


VOICES *of* COMPASSION



Winter 2010



THE SOUND OF MISSION:
MKLM works with deaf people
of Cambodia to help them gain
skills, integrate into society,
establish communities

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.



FOR INFORMATION

- About becoming a Maryknoll Lay Missioner, visit: www.mkmlm.org/4change
- To support our work, visit: www.mkmlm.org/donate
- To receive our e-newsletter, email “Subscribe” to info@mkmlm.org

On the Cover:

Poth, a deaf teenager, shows off the sign language skills he acquired at MKLM’s DDP ministry. Read Poth’s story on page 12.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.

– Dorothy Day

Dear Friend,

At its most visible level, Maryknoll Lay Missioners's ministry at the Deaf Development Program (DDP) in Cambodia is about providing formal education and job skills training for deaf adults who, as recently as 13 years ago, lived their entire lives without such opportunities.

If this were all that MKLM was doing at DDP, it would be enough – a highly effective response to a glaring need in one of the world's poorest countries, still burdened with the legacies of conflict and genocide.

But as missionaries, our concern is not only with the practical needs of those whom we serve – important as those needs are. Our concern is also with the deepest needs of the human spirit, which hungers for purpose, dignity, and a sense of belonging.

As much as deaf people in Cambodia suffer from a lack of access to education and employment, their suffering from cruel social exclusion and isolation is even greater. Some have been treated as objects of shame even by their own families. They have been discarded, hidden away, and abused both physically and emotionally.

Enter Father Charlie Dittmeier and Susan Spurl, both Maryknoll Lay Missioners. As project director of the rapidly expanding DDP, Charlie helps



MKLM's Executive
Director Sam Stanton

deaf people learn to communicate in Cambodian Sign Language, a language which Charlie played a major role in developing. Meanwhile, thanks to Susan's outreach work at DDP, the program's participants are no longer isolated: they have become part of a community of caring people, most of whom are also deaf. They now plan and participate in social and athletic activities. They have been given the tools they need to support themselves in a dignified manner. In short, they have come to know themselves as Christ knows them – that is, as human beings of infinite value, with important roles to play in the larger human family.

The extreme loneliness of the deaf in Cambodia is meeting its nemesis.

In April of this year, I visited our ministries in Cambodia, and felt immediately embraced by this unique, loving, and animated community. In our 18 years in Cambodia, MKLM has made a tremendous impact on Cambodian society. As a result of our work, and thanks to your support, the Cambodian government has stepped in to provide services for previously neglected groups like the deaf, the autistic, and AIDS orphans.

While the “long loneliness,” as Dorothy Day described it, is part of the human condition, the extreme loneliness of the deaf in Cambodia is meeting its nemesis: love, found in community. Transforming the world in love, justice, and compassionate community is what we – and YOU, for together we form MKLM – are all about.

Thank you for all the prayers, support, and inspiration that make you a part of our work in Cambodia, and in every country where we serve!

With gratitude and hope,



Sam Stanton
Executive Director

Friends Across Borders



Friends Across Borders is Maryknoll Lay Missioners's mission awareness program. We invite you to deepen and enrich your understanding of mission by joining us on an exciting mission trip.

You will have the opportunity to experience what you could never discover in travel brochures, films, or books. You will experience what life is really like in communities where MKLM missionaries are living out their faith, and working for, and with, the local people.

We look forward to hearing from you and accompanying you on an experience that will change and enrich your life.

2011 Mission Awareness Trips

- **KENYA**, June 11 - 24
- **EL SALVADOR**,
June 17 - 26
- **CAMBODIA**,
October 9 - 21
- **TANZANIA**, (TBD)
- **BOLIVIA**, (TBD)
- **BRAZIL**, (TBD)

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MKLM BREAKS THE SILENCE IN CAMBODIA



Deaf people in Cambodia are beginning to socialize with each other, forming bonds and carving out a new identity for themselves.



This issue of *Voices of Compassion* features the Deaf Development Program (DDP) of Cambodia and the two Maryknoll Lay

Missioners, Father Charles “Charlie” Dittmeier and Susan Sporl who work in it. Of the 14 million people living in this Southeast Asian country, an estimated half-million are deaf or significantly hearing-impaired.* For many years, the services they needed – sign language, interpreters, special education classes, audiological screening and testing, hearing aids, and note takers (for students) – were not available to them. Worse, they often suffered emotional and physical abuse and neglect. They lived in isolation – without language, without community, without cultural identity.

Because of the generosity of MKLM donors, the sound of mission has come to Cambodia.

**Data on an actual percentage of deaf and hard of hearing persons in Cambodia are not available. This estimate is based on worldwide statistics. It is likely the number of persons affected is higher than in developed nations where more diagnostic and preventive treatments and services are available.*

“In Cambodia, not one deaf person had ever completed primary school,” says Charlie, a Maryknoll Associate priest sustained by MKLM donors. Charlie himself is hearing impaired, and has become an expert on deaf issues. He is also fluent in American Sign Language. “There were no deaf clubs or sports teams, and most deaf people never got together or even knew there were other people like them,” says Charlie.

But now, because of the generosity of MKLM donors, the sound of mission has come to Cambodia.



After earning her Masters in Social Work from UCLA, Susan Sporl enjoyed a successful career which included running her own private practice in psychological counseling and support. She joined MKLM from St. Leo's Parish in Tacoma, Washington, in the Diocese of Seattle. In January 2009, Susan began her first mission assignment in Cambodia.



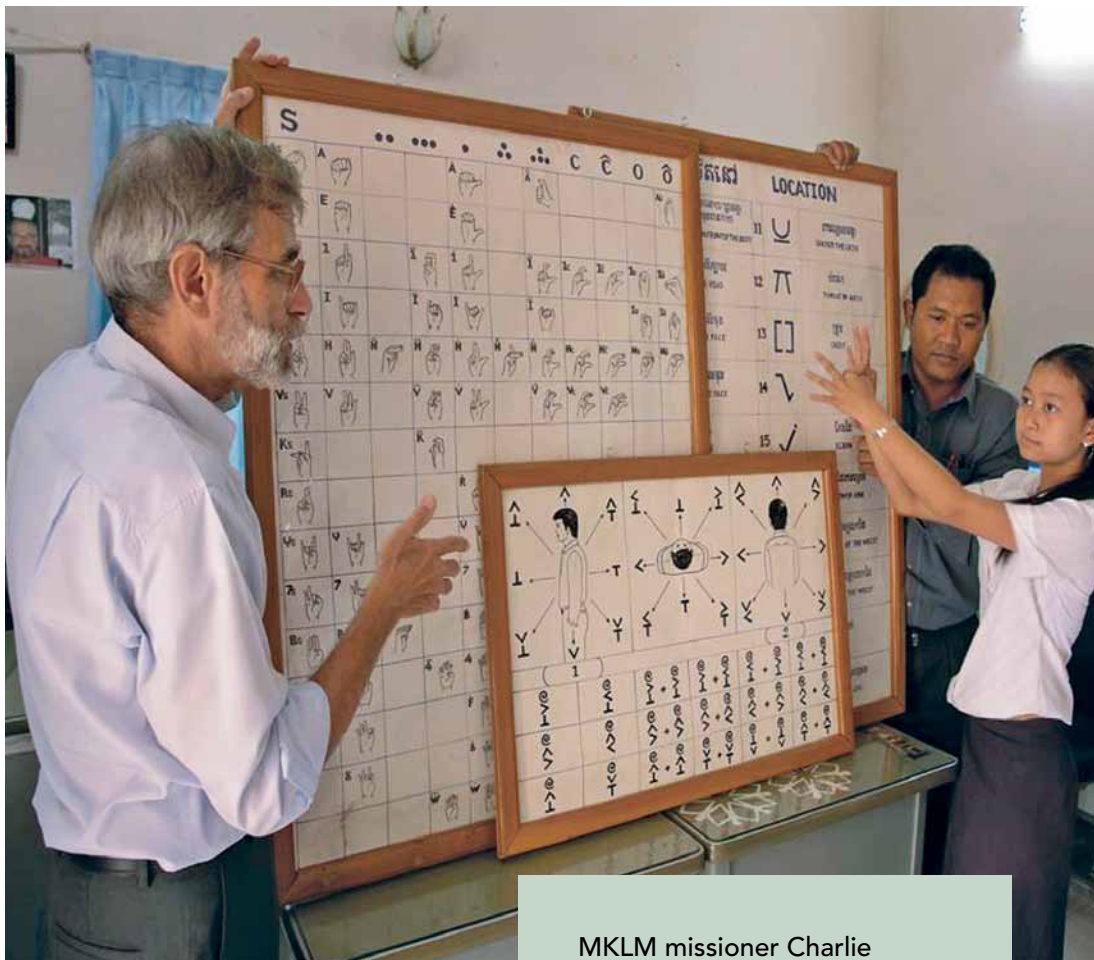
Visit mklm.org to learn more about Charlie, Susan, MKLM, and how your generosity helps sustain our missionaries around the world. You'll be amazed by the work you make possible!

Father Charlie Dittmeier is a diocesan priest from Louisville, Kentucky, originally assigned to St. Aloysius Parish. When he joined MKLM in 1987, Charlie was assigned to Hong Kong. He served there until 2000, when he transferred to Cambodia. Charlie's ministries – beginning with his seminary years in Baltimore – have always focused on service to the deaf.



Maryknoll Lay Missioners is now on Facebook. Visit www.facebook.com/MaryknollLayMissioners to see videos of MKLM missionaries and ministries!

The Deaf: A Disability Language Minority?



MKLM missionary Charlie Dittmeier was instrumental in the development of Cambodian Sign Language.

ty Group or a

by Charles Dittmeier

Are the deaf a disability group? Many would automatically say “yes” without giving the question much thought.

However, some would say that the deaf should not be considered a disability group, but rather a language minority. The challenges they face are not the same as those faced by the visually impaired or the physically disabled – for example, obstacles of mobility or lack of accommodations.

Rather, deaf people share the main challenges of *linguistic minorities* – they cannot communicate in the mainstream language of the society in which they live. This makes it difficult to get an education, to express needs, and to participate fully in society.

Deaf people who think of themselves as a language minority would say that they are just as physically and mentally able as people without disabilities. Their challenge is one of language and of negative societal attitudes towards them.

The real question is not the label, but rather how deaf people can be seen in a way that puts the least restrictions on them and enables them to use their abilities in the best way. Through my work with the DDP, this is the issue I seek to address.





Poth, a deaf boy, stands in the spot where he once lived with his mother. After she died unexpectedly, and their house was torn down, the teenager was referred to the DDP, where he now receives an education and counseling services.

The Deaf Development Program

Hundreds of deaf students receive services

Each time Charlie approaches the classroom, he cannot help but notice the noise level. The students clamor around the room, slamming cabinet doors, stomping to their desks, and dragging their chairs across the floor in order to take a seat. An outsider might be startled by all the ruckus, but the hearing teachers of the school take it in stride. They know that their students simply cannot hear the noise they make, and so they make no effort to diminish it. “Many people comment that working in a school for the deaf must be very quiet. In fact, it’s one of the noisiest places I’ve ever worked in,” Charlie jokes. “Women in wooden heels can be the worst!”

In Cambodia, little is understood about the needs of deaf members of society. Deaf children, often born to poverty-stricken families, are considered to be an additional burden. These children do not receive the attention they need to integrate into society. They are often emotionally and physically abused.

The world outside the home is not any kinder. Until recently, deaf people were excluded from the educational system and from



Students in the DDP's Education Program learn Cambodian Sign Language.

community social structures. They were deprived of the opportunity to acquire knowledge taught or overheard in families, with neighbors, and on television. Cambodia, unlike other developing countries, did not even have its own formal sign language.

Sexual abuse of deaf girls is not uncommon; in a survey conducted by Handicap International (France) in two Cambodian provinces, 40% of deaf women admitted they had been raped.

Until 1997, deaf Cambodians lived a life of isolation from family, society, and one another. Many of those living in remote areas never even knew that another deaf person existed.

But in 1997, to address the educational, life skills, and community needs of the deaf, two new programs were founded. One, established by Krouser Thmey, was to respond to the needs of deaf children aged 16 and younger. The other, the Deaf Development Program (DDP), now managed by MKLM missionaries Susan Spurl and Charlie Dittmeier, was aimed at addressing the needs of deaf adults.

Headquartered in the heart of Cambodia's capital of Phnom Penh, the DDP began as a collaborative initiative between the Finnish Association of the Deaf and the Cambodian Disabled People's Organization. In its infancy, the program lacked the basic needs for proper administration, such as job descriptions and skilled and

specialized staff members. But the fledgling program quickly expanded.

In 2002, the DDP underwent an intensive restructuring. Workers who were well versed in the needs of the deaf, and equipped to address those needs, came from near and abroad to establish the DDP as the go-to organization for the deaf Cambodian community.

the DDP offers *basic education, job training, interpreting, sign language research, deaf community development, and social services.*

Staff members travel to the remotest locations of the country to free deaf people from a life of confinement and isolation, and to provide them with the DDP's services at Phnom Penh and its satellite



Students learn motorcycle repair at a DDP Job Training Program Center.

Now, ably staffed with a team of 33, seven of whom are deaf, the six pilot activities of the original DDP have matured into separate, but symbiotic, projects within the DDP's reorganized structure. Today,

locations. Because the DDP is the only organization serving deaf adults in Cambodia, it is frequently called upon to address a wide range of issues faced by its participants, as well as by the deaf community at large.

First Things First

MKLM missionary creates Cambodian sign language

When the DDP's first participants enrolled in the program, it was clear that they needed to learn language skills, both spoken and signed. But as yet, there was no Cambodian Sign Language – it had to be created! According to the World Federation of the Deaf, Cambodia was the only country in the world that did not, before 1996, have a sign language.

Through the DDP's *Sign Language Research Program*, Charlie and other sign language researchers collaborated to create the officially-recognized Cambodian Sign Language (CSL). In 2008, the first of a series of CSL teaching handbooks was produced; today, a CSL dictionary is being prepared for publication. Until a sizeable vocabulary for this language was developed, Charlie relied heavily on American Sign Language.



Sign language researchers collaborate to develop a robust vocabulary of Cambodian signs.

The First Day of School

Hundreds of deaf students receive basic education



The DDP students practice their Cambodian Sign Language (CSL) skills with one another. Because of the generosity of MKLM donors, missionary Charlie Dittmeier was able to help create CSL.

Because the Cambodian government does not provide deaf education, many of the DDP participants had never set foot in a classroom. Through the DDP's ***Education Program***, students aged 16 and older receive education for two years. First they are taught CSL, then basic literacy and mathematics, as well as life skills. Approximately 120 students are currently enrolled in the program.

To raise the Cambodian government's awareness of the needs of deaf students, the DDP has established classrooms in public schools. Although the deaf students and their teachers are in self-contained classes, the presence of deaf students in a school is beneficial to deaf and hearing students alike.

Continued on page 18.

The First Day of Work

MKLM missionaries teach students to balance ability with disability

Students who excel in CSL and literacy become eligible for the DDP's *Job Training Program*. The vocational program began in early 2006 with six students studying motorcycle repair or sewing. The pilot program was so successful that the DDP expanded job training to include cooking, barbering, beauty and hairdressing, and wood carving in five training centers and private enterprises.



The DDP House in Phnom Penh provides a short-term home and interactivity center for participants of the DDP's Job Training Program.

The First Day of School

Continued from previous page

One of the DDP's goals is to help participants form cohesive communities. Being able to communicate in a common language is crucial for members to develop a group identity. The historic lack of a Cambodian sign language has had a profoundly

negative impact on the self-esteem of the deaf people in that country, and the DDP is committed to addressing this issue. As its participants learn to communicate, they find strength and an improved sense of self-worth in their newly-formed community.



To accommodate participants from remote locations, the **DDP House** was opened in Phnom Penh. Two house parents supervise approximately 25 deaf young men and women who live there for about one year. The DDP House has expanded to offer a broad range of educational and social programs.

Although students in the Job Training Program have done very well in learning the technical skills needed for their work, they also require training in the theory and practice of running a small

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business or setting up a cooperative. Charlie, the DDP's director, is currently pursuing opportunities for participants to gain these skills.



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.

MKLM AND YOU THE FUTURE OF CATHOLIC LAITY IN MISSION

Lay women and men in the Catholic Church are increasingly responding to the call to live out the Gospel message by engaging in overseas mission. With decreasing numbers of vowed religious, the future of overseas mission and ministry work *depends on the Catholic laity.*

Cecilia Aguilar Ortiz and her husband Daniel lived and worked in Thailand for 10 years.

Ceci dedicated herself to peacebuilding efforts, primarily to the development of the Youth for Peace Network, which responds to issues of violence, human rights abuses, and religious, cultural and economic marginalization in Thailand.



WHERE YOU COULD SERVE

MKLM currently serves in:

- Bolivia
- Brazil
- Cambodia
- El Salvador
- Kenya
- Tanzania

WHAT YOU COULD DO

MKLM missionaries serve in the following types of ministries:

- Healthcare and health promotion
- Education and leadership training
- Sustainable development
- Justice and peace
- Pastoral care

WILL YOU ANSWER THE CALL?

Visit **www.mklm.org** to learn more or to request an application.

Call: 1-800-818-5276

E-mail: join@mklm.org

Write:

Recruitment

Maryknoll Lay Missioners

PO Box 307

Maryknoll, NY 10545-0307



Tom Scott worked as an MKLM missionary at the Kowak Mission in Tanzania. A retired chemical engineer, Tom dedicated himself to making the hospital, school, and residences in the mission a safe place for learning and healing. He assisted in repairs of the buildings, while also tutoring students in English and computers, and keeping accounts for the school. Of his multi-faceted ministry, Tom said, "God, here are my hands. Do with them as you wish."

Bridging Communities

MKLM ministry provides Cambodian government and private organizations with sign language interpreters



A DDP interpreter, right, assists students in the DDP's Job Training Center's sewing class.

The DDP's Interpreting Program is both a training program and a service provider. The program welcomes hearing students to learn CSL and to become interpreters for the deaf community. Demand for sign language interpreting from the government and from other organizations, as well as from the DDP's Job Training Program Centers, has been growing rapidly. To help meet this need, six students of the Interpreting Program now work in the Job Training Centers with deaf students.



MKLM missionary Charlie Dittmeier gets a haircut from a DDP Job Training Center barber student.

Deaf Community Development Project

Project fosters growth of friendships and support groups

DDP is the only organization for the deaf in Cambodia – there are no sports teams, no clubs, and no national organizations. Most deaf people in Cambodia have never met another deaf person. The ultimate goal of the DDP is to create a

national association that will give a voice to the deaf community and allow its members to speak and advocate for themselves. As the first step toward accomplishing this goal, DDP staff members have traveled to remote provinces to locate and bring together small groups of deaf people. For those who are able to leave their homes and families, the DDP offers a

Most of these students had never met another deaf person until they came to the DDP. Now, because of MKLM donors, they are forming friendships and communities.



boarding house – the DDP House – and support staff for that house. Field workers must often talk to families many times before they can persuade them to let the deaf son or daughter come to the DDP House and school. DDP field workers also talk to village leaders and government officials in the remote areas to provide deaf awareness training to help them understand the disability, and to seek their cooperation and support in assisting the deaf community. Regional schools have been established for those who do not live close enough to commute to the DDP every day.

The DDP's ***Deaf Community Center***, located in Phnom Penh on the same grounds as the DDP House, offers a social gathering place for its participants. A new center located in the Kampong Cham Province will soon open its doors; it will provide classrooms, conduct job training workshops, and serve as a base for a sign language interpreter and a social worker. This major development and expansion of the DDP's work will enable its administrators and staff members to open additional centers in other parts of the country, particularly in the underserved northeastern provinces.

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 1-800-867-2980.

The Sound of Silence

MKLM missionary helps deaf community voice its needs



Years of solitude, stigmatization, and abuse have left their mark on the DDP participants. Although the DDP's programs work to equip students with practical skills, they also seek to nurture emotional health. In many cases, language

MKLM missionary Susan, left, meets with a deaf woman and a member of her family. The woman has been having medical problems, and Susan is helping her to obtain the care she needs.

alone is not enough to foster healthy and productive social interaction.

Because of the generosity of MKLM donors, MKLM missionary Susan Spurl, a licensed clinical social worker, was able to join Charlie at the DDP in 2009. Susan spearheaded the development of the ***Social Services Program*** now offered by the DDP. Her extensive experience was essential to developing the program's goals, strategic plan and charting forms. Because MKLM missionaries are taught the dominant language of their placement country, Susan has been able to create these forms in both Khmer and English.

As the Program Advisor, Susan mentors the DDP's recently-hired social worker and assists her with her caseload. Together, the team of two responds to the effects of isolation, discrimination, lack of status in society, lack of identity, and marginalization of deaf people in Cambodia. The team enables its deaf clients to become leaders of, and advocates for, the deaf community by helping them to

The team enables its deaf clients to become leaders of, and advocates for, the deaf community.

grow in positive self-awareness, learn clear communication skills, develop ways of coping with and reducing stress, and build healthy relationships. Susan and her co-worker also provide participants with access to medical and legal services, schedule interpreters for them, and teach them how to advocate for themselves.

Because MKLM donors ensure Susan's presence in her ministry, deaf people and their families are now, for the first time, receiving psychological counseling and support. Susan manages crisis situations and serves as a conduit to healthcare and legal services. She collaborates closely with the project managers of the DDP's other five program areas, seamlessly integrating her efforts



The DDP Social Services Program arranged for this deaf person to receive an ear exam while accompanied by an interpreter from the DDP.

with theirs in order to create a comprehensive plan for her clients. She also collaborates with local non-governmental organizations to secure and coordinate access to outside resources.

More than half of the program's participants have families that also receive the DDP's services. The social workers meet with parents

or other guardians to provide information on how best to address the needs of the deaf family member.

The team's caseload has skyrocketed in the past six months, and the DDP is planning to hire and place two additional social workers in the program's satellite locations.

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 Lay Missioners serves the poor in Africa,
Asia, and Latin America.

To learn more about us, and how your
support creates lasting improvements
worldwide, visit **mklm.org**.

