

VOC



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Voices Of Compassion

**WE ARE
ALL CALLED**



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Mission Awareness
Trip Opens Our
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Cover photo: Maryknoll Lay Missioner Larry Parr tutors Kelly Ramirez,
a Salvadoran schoolgirl, in the Las Delicias library
Photo courtesy of Larry Parr



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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.*

Dear Friends,

*Sam Stanton, Executive Director,
sharing smiles with children
in Bolivia*

“Mission work” is an aspect of Christian life that sometimes can be difficult to connect to or feel unattainable to those of us who have never been in a position to go on mission. However, we each participate in the call to mission through Baptism, which incorporates each of us into the Church and invites us to share the joy of the Gospel. Contributing to the goals of mission can be as simple as offering compassion to the people in communities around us.

For our Lay Missioners, being able to offer compassion comes through the transformative experience of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Compassion is a gift of the Spirit, so when we serve others in compassion, we ourselves experience its life-renewing, transforming grace. Karen Bortvedt, serving since 2013 in Cambodia, shares her story about that transformative power in this issue’s “Mission Called Me.”

For others, offering compassion can be an act of financial generosity. Maryknoll Lay Missioners is able to carry out its mission thanks to the generous donations of people who care. With your gifts, our Lay Missioners are equipped with the resources to shower attention on disabled children and AIDS orphans, educate poor communities about nutrition, ensure access to food and healthcare, tend the sick and visit the lonely and elderly. The donations we receive also allow MKLM to recruit, train, send and sustain our Lay Missioners.

In the article “Immersion into Tanzania,” Dan and Jean Heuer share how a *Friends Across Borders* (FAB) mission awareness trip led them to a deeper understanding of how their gifts to MKLM are applied in





*Orphan boys play soccer in Bolivia;
these include some of the children Maryknoll Lay Missioner Caitlin
Reichelderfer serves through her ministry as a nurse*

(All photos courtesy of Sam Stanton)



mission, as well as a profound respect for the people and culture they visited.

There are a multitude of ways to experience mission and its call. You may be considering joining one of our FAB immersion trips. Perhaps you have cross-cultural relationships through your parish's mission outreach efforts. You may enjoy reading Lay Missioner stories on our website, Facebook page or other materials. You may faithfully offer prayers for a Lay Missioner you know personally, or contribute financially to MKLM, helping enable our overseas ministries to continue.

No matter where the connection developed, we thank you for your partnership with Maryknoll Lay Missioners. With your support, we will continue offering Christ's compassion to those in need across Asia, Africa and the Americas, while continually experiencing change in ourselves through those experiences. I offer prayers of thanks and encouragement that mission continues to transform your life as well.

Yours in mission,

Sam Stanton
Executive Director

*"God's word is unpredictable in its power.
The Gospel speaks of a seed which, once sown, grows
by itself, even as the farmer sleeps (Mk 4:26-29)."*

*– Pope Francis,
Evangelii Gaudium*

Called to **OFFER** **HOPE**

THE BORDER CRISIS ISN'T OVER
(NYT, Oct. 11, 2014)

**American-Grown Gangs Fuel Immigration
Crisis From Central America**
(NBC News, July 25, 2014)

**Minors Fleeing Central America Face
Shaky Transition to U.S. Schools**
(NBC News, Sept. 15, 2014)

We read news headlines like these and sigh. Some of our reactions may include anxiety, prayer, mobilizing those around us to act or stifling indecision on what we should do. Many strong emotions surface when hearing the stories of Central American unaccompanied minors who may be escaping violence and lack of a future in their home countries or seeking to piece back together a family separated by borders. It is difficult to understand how we can affect change and help these vulnerable people caught in the middle of escalating attention.

Our Lay Missioners serving in El Salvador are uniquely positioned to understand the forces behind the headlines and the reality that drives families to choose extremely dangerous border crossings for their children. Their ministries focus on keeping the youth in El Salvador, by working to change structures and enable a better future for youth in the communities they serve. They are well aware that these goals are not easily accomplished and that significant change often takes time.

Salvadoran youth share artwork with Lay Missioner Melissa Altman



Photo courtesy of Deacon Don Weigel

BUILDING TOMORROW'S FUTURE THROUGH TODAY'S YOUTH

Larry Parr serves the small, rural Salvadorian community of Las Delicias. He works with several community programs to provide safe havens for children and encourage literacy, leadership and empowerment. He relates that many in the town have family in the United States and are tempted to leave for a better life. Fortunately, many choose to stay to improve their community and their country. The following examples are youths who, after participating in a community program with MKLM involvement, now continue to sustain it through their leadership.

A Salvadoran boy at play relaxing near Rick's library program

Arnoldo Escobar is the head coach of the "Play for Peace" soccer program, which he helped found in 2009. He started out as a volunteer coach when he was 25 years old, and at first was very shy and did not know how to even talk to the children. He has progressed far beyond his initial shyness and says he learns a lot from working with them. He has even taken classes with the goal of making coaching his career. Arnoldo is also in charge of the program's scholarships and does spiritual reflections with the students. In being a mentor for the youth in the community, Arnoldo is fulfilling a much-needed role and helping to create a safe environment where the children can play and learn.

Photo courtesy of Deacon Don Weigel



Photo courtesy of Larry Parr

Eli Santos and Marvin Moreno are both scholarships students through FUEDESCA

Also involved in “Play for Peace” is 20-year-old Carlos Lopez, who participated in the sports program for four years before becoming a coach last year. He enjoys teaching and sharing his skills with the children in the community and represents another strong role model for the Las Delicias youth.

The Las Delicias library is another MKLM-associated project created in conjunction with FUEDESCA, a foundation started by members of the Catholic Church in Las Delicias to help strengthen the community through development and education. Ana Ruth Ramirez has worked in the library three days a week for the last five years. She helps students with homework and teaches art. She says it is such a great feeling to assist the children and see them succeed in school. Her 17-year-old

A SOBER REALITY

“The Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency disclosed apprehensions of unaccompanied, undocumented minors increased 77 percent during the fiscal year of 2014, which started on Oct. 1, 2013. The latest CBP update includes data through Sept. 30 of this year. With September’s figures, 68,541 minors were apprehended by border patrol. The minors were apprehended without a parent or guardian. Salvadorans more than doubled their rate of entering into the U.S. The CBP noted 16,404 unaccompanied children from El Salvador entered the U.S., an increase from 5,990 during the 2013 fiscal year.” (Latin Post.com article, Oct. 2014)

“In May, Salvadoran gang members boarded a commuter bus near San Salvador disguised as road maintenance workers, witnesses said. They opened fire on the passengers, killing six of them. That same day, police came across a clandestine grave filled with the bodies of six boat maintenance workers believed to have been murdered by MS-13 (Mara Salvatrucha gang) members, according to The Associated Press. That month (May), El Salvador saw murders double from a year earlier, to more than 350.” (NBC News article excerpt, July 2014)

MKLM IN EL SALVADOR

daughter is a scholarship student who gives back by teaching computer classes to the children.

BRIDGING THE GAP

Rick Dixon observes many of the same frustrating obstacles for the children he works with in La Esperanza, within Cojutepeque. He works to engage the youth with the spiritual community, helps them stay in school and develops them into members of Base Christian

Peter and **Melissa Altman**, graduates of the MKLM class of 2013 and serving in El Salvador with their two young children, quickly realized upon beginning their ministries that working with the local community to improve conditions is key.

The Altmans observe, “Emigration rips families apart and tears the fabric of family life in El Salvador, yet conditions are so challenging that many have no choice but to try to leave. We hope to



Lay Missioner Rick Dixon with Salvador students at Luis Pastor Argueta school in Cojutepeque

Communities. In La Esperanza, the demand for basic education far exceeds what the government provides. Only 500 of the more than 1,500 teenagers who took the entrance exam to enter the public high school were accepted because there is not enough space for all who want to study. Facing challenges like these only strengthen Rick's resolve. He coaches the children who attend his programs with the hope that they will model for their peers the opportunities that education can create.

work with the local community to improve conditions so that people have greater options and more opportunities.

The most unforgettable experience has been to witness the challenges facing many Salvadoran children. Many children are under-fed and lack proper nourishment; our children often tower over their peers simply because they have access to nutritious food. We have met children who don't own a single toy or book, who spend their days

unsupervised in the dangerous streets. We have visited elementary schools in which there are poorly trained teachers, no textbooks, 45 students in each class and where gangs have already begun to recruit new members. We have driven down the street and seen young children working as vendors in the middle of a school day. Seeing this reality makes us grateful for the opportunities we can provide our children, but also outraged that so many Salvadoran children face these hardships

As each Missioner observes, the people they live and work with relentlessly struggle with hardships. Despite the harsh reality, there are many young people and families working to better their communities with hope for the future. Maryknoll Lay Missioners encounter Christ as they learn from and guide the development of these inspiring people.



Students at Luis Pastor Argueta school are entertained by Elijah and Evangelina Altman, who are in mission with their parents, Maryknoll Lay Missioners Pete and Melissa Altman

in a world that God has filled with abundance.”

The Altmans also note that it is humbling to witness the deep faith of so many Salvadorans despite the hardships and challenges they face. “Sometimes people think of mission as introducing people to Christ, but Christ is very present among the people of El Salvador.”



In El Salvador, the wood used to create these “stick crosses” actually grows roots when planted, reflecting the inspiration of the resurrection for these faith-filled people.

All photos courtesy of Deacon Don Weigel

Mission Called ME

FROM THE
FIELD

by Karen Bortvedt

"I WAS TAUGHT THAT ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS AND IT WAS TIME TO PROVE IT."

Every day, every moment, we have a choice about what story our life will tell. For me, I want the story of my life to be one of stretching beyond what may be comfortable and "normal" to truly grow and meet people who are walking a different path. That is why I chose to serve as a Lay Missioner. I have a strong belief that we need only go out our front door to be an example of welcome, acceptance, love, care and empathy, but for me, it was time to stretch, and move to a completely new culture.

I grew up in a family where I was taught that actions speak louder than words, and it was time to prove it. As with all callings in life, the message is not always clear and we can choose to ignore it, but eventually, we will have to listen. It took breaking my foot to get my attention. I was in the midst of my quarter life crisis, bouncing from job to job, trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life. Then, one morning on a run, I hit a curb wrong and next thing I knew, was moving through life, on crutches, at a much slower pace.

Slowing down to that degree helped me focus inward, and that push got me to where I am, here in Cambodia. Each day, it is the people I meet that keep me here: the joy on the faces of the children in the village when a foreigner will kneel at their level and have a conversation in their language; the encouragement of my deaf colleagues as I make attempts to communicate in Cambodian sign language and understand their stories; and my students at a week-long English camp who expressed loving the one-on-one feedback they received for their writing homework and speeches.

I reflect sometimes on the steps that brought me to mission. I had

studied Political Science and Spanish in school, but moved to a country where neither is being applied. Sometimes, following a calling is not so logical.

I recommend answering the call before a bone has to be broken to get your attention!

Will you join me?



Photo courtesy of Karen Bortvedt

JOIN



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**To make a
difference
in the world**



**To answer
Christ's call**

To learn more, please contact:
Alma Garcia
1-800-818-8276 or join@mklm.org
www.mklm.org



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SHARING REFLECTIONS FROM MARYKNOLL LAY MISSIONERS AROUND THE GLOBE

Life in *Mission*: CALLED to Understanding

Part of our role as Lay Missioners is to find the gaps where community needs are not being met. When possible, we develop opportunities for those who are without services and seek to correct unjust structures and systems.

Maryknoll Lay Missioners Bill and Eileen Velicky with a Bolivian boy who received a custom-built tricycle through Co-op'Art

Focus on BOLIVIA

In Bolivia, a husband and wife Lay Missioner team, **Bill and Eileen Velicky**, have chosen to serve those who are disabled, however in different types of ministries. Eileen, a physical therapist specializing in care for the disabled, says, "I have worked in Tanzania, Cambodia and East Timor. In many ways, Bolivia is more developed than any of these countries, but regarding the reality to provide for those who suffer from disabilities, in all ways, Bolivia is far behind."

In Bolivia, Bill continues to leverage his prior experience



Lay Missioner Bill Velicky advising a Co-op employee in the metal workshop

in East Timor, where he oversaw the production of wheelchairs and hand-powered tricycles for disabled people. As a certified prosthesis maker, he has served people with disabilities in hospitals, schools and small workshop settings. Bill now collaborates with a Co-op where he mentors local workers, several of whom are disabled, to fabricate affordable, custom fit wheelchairs that suit a variety of very specific needs. Through Bill, the Co-op employees have gained knowledge and training in welding and general chair construction. The focus is to train more people with disabilities, maximize production capabilities and become self-sustaining through the sale of products.



Don Victor is in a wheelchair and suffers rheumatoid arthritis. Despite this, he designs and hand paints all the artwork crafted at the Co-op' Art in Cochabamba where Bill Velicky also advises with wheelchair fabrication.

All photos courtesy of Sam Stanton

BOT. TVTA



Photo courtesy of Sam Stanton

Joe Loney is a lawyer who has been with MKLM nearly 20 years. During his first contract with MKLM, in Bolivia in the 1990s, Joe went to school to have his license as a lawyer recognized so he would be able to practice as a Bolivian lawyer. He currently spearheads the prison ministry efforts of the Cochabamba archdiocese, providing advocacy for those who would not otherwise have a voice. Serving in Bolivia with his wife and two children, Joe works to provide the imprisoned with a small measure of true justice by giving them communication services and basic legal orientation, while monitoring the efforts of the criminal defense lawyers. He hopes to help the imprisoned become better advocates for their own interests.

One example of Joe's work was processing an appeal for a gentleman who had served two years and nine months of a four-year sentence for an unpaid loan. The man,

Dom Freddy, was placed in an overcrowded, rustic jail. Due to his mental disabilities, he had limited means to navigate the legal system prior to Joe's assistance. During the session Joe was able to attain the man's release under the custody of his daughter—Dom Freddy left the courtroom a free man.

Minh Nguyen, a hairdresser by profession, joined MKLM in 2009. One of her ministry areas focuses on empowering incarcerated women in Bolivia. Minh provides classes to the women prisoners in hair styling, and has created a school and training process in the prison that even offers a certificate. The goal is to provide the women with a better chance to attain gainful employment after being released. Through the program, Minh brings a unique opportunity for a better life for the incarcerated women.



Photo courtesy of Minh Nguyen

Mission Awareness Trip OPENS our HEARTS and MINDS

Dan and Jean Heuer exemplify a key group of people who help sustain Maryknoll Lay Missioners through their commitment as *Companions in Mission*. This is a program for donors who provide a recurring gift on a monthly, quarterly or yearly basis. The Heuers are moved to support Maryknoll Lay Missioners for many reasons, in particular due to their interest and connection to a number of Lay Missioners and their ministries.



Photo courtesy of Matt Fetters

The Heuers visit with Maryknoll Lay Missioner David Rosser, as he encourages a disabled Tanzanian boy at play



Dan and Jean also belong to the Westchester Chapter of Maryknoll Affiliates.

In the Heuers' desire to experience the people and culture of East Africa, they chose to participate in a Friends Across Borders immersion trip to Tanzania in August. Here, they describe the memorable time they had while visiting and deepening their understanding for the ministries that MKLM supports.

"We met a group of four other people with whom we would travel as part of the 12-day Maryknoll Lay Missioners Friends Across Borders program. It is an immersion program designed to allow us to have an in-depth experience with the people of Tanzania, especially the poor, and make new friends. There were ten Lay Missioners at the time serving in Tanzania in various capacities. We grew in admiration of them as we later learned about the work they are doing in the country.

Upon reflection, I think that during our first few days in Mwanza, Tanzania, we

experienced culture shock. We had arrived in the global south, which is much less developed from an economic standpoint than the U.S. At the same time however, we grew to have very positive impressions of the people and of the culture.

Mwanza is a city of about two million. As we traveled around the area, we observed many disparities in how the people of this nation live compared to our typical "standards." Only the main roads are paved, with most of the side roads being dirt, many of which have deep gullies. Streets do not have names. If you

"Our mission awareness trip grew our realization for all the ways our contributions to MKLM are applied."

wish to visit a person's home they must give you directions utilizing landmarks. Many people do not have electricity

and live in shacks that they construct themselves out of wood or corrugated metal. Outdoor sanitation facilities are often shared with others nearby. The average life expectancy for a person in Tanzania is only 44 years.

MKLM MINISTRIES IN ACTION

We observed many wonderful ministries and there are a number of stories that I could share. I will mention only a few highlights: **Liz Mach** is a Lay Missioner who is originally from Minnesota. She is an obstetrical nurse who first went to Tanzania in 1976. She has assisted at thousands of births. In a low key and

IMMERSION INTO TANZANIA:



Photo courtesy of Liz Mach

Liz Mach with a family she provides healthcare for in Tanzania

One event in which we participated stands out in my mind. Our group traveled three hours outside of Mwanza to the rural village of Ibindo where there is a Catholic girls boarding school. Numerous Maryknoll Lay Missioners have provided services for the school over the years. For example, Lay Missioner George Otte installed a water and sanitation system for the school while in mission from 2008-2012. Other Lay Missioners also helped obtain computers for the school. For our arrival at the school, the staff planned a wonderful celebration and classes were called off for the day. We were escorted into an outdoor hall and seated across the front, where we were clearly the guests of honor. During the next several hours we were treated to several courses of food. Even more wonderful, we were treated to numerous, spirited dances performed by the girls. Then the adult

humble manner she explained to us how she has literally saved the lives of many young mothers and infants during births when there were serious complications.

Joanne Miya, a Lay Missioner originally from California, has lived and worked in Tanzania for over 30 years. She is the Director of the Uzima Centre, a longstanding program that assists orphans and people living with HIV/AIDS. That program has also saved many lives. In Mwanza, AIDS is a pandemic impacting virtually every family in some way. Joanne married a Tanzanian man, with whom she has raised five children.



Maryknoll Lay Missioner Joanne Miya offering support to a woman in her community

IMMERSION INTO TANZANIA:



Photo courtesy of Matt Fetters

A local group performs for those participating on the FAB trip with the Heuers

choir processed in to perform some very spirited songs for us. I don't think that any of us will ever forget the pride and gratitude that was expressed that day. We truly came away enriched for having experienced the beauty of the Tanzanian people. They REALLY know how to celebrate.

We had many inspiring experiences and left with numerous positive memories of people who have much spirit and a will to survive. We also were very inspired by our fellow Americans who live in the country and joyfully utilize much skill and dedication helping and empowering many

Tanzanian people. They are motivated, helped and empowered by their Catholic faith, based on the message of Jesus calling them to serve others. Part of what keeps them in this service is seeing the goodness and potential of the Tanzanian people."

With peace and blessings,

Dan and Jean Heuer

If you would like to consider joining a Friends Across Borders immersion trip, please visit <http://www.mklm.org/take-a-trip/>

Or contact friendsacrossborders@mklm.org



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Come take a trip with us that could change your life

FRIENDS ACROSS BORDERS

is Maryknoll Lay Missioners' mission awareness program.

Join us to experience what you could never discover in travel brochures, films or books. You will see what life is really like in communities where Maryknoll Lay Missioners are living out their faith and helping create a more just and compassionate world.

UPCOMING MISSION AWARENESS TRIPS

- **EL SALVADOR-Mission Discernment,**
June 12 - 21, 2015
Deadline for signups: March 13, 2015
- **BRAZIL,**
June 13 - 23, 2015
Deadline for signups: March 13, 2015
- **CHILE-Notre Dame-Marquette,**
July 11- 24, 2015
(Tentative) Deadline for signups:
April 10, 2015
- **TANZANIA,**
August 8 - 20, 2015
Deadline for signups: April 8, 2015
- **BOLIVIA-Portland, ME Diocese,**
August 8 - 20, 2015
Deadline for signups: April 8, 2015
- **CAMBODIA-JustFaith Ministries,**
February 12 - 21, 2016
Deadline for signups: October 12, 2015
- **KENYA-JustFaith Ministries,**
June 11 - 23, 2016
Deadline for signups: December 14, 2015



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Where are they NOW?

FORMER MARYKNOLL LAY MISSIONER APPOINTED TO CONGREGATION LEADERSHIP TEAM

We congratulate former Maryknoll Lay Missioner **Sr. Anastasia Lott** for her recent election to the new Maryknoll Congregational Leadership Team. She was appointed member-elect in September 2014. Sr. Anastasia served as a Maryknoll Lay Missioner in Venezuela from 1981-1986, prior to entering the Maryknoll Sisters' Congregation.



Sr. Anastasia shown here serving as a Maryknoll Lay Missioner in Venezuela

Photo courtesy of Maryknoll Mission Archives

TODAY, the face of mission is rapidly being transformed by the ministries, lives and compassion of lay men and women. In our nearly 40-year history as Maryknoll Lay Missioners, more than 700 U.S. lay Catholics have crossed borders to serve in some of the world's poorest communities. The ministries our lay missioners began overseas don't end when they return home. In fact, our returned missioners continue to live out their commitment to offer compassion and hope in many ways to people in need across our nation and beyond.

Visit our **"Returned Missioners"** page on www.mklm.org and our **"Always A Missioner"** Facebook page at www.facebook.com/AlwaysAMissioner to stay connected and learn more.



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DID YOU KNOW?

Maryknoll Lay Missioners (MKLM) is a separate and distinct organization from the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers and Maryknoll Sisters. MKLM has its own self-governing Board of Directors and raises all of its own resources to serve the poor and marginalized in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Although we often join together to serve in mission, MKLM is independently responsible for raising the means to recruit, train, send and sustain our Lay Missioners.

CONTACT US

To visit us, learn more about becoming a Lay Missioner or to support us, please visit our website

www.mkmlm.org

Find us on Facebook
facebook.com/MaryknollLayMissioners



Photo courtesy of Michael Leen


Maryknoll Lay Missioner, Michael Leen leads a session in Mwanza, Tanzania sharing practical ways to apply business management skills to everyday situations



We hope you
will join us as a
**COMPANION
IN MISSION!**



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Companions in Mission is Maryknoll Lay Missioners' sponsorship initiative which enables insightful benefactors to make regular, ongoing gifts of support, thus fulfilling our Mission to follow in Christ's footsteps—to live and work among the poor and marginalized. Continuous financial support, whether monthly, quarterly or annually is critical to our Lay Missioners in the field doing God's work.

If you choose to become a *Companion in Mission* with us, you will join more than 1000 other supporters who are committed to alleviating the effects of poverty, and helping to create a more just and compassionate world.

As you read the first-hand experiences of our Lay Missioners in action in this issue of *Voices of Compassion*, our hope is that you will be moved to join us in our mission. If you would like to give ongoing support, or find out more about the benefits of becoming one of our *Companions in Mission*, **please contact Richard Gatjens at 1-800-867-2980 or rgatjens@mklm.org.**