rehema and I enjoy leading the children through two or three lessons each day—focusing on reading, writing, and arithmetic. Thanks to the Dominican Sisters,



Photo credit: Susana Carpenter

Waldorf educators and others from whom I learned teaching skills, I have much to draw upon in preparing our lessons. Rehema adds her motherly wisdom and seasoned insight.

The day includes song, dance, outdoor games, and gentle time for drawing and painting. Sometimes when outdoors, the

children spontaneously gather together. One will perch on a rock and begin a lively chant. The others will respond. When the chant is about a lion chasing other animals, on a certain beat, many of the children will run at top speed with one or two designated “lions” trying to capture them! When I listen, I feel as if I am hearing songs that are hundreds of years old, and can almost feel the drumbeats beneath the rhythm.

At the end of the school day, Rehema and I usually walk to the daladalas together, discussing the students and what they may need. At times, a quiet girl, Zainabu,

rice. A lively boy, Mikaeli, withdraws from the rest and sits and cries. He, too, is very thin. “He is probably hungry,” Rehema tells me, “there is likely trouble in his house.” We have sent him home with rice as well. Another child sits scratching his badly wounded skin. His eyes would drift away from the chalkboard. Like most of our children’s parents or guardians, his mother can afford neither doctor nor medicine. We have been able to help him through his health crisis.

Malaria is a constant problem for the people of Mwanza, as are a few other illnesses. For impoverished parents and caretakers, such as ours at Shaloom Kindergarten, medical costs are impossibly high. Children frequently die. We have quietly provided medical care for many of our students. More medical needs will definitely arise each month. We hope to continue this service.

CHRISTMAS AT SHALOOM

At Christmas time, we of Shaloom Kindergarten are richly blessed with greetings, prayers, and gifts from friends and family in the United States – they are like our very own Magi! We are most grateful for their prayers, which sustain us with peace, hope and happiness.

The gifts we receive at Christmas and throughout the year allow us to purchase learning materials, art supplies, balls and jump ropes, chalk and chalkboards. We hired a plumber to bring running water to the kitchen sink. We’ve bought gas and necessities so that we can cook. We’ve replaced broken window panes, window locks, and hinges, so that we will no



Two students hard at work in the classroom

Photo Credit: Sam Stanton

stays in the classroom a little longer than the rest. “I am hungry,” she whispers. Her voice is so soft that I must put my ear to her lips to hear. Both her parents died. She is bone-thin. Occasionally, we have been able to send her home with a bag of

longer get flooded in the heavy rains. We provide nutritional food every day for the children - fruit, porridge, and an egg or muffin along with clean water. Never has one crumb remained on a plate! These children, like those who raise them, are hungry.

We have provided medical care as needed, and salaries for Rehema and Mama Jerad, who can then adequately care for their children. Both live in one-room dwellings and cook with a little pot upon charcoal. Their salaries enable them to buy food for their families and ensure that their children can attend school. I visited Rehema one day and she gave me her one chair to sit upon! Still I could see hers was a happy home.

We are hopeful that we can continue Shaloom Kindergarten in future years. This is our eighth year, and local parents are very grateful for us. Our current group will enter first grade next year in broken-down schools with 50-100 classmates in each room, no books, and no supplies. In these conditions, many children, perhaps even half, will not learn even the basics. Yet, after a good kindergarten foundation where they learn to read, write, and calculate, our Shaloom Kindergarten children enter first grade with strengths. They are particularly vulnerable to life's challenges because all are impoverished and many are orphaned. Despite these challenges, we often hear how well the Shaloom children do in their continuing years.

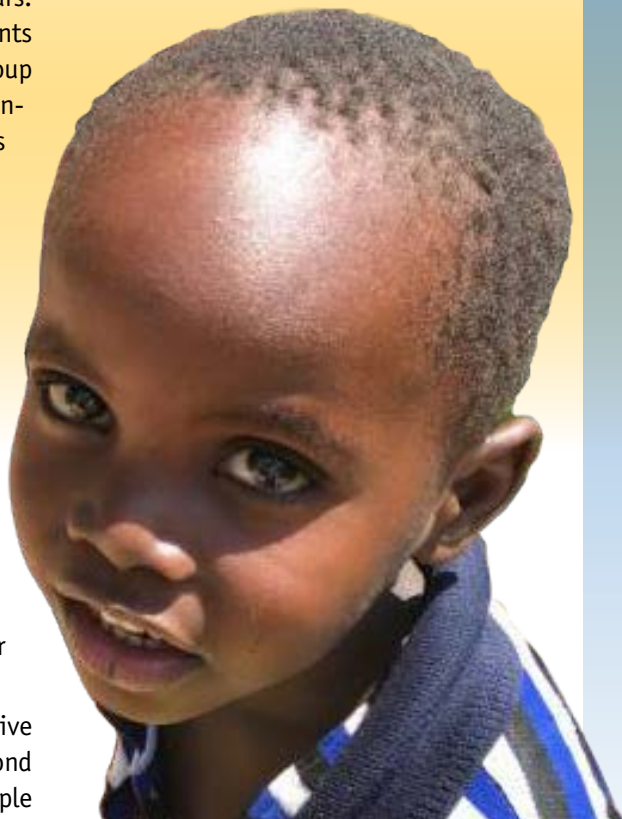
We do have hopes, should we receive gifts in abundance, of adding a second swing outdoors, and providing a simple

uniform for each child so that they have a good new set of clothing to enjoy. We also would like to provide each with a pair of shoes, and send a packet of beans or rice home more often to families suffering the pains of hunger.

I feel so very blessed to be here with these beautiful children. It is only because of the prayers, love and continued generosity of our benefactors that I am with these wonderful children and they are able to learn in a loving, peaceful and hope-filled environment.

Shafi, age 5, is a great student and loves to build things

Photo Credit: Sam Stanton

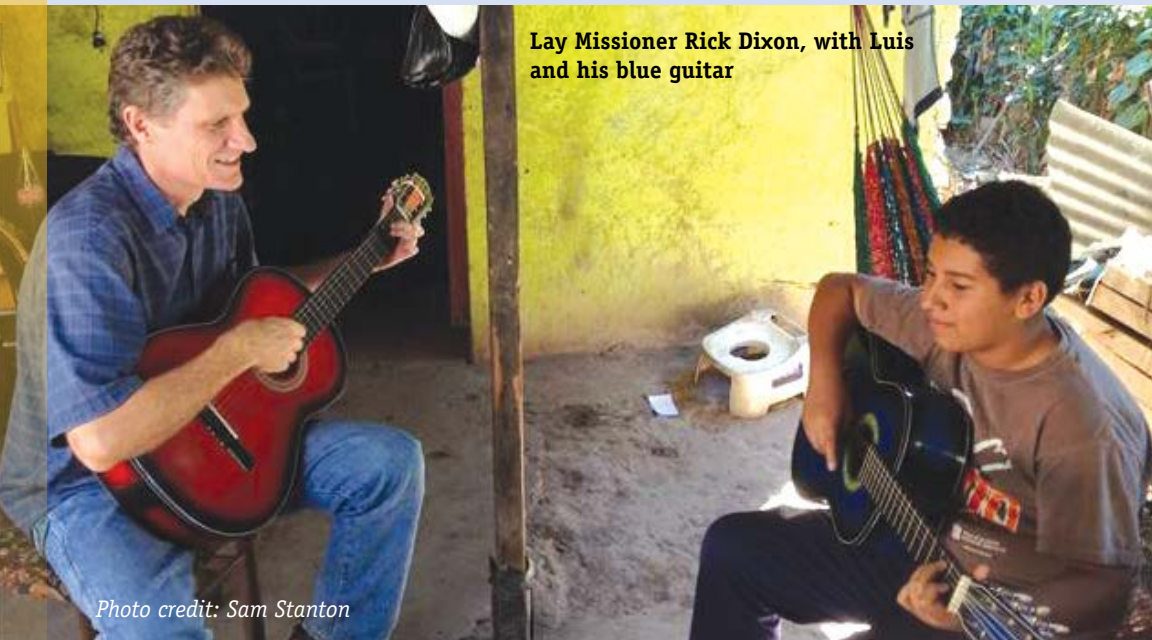


The Blue Guitar

by **Maryknoll Lay Missioner
Rick Dixon, El Salvador**

Since 2012, Rick Dixon has served in Cojutepeque, El Salvador, promoting family literacy. His work includes a small mobile library, complete with a wheelbarrow, which he takes to different homes to engage parents, children and young adults. He recently met a little boy, Luis, whose grandmother was a victim of gang violence. Luis carries around the death of his grandmother like a reprieve on his own life. Rick's words best tell the story of Luis and the blue guitar:

Luis picked up the guitar and strummed. He then sat silent for a few minutes and strummed again. "I like the sound," he said, "can I take it home?" I told him I'd ask his mother. He didn't like the idea. "She works and won't be home until late. Just let me take it," he pleaded, "I promise I'll bring it back. I'll take good care of it and won't let anyone else use it." I explained to Luis I couldn't give him the guitar without his mother taking responsibility for it, but he insisted and became very anxious. Knowing the sound of six strings over a hollow void touched a place in him, I let him take it. That evening, coming out of a church meeting, I ran into his mother and told her I had lent Luis a guitar. "I'll make sure you get it back," she said. "But please don't lend it to him again. He can play it at the library."



**Lay Missioner Rick Dixon, with Luis
and his blue guitar**

Photo credit: Sam Stanton



Justin and *The Blue Guitar*

Photo Courtesy of Rick Dixon

The next day Luis brought the guitar back. He turned it over and over, saying, "Look no scratches." He ran his thumb down the strings. "Still tuned." Then the inevitable, "Can I take it home again?" "Sorry," I told him. "I saw your mother last night and she said not to lend it to you." "But I brought it back in perfect condition. What more does she want?" "Ask her yourself."

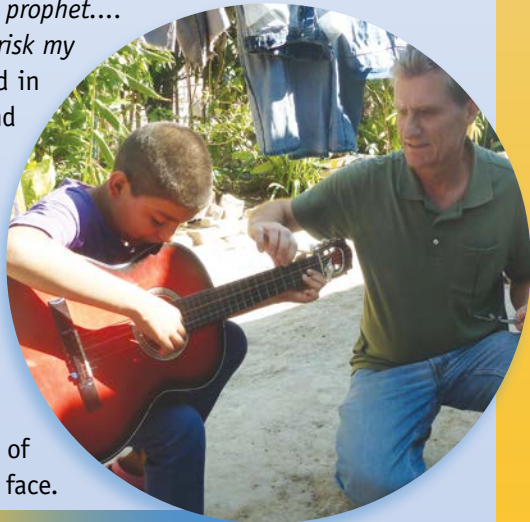
I pulled up a chair and pointed to it. "She's not here. So now's your chance to tell her something. Just get it out." A series of strange, guttural sounds plowed into each other. The only thing I understood was the reddish-blue anger glowing on his forehead. Three other kids came in and asked if they could paint, so I gave them paper and watercolors. Luis painted trees. The canopy of the first doubled as a flying saucer; the second was a leafy shelter; the third was stripped bare, nothing but dead branches hanging with guitars.

As the kids painted, I picked up a guitar and sang 'The Prophet.' The first few lines go like this: *Before you were formed in your mother's womb I knew you.*

Before you were born I consecrated you as my prophet....

Then the chorus: *I have to cry out. I have to risk my life. Woe is me if I don't.* The four boys joined in here. After a few rounds of this, I got up and congratulated them on their paintings. "So can I take the guitar home tonight?" Luis asked. "Why don't we wait a few days? I'll talk to your mother again. In the meantime, why don't you take your painting home and give it to her as a gift? Try explaining what it means to you, the guitars too."

Luis took the painting and held it like a charm of hope, and he walked home with a smile on his face.



Rick teaches Marcos how to play a new chord

Photo Courtesy of Rick Dixon

Only the Barest Necessities

by **Maryknoll Lay Missioner**
Dee Dungy, Cambodia

Photo Courtesy of Dee Dungy



I missed my good friend, Phaney, once a student at our center. Her grandfather took her back to his village for the summer. After numerous calls to ask him about Phaney's well-being as well as a request for her to return to school, he decided Phaney would stay in their small village miles from school. My staff and I called Phaney every now and then to check-up on her. She ended her calls with, "I love you." I giggled and said, "Out of all the English words in the world, you memorized these, why?" She just chuckled and hung up the phone.

Months passed and I was not satisfied knowing that Phaney, a very bright 15-year-old young lady in the fourth grade, was not continuing her studies. My spirit pushed me to go visit her. So one of my staff members and I packed his motorcycle on the bus. Three hours later, we got off the bus at the closest bus station to her village and drove through the barren countryside for another hour and a half until we got there.



House of Phaney's Grandfather

Photo Courtesy of Chanthy Raoth

When we arrived, her family and several villagers came out to meet us. Phaney's grandfather explained that four or five years ago, families were displaced from their homeland and came to settle in this barren area, known as Jeav, about forty miles from the main city. At first, only four families lived in this barren little



Dee Dungy in blue shirt with Phaney's Family

Photo Courtesy of Chantry Raath

village, but now there are twenty-seven. This village does not have electricity, running water or bathrooms. Water is trucked in every six weeks. This place looks like a desert without dunes and with no hiding places – it is truly barren. The closest school is about a 45 minute motorcycle drive away. Phaney's grandfather does his best to take Phaney to school every other day, but this is not enough to get her into her right grade level by the next school term.

Several families invited us to dinner that night. I spent most of my time dancing and talking with Phaney and her siblings. At one point, Phaney asked me, "Bong srey, you see cow?" As she pointed to a spot in the distance, I murmured, "Yes." She continued, "Last week four cows and many chickens died because it was so hot here. Come, follow me. I have to get the cow untangled from over there." I followed her and helped her free the cow from the brambles where it was tangled. Over and over again, I thought to myself, "How do they do it? How do they live with only the barest necessities?"

We decided to stay with Phaney's grandparents and siblings that night. Her grandmother pointed to where I could wash, so I splashed my face and feet and fell asleep straight away in their little house. It had a partial roof and no walls. The lights and fan were powered by a car battery.

I must admit, I slept very well and was quite comfortable. Phaney's grandfather greeted me in the morning with tea and noodles. He asked me, "Bong srey, can you find a way to get Phaney back into school?" I told him that I would pray for a way to get her back to school and that I would be in touch with him.

I kept his request to get Phaney back in school in my prayers that weekend. On Monday, I emailed Sr. Helene, a Maryknoll Sister in Cambodia, about the possibility of Phaney entering her program for vulnerable girls. The following week, Phaney entered Sr. Helene's program where she now studies with other sixth graders. God willing, Phaney will continue her studies, enter vocational school, and have a fulfilling career.

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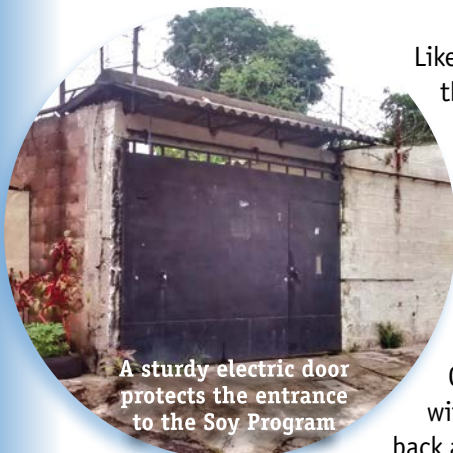
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Mission Possible

II

by Maryknoll
Lay Missioner

Dwayne Fernandes,
El Salvador



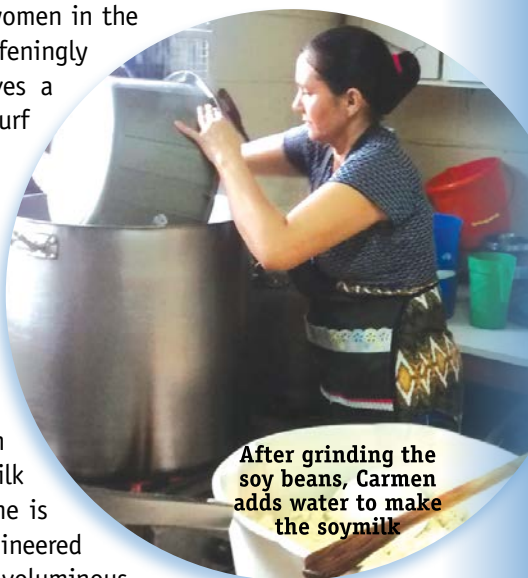
A sturdy electric door protects the entrance to the Soy Program

Like a curtain secretly drawn, a sturdy black gate shelters the Soy Program on a street where undetectable barriers dictate where one walks or crosses. But it's been there for over two decades and the rival gangs who control the small suburb of San Ramón, which houses the Soy Program, obviously endorse whatever happens behind the black gate and we benefit, in some way, from the presence of an invisibly, visible gang.

Photo Credit: Dwayne Fernandes

Carmen is usually the first to arrive. Small in stature with an infectious laugh, she wears her hair pulled back and sports a bright red lipstick that adds chirpy color to her otherwise introverted self. I haven't met her mother, but when her two young sons, one of whom has special needs, happen to stop by the Soy Program, I do not hesitate to offer them salpores (soy cookies), which they gleefully consume with the voracious appetite of growing boys. Her husband, I have been told, was killed early in their marriage, a random act allegedly tied to gang initiation. Carmen's story is common to most women in the neighborhood of the Soy Program and speaks deafeningly of a reality where machismo masculinity drives a culture liberally peppered with unrestrained turf battles between gangs.

The hum of an industrial grinder meets my entrance and with a loud and flashy, "Buenos Días, Niña Carmen," I try to imitate the Salvadoran accent with little success. Incidentally, all the women who work at the Soy Program call each other niña (little girl) and I have grown to adore this little play of affection. I can't see Carmen yet as she is hidden behind the window slats that designate the "milk plant" area of the Soy Program, but I know she is there hand-feeding soybeans to a locally engineered wet grinder. The tub of hydrated soybeans is voluminous



After grinding the soy beans, Carmen adds water to make the soymilk

Photo Credit: Dwayne Fernandes

and it will take her at least 45 minutes to an hour to complete the first step of “milk” production. By this time, Wilma and Ann will have long arrived.

If a wild flower is to be found on her way to the Soy Program, Wilma will have plucked and placed it delicately on her ear. Motherly and jolly by nature, she always insists she is on a new diet, but sugar crusted pastries, ten to the dollar, can invariably be discovered and exhumed by her work-station. “Quiero café, Dwayne!” could well be her first words and I have grown to anticipate this demand for the steaming, black brew that jumpstarts the Salvadoran workday.

We fire up the oven twice a week to make soy breads or soy cookies but today is market day and Wilma and I will soon head to the Zacamil market, a 15 minute bus ride from the Soy Program, armed with recycled bags. The list is not long but heavy – onions, carrots, celery, tomatoes, squash, corn, and yucca that will go into making a bean and vegetable soup. The Soy Program serves about 50 families daily and each family receives 5 cups of soymilk



Soy Pancakes with a sugarcane-molasses syrup

Photo credit: Dwayne Fernandes



Wilma learns how to make a solar oven with recycled materials

Photo credit: Dwayne Fernandes

and a substantial portion of the meal special - be it the bean and vegetable soup, spinach or yucca griddle cakes, spaghetti and soy protein in a tomato sauce, red bean chili, cookies or our prized soy pancakes with a sugarcane-molasses syrup.

It's important that I be seen with Wilma on market days, not only in the neighborhood but also on the bus. With the turf wars, given my skin color and shaved head, there is sufficient reason to announce that I am not a threat to the community nor a member of a rival gang. In fact, Wilma – a resident of San Ramón - was so afraid for my safety during the first 15 months of my work at the Soy Program that I wasn't even allowed to walk by myself to the corner store – a minute away - to buy eggs or yeast. The anxiety, though, continues for Wilma, a single mother; her sons are young and along with the aggressive peer pressure to join a gang, the streets are alive with stray bullets, stabbings, abductions and other gang-related activities.

By the time we are back from the market, Carmen will be done grinding the beans,

and the soy puree simmers with added water in gigantic stock pots. Mix the hot tin roof with the heat from a two-burner commercial sized stove and you've got yourself the makings of a muggy sweat-lodge. A little while later, Carmen will hand press the searing liquid to strain the soymilk from the okara (soy pulp). The work is laborious and hard, yet Carmen is one of the few, fortunate to have a job. With an high unemployment rate and a dismal to no minimum wage, it is common for an agricultural worker, for example, to take home no more than \$115.00 a month to provide for a family of four or more.

To me, the Salvadoran palate lacks adventure and when Wilma is distracted, I often find myself furtively speckling the boiling cauldron with ginger, cumin, turmeric or coriander.

The best part of the day is the afternoon. After lunch, Ann puts on a large pot of coffee and we migrate to a weathered table, shaded by hanging flower pots, for a lazy half-hour of unprompted conversation. Often, this time is not meant to last as the foyer quickly fills up to collect their meal supplement and soymilk.



Beneficiaries picking up soymilk in the afternoon

Photo credit: Dwayne Fernandes

The making of the bean and vegetable soup is easy, and hints of a tri-colored vegetable mix, partnered with crushed garlic, soon spike the morning air. The vegetables are hand washed meticulously with soap and water and later soaked in an iodine solution to exterminate any obstinate bacteria. Cilantro is added by the handful along with a bouquet of other minty and peppery herbs. The beans start to bubble but the Indian in me is restless.

Each family is encouraged to contribute \$1.50 per week but with over 36% of Salvadorans living below the poverty level, even this can be too high a price to pay. The gathered mood is cheery and the women usually linger for a cup of coffee and soy cookies, ever willing to help out with sundry tasks. Life-stories are told and re-told, unconsciously making this a rare, safe and sacred space for the women and children of San Ramón.

Karen joined us last December as Marketing Executive, part of a three-fold initiative of the Soy Program to create further employment opportunities for Salvadorans, market our soy products, and make the Soy Program more self-sustaining. The job description was spot-on for her. She also carved her own niche in the kitchen as we tested and tweaked soy-based recipes to launch our entry into the Salvadoran market.

This was an exciting time for the Soy Program - designing artwork, augmenting pictures for Facebook posts, revering our first colored brochure as it emerged warm from a professional printer, arguing about competitive pricing, calculating the nutritional table for each of our products, promoting tastings and signing up clients. By May, we were supplying soymilk and soy products to four gyms, one school, two



Karen puts the brand on the bags to package products

Photo Credit: Dwayne Fernandes

vegetarian restaurants and about three new consumers every week through our on-line and grapevine advertising. Little did we know that come August, we would be invited to participate in La Consuma – El Salvador's largest and most prestigious trade exposition – and would be geared to make, in less than a week, 8000

salpores (soy cookies), 200 quesadillas (a savory / sweet tea cake), 1200 oatmeal / chocolate chip cookies, 100 banana breads, 300 brownies, 75 soy burgers and 100 liters of soymilk to market and sell at the 10 day event.

Anxiety levels were high the last week of July, and with a sore back, hunched over from shaping tiny balls of sticky dough into 8000 cookies, it was a blessing that the late-afternoon rains cooled down the smoldering environment. Copious cups of

Photo Courtesy of Dwayne Fernandes



The Soy Team – Wilma, Ann, Carmen, Karen and Dwayne

coffee kept the team focused but jittery. Sets of eyes mechanically glanced at the cheap plastic clock as its hands teased away the seconds. It was only the determined jingle of a familiar bicycle bell that brought relief to the wilting work crew. Don Antonio dependably arrives around closing time every evening to collect any surplus okara (soy pulp), which goes into a feed for his cows. A few years ago, he suggested a barter that we couldn't refuse, and every so often it is refreshing to have another man about the house, especially one who is built with the shoulders to juggle sacks of protein-rich soybeans.

This is year two of my three and one-half year contract and I am already discerning making the Soy Program a lifelong commitment. Ann Greig, who co-founded the Soy Program 22 years ago, has been an inspiration, representing the values and vision of Maryknoll Lay Missioners and exuding a sense of loyalty that's addictive. Hope, too, is encompassing, and untiring optimism for a better future for the people

of El Salvador blatantly details the work to be realized. With 40% of children under the age of five in rural areas struggling with chronic and acute malnutrition, the need to focus on education and a healthy diet intensifies. We gave 16 nutrition workshops last year but with limited staff and related expenses the offering stays tentative. But we remain dogged in our efforts. Blessed with a couple of unswerving donors and reenergized by our current efforts at commercialization, there is the emerging resolution to create more employment opportunities, commit to workshops and education, generate a few scholarships to assist the neighborhood children and extend further invitations to students at the University of El Salvador to intern with us.

The challenges, though, are inescapable, the violence is real, but I have never been happier. With the persistent intuition that somehow I am being watched over by a guiding Spirit, I am surprisingly at peace surrendering to the divine plan.

Photo Courtesy of Ann Greig



Ann Greig describes the many uses of soy flour at one of her Nutrition Workshops

ON THE ROAD... AGAIN

by Maryknoll Lay Missioner Maria Montello, Cambodia

Part of the responsibility of being a Maryknoll Lay Missioner is to occasionally speak at Masses in the United States about our mission work. I recently took a road trip through parts of southern Minnesota to do a few “church talks.” These church talks are an opportunity for MKLM to recruit new missionaries and pass the hat, something necessary to sustain our organization. They also afford us a time to speak about the meaning of “mission,” to ask for prayers from and promise prayers to a parish community of fellow missionaries. I made my way from Northfield to New Ulm to Hutchinson to Stewart – charming-

small-town-Minnesota at its best. Perhaps my favorite stop was Stewart, where they were setting up for a parade and pancake breakfast on the morning I arrived. I laughed out loud, thinking, “All this fanfare for an unknown missionary from the other side of the world?!” The annual “Stewart Days” celebration reminded me of my time living in Minnesota, a state where people know how to celebrate summer. In addition, Stewart, with a population of 574, was the town where I had my highest turnout ever for a church talk – ten percent of the whole town was there!

When I speak with parish communities,

I talk about my work in Cambodia teaching critical thinking at the university. I refer to the message of St. Paul: ***We are all missionaries. We are all called to evangelize.*** Pope Francis made clear how we are to “do mission” today. The Church “does not grow by means of proselytizing,” but “by attraction, by



Maria greets Stewart, MN, in the traditional Cambodian way

Photo Credit: Lisa Schunk

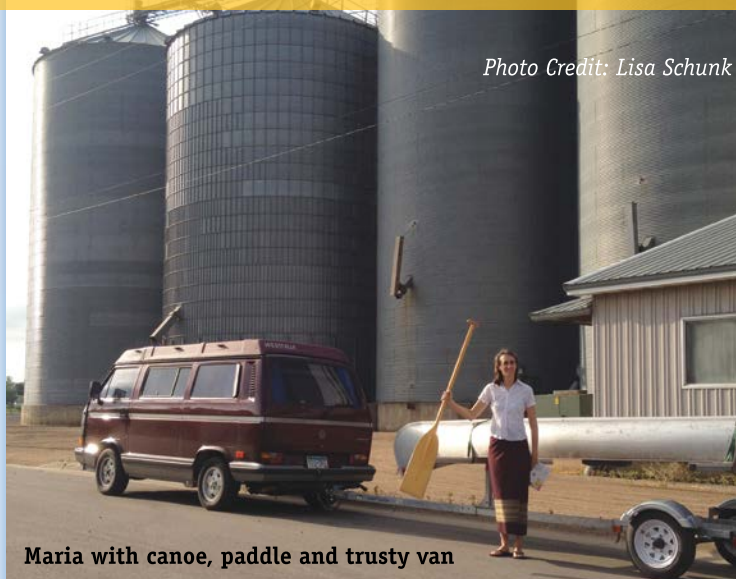


Photo Credit: Lisa Schunk

Maria with canoe, paddle and trusty van

witnessing, by preaching [the Gospel]."

How can you and I do mission in our workaday world? Another Francis, St. Francis of Assisi, made clear how best to "evangelize." He said we are to **preach the Gospel always, and when necessary, use words.** This is prudent advice to me, a Catholic missionary teaching philosophy in a public university in Cambodia where Buddhism is the state religion. In the United States, I see so many examples of people evangelizing in just this way, people living the radical message of Christ to be light in a seemingly dark time, to be selfless in a "selfie" world. This is always encouraging to me.

So, I say "thank you" to the parishioners who welcomed me this June. I imagine that in a small town in Minnesota, it is a rare occasion to see a missionary from Asia dressed in traditional Khmer clothes, emerging from a VW camper van with a canoe in tow. Even so, I left feeling embraced by each and every parishioner I spoke with - my "companions in mission" on the other side of the world.

MKLM'S OUTREACH TO THE U.S. CATHOLIC DIOCESES

Maryknoll Lay Missioners would like to thank all the parishes that invited us to give our presentations on Laity in Mission at our "Church Talks." This summer, MKLM scheduled 106 Church Talks, which covered a total of 38 dioceses, thanks to the Mission Outreach coordination of Alicia Butkiewicz, and tremendous support from Sam Stanton. Our appeals were made in English, Spanish, Portuguese and Vietnamese. We are so grateful to all Missioners, Returned Missioners, and other guest speakers who have given their time and talent toward spreading the good news of MKLM across the Catholic Church in the U.S. If you would like to help us increase our number of Church Talks in 2017 and have one of our missioners speak at your parish, please contact Alicia at 212-837-2756 or abutkiewicz@mklm.org and she will gladly guide you through the process.

WE ACCOMPANIED THEM THROUGH THE NIGHT

by Friends Across Borders' Participant
Bridget O'Donnell Muller

In June of 2016, I participated in a Maryknoll Lay Missioners' Friends Across Borders trip to El Salvador. On the first night of our arrival, the ten of us - women and men from all across the United States who were journeying for different reasons - sat in a circle in a meeting room at the retreat house of the Sisters of the Asunción, which is located in Planes de Renderos in Panchimalco. The retreat house would be our home for the next ten days. We were an eager collective, restless with curiosity; some travelers held more apprehension than others. Certainly, as a group, we knew little of El Salvador except what we had read or seen in movies. The convent sits at the top of a hill and around us (outside our nondescript classroom-like meeting space); rich gardens of ropy vines, gigantic succulents, and exotic red, orange and yellow flowers cascaded down the slopes surrounding us. The air smelled of gardenias.

Mary Delaney, a dark-haired, Irish-looking woman with a big easy laugh, began to guide us into reflection. In the 1980s and '90s, Mary spent six years as a Maryknoll Lay Missioner in Nicaragua working at an orphanage for children with special needs. As we relaxed into our quiet time, people closed their eyes, slowed their breathing. All of that meditative energy froze and became brittle when the crack of gunfire exploded through the open windows. Our backs straightened in our plastic chairs. After what felt like an extremely long silence, Peter Altman, one of our Maryknoll Lay Missioner guides, said (in a dead-pan way which we would all learn to anticipate and treasure), "By the way, those were fireworks." Our spines released. We all laughed. It would turn out to be Peter who would push us - each night - to question and acknowledge the limitations of our own conclusions.



Bridget O'Donnell Muller and
Lay Missioner Peter Altman under a
portrait of Blessed Oscar Romero

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Over the next ten days, we became more acquainted with the noises and pictures of El Salvador: the ricochet of those celebratory fireworks rocketing through the night and into the early hours; the rain, lashing the convent as we tried to sleep; the tortured sounding screech of the geckos; and—as we woke—the crowing of roosters from patches of land below. We grew acclimated to the rhythmic syllables of Spanish and to the warmth of the El Salvadoran people, Buenos Días, Buenas Tardes, Buenas Noches. Through the windows of our bus, we saw men on the side of the road hoisting assault rifles. We also watched ragged mist hovering over blue-green mountains.

But that first night, we knew nothing except that we were each seeking an answer — either personal or theoretical — that might counter the injustices we anticipated. Rick Dixon, a thin man who carries a stillness with him, was another of our in-country guides. Rick, a Maryknoll Lay Missioner since 2012, is also a writer who recently published a piece in *America* magazine about his work in El Salvador. Rick promotes family literacy through a number of programs he organizes in a squatter settlement in Cojutepeque; in the tiny gathering space in the settlement he

would lead us to a few days later, we'd clear off the altar to read books with children beneath the very grounded gaze of a statue of a pregnant Blessed Mother.

That first night, after we all recovered from our brush with imagined gunfire, Rick shared with us what we would hear repeated by all the Lay Missioners. There is no answer. The changes necessary to transform El Salvador towards justice, and towards what we Catholics might call the Kingdom of God, may not come in the missioners' lifetimes. Perhaps they won't come in the world's history. Rick leaned forward. He told us about what allowed him to continue, with hope. It was the theology of accompaniment. Because it is

so dangerous in El Salvador

(currently because of a gang culture that was

nurtured in and then deported

from the United States),

when one agrees to

accompany another in

El Salvador, it is one of

the strongest statements of

support a person can offer another.

Maryknoll Lay Missioners

accompany the poor by living alongside them and by being in solidarity with them. They accompany by walking beside the powerlessness of the Salvadoran people.



Mural of the four martyrs: Sr. Ita Ford, Sr. Maura Clarke, Lay Missioner Jean Donovan, and Sr. Dorothy Kazel

Photos Courtesy of
Bridget O'Donnell Muller

A JOURNEY TO LOVE

On the trip, I was searching to learn more about my own story of accompaniment and I felt closely tied to the four churchwomen (Dorothy Kazel, an Ursuline sister; Maura Clarke, a Maryknoll sister; Ita Ford, a Maryknoll sister; and Jean Donovan, a lay missionary with the Cleveland Diocesan Mission Team) who were raped and murdered execution-style by members of the National Guard on December 2, 1980. I'm challenged by their total commitment to accompanying the Salvadoran people in their struggles.

In Ita Ford's reflection to Maryknoll in 1977, when she was still in Chile (before she came to El Salvador in response to Oscar Romero's plea for pastoral help), this is how she described what I came to understand as this theology of accompaniment:

"In reflecting about it alone and with others, I see Chile deeply experiencing the paschal mystery, with the light of Easter still to come...The challenge that we live daily is to enter into this mystery with faith. Am I willing to suffer with the people here, the suffering of the powerless, the feeling impotent? Can I say to my neighbors—I have no solutions to this situation; I don't know the answers, but I will walk with you, search with you, be with you. Can I let myself be evangelized by this opportunity? Can I look at and accept my own poorness as I learn it from other ones?"

Early on in the trip, our group visited the memorial dedicated to the murdered churchwomen, which includes a chapel built in their honor. Outside the colorful chapel looms an ancient, royal-looking, matriarch of a tihuilote tree; its gnarled



Two views of the chapel built to honor the four martyrs

Photo Credit: Deacon Don Weigel

roots and its mammoth trunk are thought to be the final images the women saw before they were killed. The tree, protected forever when the site was designated an historical site, has been described as the only witness to the killing. Accompaniment is deeper than witness; it pushes us out of comfortable bystander mode. It does not allow us to remain mute. Instead, it demands that we somehow participate in the suffering in whatever way our vocation allows.

Can I be that open to Love? We'll see, as I discern my own path in the coming year. I think everyone on my trip would agree with me when I say that the Maryknoll Lay Missioners we visited have entrusted their lives to Love. On one of our final nights of reflection, Peter Altman, our hard-to-impress Maryknoll Lay Missioner guide

said, "Well, we all know how it ends, right? In the end, Love wins."

When I returned to the United States, I visited Maryknoll in Ossining, New York. On every Maryknoll priest's grave, flat gray stones, signs of so many lives passed, was this statement, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God." At our layover in the Atlanta airport, I got into a discussion with one of my co-travelers, Vince Hand—a passionate student of Spanish and an engineer—about everything we'd experienced and what it meant as we moved towards our own futures.

"But what if everyone accompanied the way the lay missioners do?" I said.

"Well, then, the Kingdom of God would be at hand," Vince said. And on that point, we both agreed.



***"Well, we all know how it ends, right?
In the end, Love wins."***

Photo Courtesy of Bridget O'Donnell Muller



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February 9 - 25, 2017
Deadline for signups: November 9, 2016
- **BRAZIL, June 2 - 11, 2017**
Deadline for signups: March 2, 2017
- **EL SALVADOR - JustFaith Ministries**
June 30 - July 9, 2017
Deadline for signups: March 1, 2017
- **CHILE - Notre Dame - Marquette**
July 8 - 24, 2017
Deadline for signups: March 9, 2017
- **TANZANIA - JustFaith Ministries**
August 4 - 13, 2017
Deadline for signups: April 4, 2017
- **BOLIVIA, August 11- 20, 2017**
Deadline for signups: April 11, 2017
- **CAMBODIA, August 11- 20, 2017**
Deadline for signups: April 11, 2017
- **CHILE - Notre Dame - Marquette**
February 9 - 25, 2018
Deadline for signups: November 9, 2017



CONTACT US TODAY:

CECILIA ESPINOZA
Maryknoll Lay Missioners
Friends Across Borders Manager
P.O. Box 307
Maryknoll, NY 10545-0307

Phone: 914-236-3474
FAX: 914-762-7362
friendsacrossborders@mkmlm.org
www.friendsacrossborders.org

My Path

Photo Credit: Padre Valdir Silveira

by Maryknoll Lay Missioner
Claire Stewart, Brazil

Claire Stewart spent a year as a member of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, studied abroad in Italy, volunteered with the Little Sisters of the Poor in Mobile, Alabama, and the Missionaries of Charity in Bologna, Italy, and Houston, Texas, traveled to El Salvador and the Dominican Republic on immersion trips while attending Spring Hill College, taught English as a second language and tutored Somali refugees for Catholic Charities in Nashville, Tennessee, and then discerned a call to embark on a mission journey with Maryknoll Lay Missioners in 2015. Claire has just begun her journey with our organization but her reflection below captures how she views herself as a young adult woman in overseas mission.



Claire with a prisoner
venerating a statue of
Our Lady of Aparecida

"I remember a magnet that was once on my fridge. I am not quite sure where it came from, but it said, 'Be the change that you want to see in the world,' (Mahatma Gandhi). At this time in my life, I make this my daily mantra when I wake up in the morning, walk down the street or encounter someone who is hungry. I found that the path most desired in life is sometimes not the most direct or simple route. The path can be bumpy with ruts and gravel and may even be impassible.

No one has ever said being in mission was easy; however, no missioner I have met ever said that their journey was unfulfilling. Each day comes with its challenges. How do I deal with the poverty I see - the cracked feet, cardboard box houses, hungry eyes, weathered faces and the children who might not have an idea of what stability looks like?



A carving of the Divine Mercy
in soap by a prisoner

Photo Credit: Padre Valdir Silveira

My path consists of people who are marginalized and who have seen the true cruelty that humanity bestows upon them - *indifference*. My adventure is overwhelming, toiling and painful. The main lesson I have learned over the past months is, 'We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love,' (Mother Teresa). So how do I deal with the poverty before me? I carry a backpack full of snacks, a heart full of prayers and a smile."

A Journey to Mission

by Maryknoll Affiliate Kelly Booth

Inspired by their teacher, Mary Logan, students from the Red Bank Catholic High School Class of 2007 started the Red Bank Catholic (RBC) Maryknoll Affiliate Club with Ms. Logan as the moderator. Since then, the club has expanded its local and global service projects and is now moderated by religion teacher and campus minister Kelly Booth, one of the original Affiliates from the class of 2007. Being part of this great tradition of service at Red Bank Catholic High School encouraged Kelly to stay involved in “mission” throughout his years in college and eventually led him back to Red Bank Catholic.



Kelly Booth in Tanzania during recent FAB trip

Photo Credit: Jill Cole

In 2012, Kelly graduated from Misericordia University, a Sister of Mercy Institution, with degrees in elementary and special education. Through the Religion Department at Misericordia, he taught in struggling areas of Jamaica and Guyana. From these experiences, Kelly learned how faith keeps many communities united by supporting others through God’s will. Kelly feels he was blessed to live and learn from a community that had very little, but did so much with what they had.

Kelly writes, “Now that I have the privilege of teaching at Red Bank Catholic in the Religion Department, I am spreading the JOY of Mission to our student body. I have been given the honor to mentor the students in the Maryknoll tradition. Through the tradition of being a student here and our call to service, my students are eager to support and raise awareness for the education of young women around the world.”

Over the past two years, Kelly immersed himself in two of Maryknoll Lay Missioners’ Friends Across Borders trips. During these trips, he experienced Lay Missioners inspired by the mission of Jesus, living and working with poor communities, responding to

basic needs and helping to create a more just and compassionate world. Red Bank Catholic is connecting and building bridges across borders with the El Salvador and Tanzania MKLM Regions. To raise awareness and funds for these missions, the club sells “mission water” (bottled water) in the school’s bookstore all year. When students purchase the water, they see a picture and a biography of the Lay Missioner who is being recognized that month, as well as a description of that particular Lay Missioner’s ministry. This information motivates Red Bank students to learn more about Maryknoll Lay Missioners, their Friends Across Borders, and to “be happy, do as much as they can, for as long as they can, while they can.”

Photo Credit: Jill Cole

**A young mentor teaches
Kelly Booth the fine art of
craft-making during his
recent FAB trip to
Tanzania**



Where are they NOW?

RETURNED MARYKNOLL LAY MISSIONER STEVE POHL, VENEZUELA, BOLIVIA

Returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner Steve Pohl joined MKLM in 2005, and served in Venezuela and Bolivia for six years until 2011. While living in a rural community in Venezuela, Steve took an interest in students who were affected by blindness. After transitioning to Cochabamba, Bolivia, Steve served youth whose parents had emigrated to search for work. He also was involved in two music ministries, one of which traveled to rural and urban communities that did not have churches.

In 2009, Steve began working with students with visual impairments at the Ignacio Zalles Foundation. He acquired several skills, including transcribing to and from braille, adapting materials, and coordinating workshops. Steve frequently joined the community-based rehabilitation team that traveled to remote areas and provided training for residents who served their neighbors living with disabilities.

In 2011, Steve returned to the United States to pursue a master's degree in education, specializing in visual disabilities. He completed his studies in 2013, and currently works near Richmond, Virginia, as an orientation and mobility instructor and a teacher of students with varying degrees of vision loss.

In 2014 and 2016, Steve returned to Bolivia and presented workshops on pediatric orientation and mobility, as well as instructional strategies for students with visual impairments. He reunited with musicians from his former music ministries and they played together at Masses. Steve remains grateful to MKLM and his South American friends and colleagues, who were instrumental in the formation of his life-changing career.



Steve working with a visually impaired student
Photo Credit: Olgarinha Ledezma

As Steve's story illustrates, the ministries that our Lay Missioners began overseas don't end when they return home. Rather, our returned missioners continue to serve people in need and "live out the Gospel" across our nation and beyond. Please visit our "Returned Missioners" page on www.mkmlm.org and our "Always A Missioner" Facebook page at www.facebook.com/AlwaysAMissioner to stay connected and learn more.



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Lay Missioner Peg Vamósy



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