

VOICES *of* COMPASSION



Newsletter of Maryknoll Lay Missioners

Winter 2008

WOMEN IN MISSION: MKLM in Brazil



Dear Friend,

In this issue of *Voices of Compassion*, you will read about women in mission and, specifically, about Maryknoll Lay Missioners serving oppressed, impoverished and imprisoned women in Brazil.

Currently, we have a number of lay women missionaries engaged in such work. They serve prisoners, victims of domestic violence, mothers in need of nutritional information and those leading local efforts to advance equal rights for women.

To be impoverished in Latin America is to be among the poorest of the poor...those for whom we share a responsibility as members of Christ's body. Theirs are the very faces of poverty. They are not only poor, but often are also subjected to the abuse and domination known as "machismo." They endure unequal employment opportunities, lower pay than men for the same work, and reduced educational opportunities.



Alicia Butkiewicz is a native of Bolivia. She joined MKLM with her husband Bernie 27 years ago, and remained in Bolivia in order to serve the people there. Bernie and Alicia's three daughters, now ages 32, 30, and 28 were all born and raised in Bolivia.

This photo was taken during Alicia's 2004 visit to Kitale, Kenya.

Still, they must find the strength to hold together their families and the very fabric of their communities. It is our privilege to serve them in their daily struggles.

If you wish to learn more about MKLM, please call us at 1.800.867.2980, visit us at www.mkmlm.org or write us at: Maryknoll Lay Missioners PO Box 307 Maryknoll, NY 10545-0307

Like many other Maryknoll Lay Missioners, those who have been called to serve the poor women of Latin America must be both tough and tender. Our missionaries, while driven by compassion and an ability to relate to the suffering of others, must be strong enough to live and work in very challenging settings. They may be addressing very basic needs or walking arm-in-arm with those protecting women's (and human) rights. In every case, they are also working to create a broader understanding of the inherent dignity possessed by every one of God's children.

Be assured that they, and all of us, are strengthened by your prayers and financial support. We are humbled by your confidence and grateful for the chance to serve others on your behalf...and in Jesus' name. Thank you very much – from Maryknoll Lay Missioners in Latin America and around the globe.

In Mission,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. Butkiewicz." followed by a large, stylized flourish that extends to the right and then loops back down towards the left.

Alicia Butkiewicz
Director of Missions

IN THIS ISSUE

Lay Women in Mission

"She reaches out her hands to the poor, and extends her arms to the needy."

- Proverbs 31:20

For Maryknoll Lay Missioners, 2009 marks 35 years that we, and you, have been sending lay women to represent the U.S. Catholic Church in overseas mission!

In 1974, after a 13-week orientation and mission preparation session, MKLM fielded its first class of missionaries. Among the graduates was Gwen Nordgren, who went off to serve in Venezuela with her husband Phil. Since then, 357 lay women have served the poor overseas as Maryknoll Lay Missioners.

Although MKLM does not require a life-long commitment, many of our missionaries have chosen to stay on long after the initial 3½-year pledge. Current notables with more than a quarter century of service include 33-year veteran Liz Mach, as well as Alicia Butkiewicz and Ann Grieg, both with 27 years. (Please visit www.mkmlm.org to read more about Alicia, Ann, and Liz.)

Women, be they single or coupled, with or without children, have

made their mark in mission with MKLM. And they continue to do so in growing numbers. Of 103 MKLM missionaries, *more than half are women!* And, of those, 28 are mothers who have chosen to raise their children in a cross-cultural environment, so that the children, too, provide witness to God's presence throughout the world.

In America, women know well the difficulty of breaking the "glass-ceiling." We have bumped our heads



Through the São Paulo Archdiocesan Prison Ministry Sarah McLaughlin, left, visits inmates and serves as a link between them and the society outside the prison.

against it in our culture, our workplaces, our government, and our churches. Such gender-based inequities, painful as they are, often pale in comparison to those of our sisters in other countries, particularly those of the Global South. Simply and solely because of gender, many of our sisters in poorer nations are victims of culturally-accepted spousal or parental abuse and forced prostitution.

They may be denied an education. They may be denied basic human rights. They often are denied hope.

For our sisters *serving* overseas, the hardest part of mission is often the suffering that they witness. In this issue, we bring you the ministries through which our six women missionaries (out of a total of nine) serving in Brazil respond to that suffering.



Heidi Cerneka works with imprisoned women in São Paulo, providing them spiritual support, raising national awareness about the human injustices they suffer, and advocating for policy changes to improve their quality of life. About 9,000 women in São Paulo are behind bars.



The most difficult issues for mothers (and fathers) serving in mission are the quality of health care and education that is available to their children where they live. These must be weighed against their Catholic values in response to Jesus' call, and the opportunity for their children to grow up living those values with the awareness of the problems that exist throughout the world, all while developing a deep appreciation for and understanding of their brothers and sisters from another culture.



Joanne Blaney, serving in São Paulo, helps to empower women so that they may heal from domestic violence, rebuild their self-esteem and become full participants in society.

You, with MKLM, send remarkable women to help, to serve, and to promote the rights of other remarkable women worldwide! This issue of *Voices of Compassion* pays tribute to

women – those who serve and those who receive us...those who have paved our way...and those who will someday join us in fulfilling the mission of Jesus!



MKLM is a BBB Accredited Charity and a proud member of the BBB Charity Seal Program, which indicates a commitment to the 20 Standards for Charity Accountability. MKLM meets all the Standards, which assess our organization's finances, governance and oversight, effectiveness measures, and fundraising and informational materials.

TIMELINE: U.S. Catholic Women

1891:

Katherine Mary Drexel founds the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, dedicated to racial tolerance



and addressing the suffering and destitution among Native Americans

and African Americans caused by racial injustice.



1946:

Maria Francesca Cabrini, known during her life as "Mother Cabrini," becomes the first American citizen to be canonized a saint.

1974:

Gwen Nordgren, first woman Maryknoll Lay Missioner, is sent to Venezuela.



1933:

The Catholic Worker movement is founded in New York City by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin.

1947:

The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, KY, undertake their first mission outside of the United States, sending six sisters to India. Other missions followed in Belize, Botswana, and Nepal.



1975:

Elizabeth Ann Seton becomes the first native-born American to be canonized. She established the first American community of the Sisters of Charity, in Emmitsburg, Maryland, in 1809.

Women Serving the Poor



1976:

Liz Mach joins MKLM. Today, she is still an MKLM missionary, serving in Africa as a nurse.

2005:

Dorothy Stang, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur from Dayton, OH, is murdered for her work among landless peasants in Brazil. She becomes known as "Martyr of the Amazon."



2008:

61 lay women are serving with MKLM; 28 of these are moms raising their children in mission.



1980:

Maryknoll Sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford, Ursuline Sister

Dorothy Kazel, and Cleveland Lay Missioner Jean Donovan (who had undergone missionary formation and orientation with Maryknoll Lay Missioners), are murdered by a military death squad in El Salvador. Their martyrdom focuses world attention on the civil war in that country, and raises awareness of Maryknoll's charism of witnessing to justice for the poor.

2007:

Marie Dennis, Director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, is elected co-President of Pax Christi International, a Catholic Peace Movement active in more than 50 countries on five continents.



Welcome to Brazil

From the sights of Carnival to the sounds of samba, from the World Cup tournament grounds to the mountaintop pedestal of Christ the Redeemer, many come to enjoy the delights and wonders that are Brazil. MKLM missionaries are beckoned by another call.

São Paulo, Brazil is a city marked by violence, social exclusion of the great majority of its population, and intense degradation of the environment. Brazil has one of the most unequal income distributions in the world, with the wealthiest 10% receiving 50% of the nation's income and the poorest 10% receiving only 1%.



São Paulo is home to 10% of Brazil's population. At least two million people live in *favelas* (slums) in São Paulo; one million of these live in *cortiços* (collective slum houses). Along with the sanitation, health, and

environmental problems that accompany such crowded living conditions, crime and violence are rampant.

Physical assaults and the prevalence of guns are serious issues in many of the neighborhoods where MKLM missionaries work. The two most visible types of violence are drug-related conflicts and domestic abuse. In São Paulo, 65% of the population between 15 and 19 years of age lives on the periphery of the city where public services are lacking. The quality of the schools is poor and the level of unemployment is up to 70% in these neighborhoods. With so many youth lacking educational or job prospects, this territory is ripe for criminal gangs.

More than 40
million Brazilians
live on less than
\$2 a day.

Nearly 20 million
live on less than
\$1 a day.

Companions in Mission



Meet Jurencio, a ten year old boy living in East Timor. Gifts from



Companions in Mission sponsors enabled MKLM to send a missionary to build a specialized wheelchair for Jurencio and countless others like him. Now, Jurencio can finally travel to school.

This little boy is just one of the thousands of reasons why you should join MKLM's Companions in Mission sponsorship program.

To learn more, go to www.mkmlm.org, or call Libby DiSisto at 1-800-867-2980.

MKLM Missioners Appeal to Brazilian Government for Change in Prison Systems

São Paulo suffers from social and economic inequality and a prison system that shows disrespect for basic human rights. Overcrowding and inhuman conditions are the norm.

The prisons have been called “concentration camps” for society’s poorest and most marginalized citizens. And, while women compose only 6% of the prison population, they make up 30% of those incarcerated in woefully inadequate public jails.



Heidi Cerneka and Sarah McLaughlin, MKLM missionaries, work to address the situation of women in the São Paulo Prison System. Generally, the women are forgotten or ignored by the general population as well as the prison administration.

In December, 2006, Heidi was recognized nationally at the Legislative Assembly of São Paulo when she was honored with the tenth annual Santo Dias Human Rights Award for her work as the national coordinator of *Ministry to Women in Prison*. The award is named for the Catholic labor leader, Santos Dias da Silva, killed in 1979 by a military policeman. Heidi is also involved with a research and advocacy



Originally from St. Louis, Missouri, Heidi joined MKLM in 1996. Previous to that she worked in pastoral counseling at Loyola University Ministries in Chicago, IL. Her work there focused on women in situations of substance abuse and domestic violence. In addition, Heidi spent two years in Belize working with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. Heidi holds degrees from St. Mary's College in South Bend, IN, and Loyola University, Chicago.

group for imprisoned women and the State Criminal Execution Jurisdiction Community Council.

When interviewed by the Brazilian press, Heidi cited one of her more difficult cases – that of a woman, in prison for a minor offense, who was dying of cancer. “Much needed attention

was brought to the case, which enabled her to return home. She died last month with her family by her side.” Heidi stated that obtaining the 79-year-old woman’s liberty was a true victory.

In December, 2007, a 15-year-old girl arrested for petty theft was held in the same cell as 24 men over the course of 27 days, and raped by them repeatedly. “The first day, she was raped by one inmate, and during the following weeks, was forced to trade sexual

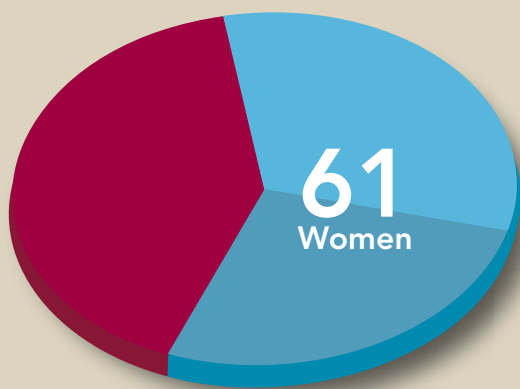
A 15-year-old girl arrested for petty theft was held in the same cell as 24 men over the course of 27 days, and raped by them repeatedly.

intercourse with other inmates for food. She awoke her first night to someone setting fire to her feet, and medical specialists have confirmed cigarette burns on her back,” Heidi recounts.

“Immediately, a commission from the governmental working group in which I participate was established to go to where Lurdes¹ had been imprisoned and raped under the eye of the corrupt local police. I am one of

¹ Name changed.

MKLM Statistics as of Jan 2008:



Of 103 missionaries:
61 are women; 28 are
moms raising their
children in mission.

28
Moms in
Mission

only two non-governmental members in the working group to make proposals for public policy and practices on women in prison in Brazil.”

In working to find justice for this victim, and to prevent further atrocities, Heidi has met with the Church’s Commission for Peace and Justice, the Center for the Defense of Children and Adolescents (Cedeca), Amnesty International, and the World Organization against Torture.

“We fully recognize that international pressure is the only thing that is going to keep this cause alive. If people

forget once again, then corruption is strengthened and victims are once again convinced that there is no point in speaking up. I continue to stay in mission as an MKLM missionary so that I can fight against atrocities such as the one to which Lurdes fell victim.”

Sarah McLaughlin joined the São Paulo Archdiocesan Prison Ministry team in 2007. Since then, Sarah has been working for the

rights of imprisoned men and women by acting as a liaison between the inmates and the outside world of lawyers, judges, prison directors, and other authoritative bodies. Like Heidi, she works tirelessly to provide a voice for the voiceless people within the prisons. Sarah also visits with the prisoners’ family members and helps the inmates and their families communicate with one another. In addition to working for the human and legal rights of inmates, the Prison Ministry is also the presence of the Catholic Church within the prison

system, providing spiritual support to the incarcerated men and women.

Each week, Sarah visits five different prison units within the city. The prisoners with whom Sarah works often have a variety of needs. Some do not speak Portuguese, the official language of Brazil, and rely on Sarah as a translator. Some are mothers, and Sarah brings their children to visit them. But what Sarah finds is universally common for all the people she visits is, “their need to be heard, their need to feel that someone cares about them and realizes that they

“I try to bring God’s love and a little bit of warmth with me on every visit I make.”



exist, and their need to be respected and valued as a special creation of God.”

“On a regular visit,” says Sarah, “I spend my time talking to inmates and being present to them. If they just want to talk, I listen. If they need information about their court cases, I take down their case number and bring it to them on the next visit. But first and foremost, I try to make sure that they know they are valued and that they have not been forgotten. Prison is a lonely and bitter

Sarah is from Burlington, Vermont where she was active in St. Pius X Parish in the Diocese of Burlington. Before joining MKLM in 2005, she worked in residential landscape design and greenhouses. Sarah came to MKLM with prior ministry experience in Honduras and was involved in the Newman Center at the University of Maine where she received her degree in Landscape Horticulture.

place. I try to bring God’s love and a little bit of warmth with me on every visit I make.”

To learn more about Heidi, Sarah, and other MKLM missionaries and their ministries, or to learn more about becoming an MKLM missionary, please visit www.mklm.org.

Fala Mulher!

MKLM Missioner Helps Women Speak Out Against Domestic Violence

According to United Nations statistics and reports, women in Latin America, and especially those in Brazil and Argentina, are victims of sexual aggression and rape with a greater frequency than women in any other place in the world. At least 35% of the women in the city of São Paulo are victims of domestic violence. Because many acts of domestic violence go unreported, the actual percentage is likely to be much greater.



Joanne Blaney, third from left, is originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She worked for many years as a junior-high school teacher and school principal in Philadelphia and Washington, DC. As a parishioner of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Anacostia, DC, Joanne has been a volunteer in women's shelters, literacy programs, educational groups, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) programs and parish councils. In addition to her work with Maryknoll Lay Missioners, Joanne had previous mission experience as the Co-Director of Franciscan Mission Service.



Every 15 seconds, a
Brazilian woman is beaten.

Every 15 seconds, a
Brazilian woman is
prevented from leaving
her home.

Every 15 seconds, a
Brazilian woman is forced
to have sexual relations
against her will.

In the time it took you to
read this, 3 women were
victimized. Violence
against women is the
third largest cause of
female mortality in Brazil,
and 70% of the
aggression occurs inside
their own homes.

MKLM missionary Joanne Blaney's primary ministry is working with women of São Paulo who are victims of domestic violence. Violence against women is a major problem in Brazil – Amnesty International recently cited Brazil as one of the countries with the worst levels of violence against women in the world. To address the problem, Joanne became a founding member of *Associação Fala Mulher!* (Speak, Woman!) to help women empower themselves, heal from violence, rebuild their self-esteem and become full participants in society.



Joanne served with Maryknoll Lay Missioners from 1991 to 1995, and re-joined us again in 2000.

Fala Mulher! is part of a broader network of women working with municipal and national groups on public policies in Brazil to combat sexual and domestic violence against

women. Joanne represents *Fala Mulher!* in various municipal forums and meetings.

She works with self-help groups and formation courses on gender issues, domestic violence, and restorative justice. The courses are part of a program that integrates body, mind and spirit so women can rebuild their lives in a healthy manner and without violence. They focus on healing, conflict resolution, nutrition, human rights and income generation. The women are connected with other

cooperatives and solidarity groups that struggle against injustice and exclusion. All of these components are critical in helping to provide women with what they need in order to overcome the effects of the abuse that they have been victims of, and avoid future abusive relationships. The project benefits approximately 200 women and their families each month.

To learn more about Joanne and other MKLM missionaries and their ministries, or to learn more about becoming an MKLM missionary, please visit www.mklm.org.

Forever Changed



If you or someone you know would like to learn more about becoming an MKLM missionary, please visit www.mklm.org/ForChange, or call or write to:

Michelle Born
Recruitment Manager
Maryknoll Lay Missioners
PO Box 307
Maryknoll, NY 10545 – 0307
1.800.818.5276 Ext. 114
MBorn@mklm.org

SPOTLIGHT: Moms in Mission:



ANNE-MARIE YU-PHELPS is one of our newest missionaries serving in João Pessoa, Brazil. Anne-Marie joined MKLM with her husband Jonathan and their two daughters, Madeleine and Grace, pictured above.

Anne-Marie's ministry, *Afya*, provides holistic healthcare and educational programs designed to help women become better educated about health and environmental issues, develop self-esteem, study holistic health practices to improve their lives, and be empowered as leaders to share what they have learned with others in their communities.

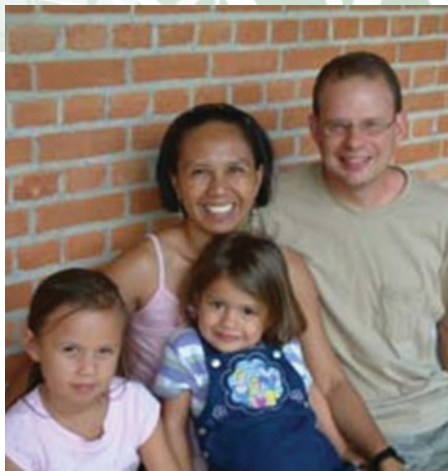
To learn more about Anne-Marie, Kathy, and Angel, or other MKLM missionaries and their ministries, please visit www.mkmlm.org.



KATHY BOND, also serving in João Pessoa, works in *Women's Rights Training*, helping to strengthen the women's movement by training Brazilian women leaders to increase the number of women's groups that focus on health, relationships, and human rights.

Here, Kathy is pictured with her husband and fellow MKLM missionary Flavio Rocha da Silva and their daughter Maya.

Angel believes that,
 "Mission is about acting
 justly, loving tenderly, and
 walking humbly with God"
 (cf. Micah 6:8).



ANGEL MORTEL joined Maryknoll Lay Missioners with her husband Chad Ribordy in 1997. Here they are pictured with their daughters Cecilia and Elisa, both born in Brazil.

Angel works with the *Pastoral da Criança* (Children's Ministry), an internationally recognized program of the National Council of Brazilian Bishops. *Pastoral da Criança* works to prevent malnutrition and diseases related to poor nutrition in children. As part of her work, Angel regularly visits families in the program, evaluates children's and pregnant women's health and development, and offers nutritional orientation and health advocacy when necessary.

ONCE A MISSIONER, ALWAYS A MISSIONER

Former Missioner Speaks with Vatican Officials on Role of Women in the Church

Former Maryknoll Lay Missioner Elizabeth (Betty Anne) Donnelly still works for the recognition and leadership of women in the Catholic Church. Betty Anne recently traveled to Rome with six other women to meet with five cardinals and other senior Vatican officials to discuss the status of women in the church. All of the women represent family foundations that support Catholic activities.



Betty Anne Donnelly, third from left, and friends meet with Cardinal William J. Levada, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Donnelly's mission assignment was Peru in the early 80's. She subsequently served for seven years on the MKLM Advisory Board. A trustee of the Mary J. Donnelly Foundation, she has also written extensively on the coalition of churches and non-governmental organizations that has pressed for debt relief for the poorest countries. Donnelly is married to Dr. Phil Pulaski, also a former Maryknoll Lay Missioner who served in Bolivia and now works with the homeless. They live in Belmont, Massachusetts with their three daughters.

Did You Know?



The three branches of Maryknoll – Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers, Maryknoll Sisters, and us, Maryknoll Lay Missioners – are each separately funded and operated.

Although we often join together to serve in mission, each entity depends on its unique donors for support.

Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers

Through contributions to Maryknoll Lay Missioners, you can make a difference in the lives of the poor in 14 countries worldwide. To make your gift, please complete the form below and return it today.

On behalf of all those that we are privileged to serve, we thank you very much.

Maryknoll Sisters

Maryknoll Lay Missioners



Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Check: Enclosed is my gift to Maryknoll Lay Missioners of:

☐ \$250 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$25 ☐ Other _____

Credit Card: Following is my information for my credit card gift to Maryknoll Lay Missioners:

☐ AMEX ☐ MasterCard ☐ Visa ☐ Discover Expiration Date: / /

Cardholder's Name: _____ Credit Card #: _____

Cardholder's Signature: _____

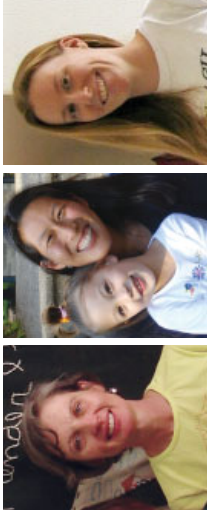
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INSIDE

Read the stories of MKLM's
women in mission in Brazil!