

# VOICES

OF COMPASSION



## Restoring justice

**Joanne Blaney helps to implement a UN-sponsored effort  
to reform Brazil's justice system**



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(PHOTO courtesy of Prison Pastoral Ministry of Brazil)



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COVER PHOTO Prison in Teixeira de Freitas, Bahia (courtesy of Prison Pastoral Ministry of Brazil)



Called to justice

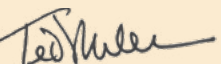
**I AM A RECIPIENT OF MY PARENT’S LOVE** and hard work. I am also a person of privilege — a white, middle class, professional male with a good education, and access to resources that help me to live comfortably in a world where many still barely survive. What then does it mean for me to follow the One who called us to “sell what you have and give to the poor” (Matthew 19:21)? In this era of pandemic, division and ever-changing realities, what does it mean to “do



justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God” (Micah 6:8)? The call to justice invites us to open our eyes that do not notice, ears that are deaf to the groans of the world, and hearts that are overcome with fatigue. As we identify how our lives are intertwined, woven together both in love and suffering, we take the first step toward restoring justice to the world. I invite you to read this issue with an open mind and heart, asking what God might be calling us to be or do in response to the suffering and injustice in our world. What do I learn when I let myself move through my fear, anger or shame and go beyond my comfort zone? What is God calling forth from me, despite my own oppression or my own privilege?

May our prayer make us catalysts to “let justice roll down like waters” (Amos 5:24). Let us work to assure abundant food and clean water for all. May we strive to end today’s exploitation and slavery. Let us confess past sins — the enslavement of Africans, the genocide of indigenous peoples throughout the world — and transform their lasting effects with healing and hospitality. May equality, justice and protection for all people throughout the world be our goal. Let us mend the wounds of Mother Earth.

*Help us, loving God. Open us to heed your call for justice and righteousness.*

Yours in mission,  
  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
Maryknoll Lay Missioners

PRAYER



Giving thanks in a difficult year

BY SAM JANSON

LOVING GOD,

Help us to embrace the duality of this year,  
To stretch our arms around the good and the bad,  
New life and painful loss  
both in abundance.

Help us to see through the eyes of your Son,  
A gaze of infinite compassion  
The Christ consciousness that teaches  
To love even the things that hurt us.

And when we ask,  
Where were you when one million people died of this virus?  
Or when a man’s life ended with an officer’s knee on his neck?  
And what about when immigrant children were put in cages?

Let us believe that you were there in the hospitals,  
Caring for the sick through the hands of a nurse,  
That every life-saving breath administered through a ventilator  
Was a divine sigh.

In the midst of police violence,  
Let us believe you were standing with the peacemakers,  
Crying for mercy,  
And that even your heart was broken.

And let us believe that You were the Father  
Of the fatherless children of detention centers,  
That each moment of play or comfort,  
Was You smiling back at us.

Lord  
Help us to recognize your presence in the midst of this suffering,  
To unload the burden of a difficult year,  
And to offer both the good and the bad  
For the transformation of our world.

Amen

*Sam Janson works to provide healthcare, education and resources to the most vulnerable residents of the Mabatini community in Mwanza. He works with the public health ministry of the Maryknoll-run Parish of the Transfiguration, assisting especially with its ministry with children with physical and developmental disabilities. He also teaches an adult literacy class.*

See [mklm.org/tag/sam-janson](#) and [mklm.org/profile-sam-janson](#).

PHOTO Maryknoll lay missionary Filo Siles with children in Entre Rios, Bolivia. The children show off the face masks and care packages they just received from the Social Inclusion Project. In 2020, many Maryknoll lay missioners responded with new initiatives to help meet their communities’ urgent needs during the coronavirus pandemic.





# Give us this day our daily bread

*Maryknoll lay missionaries tackle food insecurity — from emergency food distribution during COVID to promoting sustainable agriculture and healthy nutrition*

| BY DEBBIE NORTHERN |

Over the past year, COVID-19 has led to or exacerbated a host of secondary problems around the world. Perhaps the most urgent and widespread of these is hunger, which the United Nations views as “a looming crisis.” According to the World Health Organization, 690 million people went hungry in 2019 before the pandemic began, and up to an additional 132 million people could go hungry in 2020. This connection between hunger and COVID has made a deep impression on Mary-

knoll lay missionary, **Rich Tarro**, who works with the Helping Orphans Pursue Education (HOPE) Project in Kenya. HOPE provides access to education and job training for vulnerable youth, especially those affected by HIV. Many of the families involved in the project have only one wage earner working in the informal economy. With no savings, for many families, a day they don’t work is a day they go hungry. To prevent the spread of COVID, Kenya initiated lockdowns and travel restrictions that Rich explains “made it

difficult — and in some cases impossible — for families to earn money to eat and survive.” One of the students in HOPE is Maxmilla, who lives with her siblings in Bangla, an informal settlement composed of corrugated iron huts in an area without running water. Before the pandemic, Maxmilla received some of her meals from the school, but as the schools closed during COVID lockdowns, Maxmilla and her family were facing hunger. Rich remembers thinking, “I just can’t stand by and

watch this happen.” Maryknoll lay missionaries generally focus on ministries that build the capacity of local partners working for long-term change rather than on emergency relief. But during the current emergency, lay missionaries have discovered their integration into the local community enables them to use grass-roots efforts to respond quickly. Additionally, missionaries are uniquely positioned to serve as a bridge between the local community and people in the U.S. who want to help.



Rich discovered these advantages himself when, with the resources of HOPE and a network of donors in the U.S., he was able to provide urgently needed food for Maxmilla and 43 other families. Rich explains, “The HOPE students are our family, and we responded as a family.”

Rich is not alone — as hunger has increased worldwide, Maryknoll lay missionaries in all regions have responded by adding emergency food distribution to their ministries.

In Cochabamba, Bolivia, **Cortney Freshwater** and **Juan Gomez** realized many people in the neighborhood were going hungry because they could not get out to work due to COVID restrictions. Juan and Cortney responded with a meal ministry that initially served about 50 people per day. Those numbers grew to 130 people during the country’s second quarantine. “By doing this, we give

people a sense of hope, that people do care about them and their lives are valued,” Cortney says.

While providing emergency food has been a special concern during COVID, several lay missionaries have been involved for years, or even decades, in seeking long-term solutions to the problem of hunger.

Since 2012, **Peg Vámosy**, has worked in Monte San Juan in El Salvador, trying to “increase and diversify food production to make it more resilient to catastrophic storms and other effects of climate change.”

In her parish-based ministry, Peg helps people like Francisca Ventura learn to produce food sustainably without agricultural chemicals. After creating a tilapia pond and a vegetable garden near her house, Francisca has been selling vegetables and fish to her neighbors, thus supplementing the family income while also

providing a food source for the whole community.

In Gros Morne, Haiti, **Sami Scott** has been providing eggs, a basic staple of the Haitian diet, especially for school children. With almost all of Haiti’s eggs imported from the Dominican Republic, the large hen house Sami has established became a lifeline for the community during the pandemic when the borders were closed. With about 900 hens producing more than 800 eggs daily, they were able to provide enough eggs for the local area. The project received another 700 hens in October, further increasing the production of eggs.

Sami hopes that more communities can have hen houses in the future, producing eggs locally instead of depending on Dominican eggs.

**Ann Greig**, who first came to El Salvador in 1993, chose to address people’s nutritional needs by producing soy, which contains protein, fiber, and healthy fat, but no cholesterol.

Besides different flavors of soy milk, Ann’s ministry offers foods that contain soy bean curd. She has successfully introduced soy into the Salvadoran diet through a local distribution program in the capital city of San Salvador and workshops throughout the country. Over the years, Ann’s ministry

## FOOD INSECURITY

*Far left (opposite page):* During the pandemic, the family of HOPE students Sumbul (red shirt) and Manal (right; not their real names) received desperately needed food aid from Rich Tarro’s HOPE Project.

*Left:* In April, members of the Palacios family in the community of Las Valencias unload the rice, beans and other food, brought by **Ann Greig**, for redistribution.

*Bottom left:* **Peg and Francisca** check the radishes in Francisca’s garden, as Francisca’s daughter looks on.

has improved nutrition for hundreds of communities and thousands of individuals.

During the strict three-month quarantine in El Salvador, Ann’s ministry also provided monthly food packets of rice, beans, soy milk and products, and vegetables to the 50 families who participate in the soy program. Other missionaries in her region also provided emergency food rations to their communities.

Ann, Rich, and others plan to continue emergency food ministries until the end of the year. Many lay missionaries are also continuing to seek long-term solutions to food insecurity, because if the last year has taught us anything, it is that hunger will continue to be with us, long after the pandemic has been contained.

**Debbie Northern is the missionary engagement and programs manager for Maryknoll Lay Missioners.**

*All photos courtesy of lay missionaries.*





# Restoring justice



*Lay missionary participates in UN-sponsored effort to reform Brazil's justice system*

| BY VICKI ARMOUR-HILEMAN |

Above: **Dacar Prison** Unit 5 in São Paulo (PHOTO courtesy of Prison Pastoral Ministry of Brazil)

Lower right: **Joanne Blaney**, outside the **Women's Penitentiary Sant'Ana** in São Paulo, where she has done restorative justice work with women prisoners for many years

**M**ass incarceration. Racial inequality. Excessive use of force by police. To anyone who has followed the news in the U.S. over the past year, these complaints will feel all too familiar. But according to Maryknoll lay missionary **Joanne Blaney**, these complaints are also frequently heard in Brazil, where she is inspired by the countless people and organizations working to reform what many refer to as the “injustice system.”

Currently more than 750,000 people are in prison in Brazil — and more than 35 percent of them have not even officially been sentenced yet. The high numbers are, in part, the result of a heavy emphasis on “law and order” coming from Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro. Brazil now has the third highest incarceration rate in the world — behind only China and the U.S.

**Training Brazil's courts in restorative justice**  
The good news is that Brazil



has begun taking steps to address these seemingly intractable problems through a new program jointly sponsored by the United Nations Development

Fund and three Brazilian organizations. The new initiative, called the “Restorative Justice Network,” is offering training in a new paradigm and approach to crime: restorative justice. The group chosen to implement the program is the Human Rights and Popular Education Center (or CDHEP), which is based in São Paulo and will celebrate its 40th anniversary next year. Since the 2000s, CDHEP has also been involved in restorative justice practices.

Joanne, who has lived in Brazil for 20 of the last 23 years, joined the staff full-time in 2008. She has taught restorative justice practices in prisons throughout Brazil as part of her pastoral ministry and also helps individuals and groups use those practices to address conflict.

Now she and the other members of the CDHEP team are also spending their time implementing the new UN-sponsored project through an 18-month course that provides training, accompaniment and supervision in using restorative justice practices. Current participants come from 10 state tribunals (state supreme courts) throughout Brazil.

The course was originally planned to take place in person, but because of COVID-19, much of it has moved online.

For each tribunal, the course participants include judges, state judicial workers, and representatives of the community. The ultimate goal is for each tribunal to create a network of people trained in restorative justice and to establish a local center for restorative justice able to train others in these practices.

## Starting with the victim

Joanne explains that one of the biggest differences between restorative justice and the penal justice system

with which most of us are more familiar is that the latter is concerned primarily with the offender and has the goal of assigning punishment for the crime. Restorative justice, on the other hand, “begins with a focus on the pain and grief of the victim, who, in sharing, begins a healing process.”

That sharing is done through various processes and dialogues that include not only the victim and offender, but often also their families, social networks and representatives of the broader community. Joanne defines a successful process as one in which “the traumatized victim can move forward in life, and the offender, after assuming responsibility and repairing the harm, can also reintegrate back into society.”

This community-based approach reframes crime, violence and conflict not merely as interpersonal interactions affecting two parties, but as a disruption and injury to the community as a whole.

As a facilitator of these processes over many years, Joanne has been impressed with the transformation that often takes place in them. Through dialogue, the victim develops a new narrative in which the offender is no longer a “monster” but “becomes humanized.” Joanne adds that for both the victim and the offender, “a well-run restorative process helps people get in touch on a deep connective level, to the place where compassion is born.”

Mariza (names of all program participants have been changed), for example, was devastated when her 20-year-old son was killed in front of her home. Presenting herself at the police department every day to ask about her son's case, she found the police dismissive. They implied that her son would not have been killed

## COVER STORY



Top: **Joanne Blaney** at the offices of the **Human Rights and Popular Education Center (CDHEP)** in São Paulo. The photo was taken shortly after she first started her ministry there in 2008 (PHOTO Sean Sprague).

Middle: Teachers, community leaders and other professionals participating in a 2014 CDHEP **restorative justice circle training**

Bottom: **Mariza** (not her real name), who lost her son to violence, has participated in a restorative justice process led by CDHEP. Today she helps mothers whose sons have been killed or who are in prison.





*Top:* At a **Brazilian juvenile detention center**, mothers visit their sons for the first time after five months of no visits due to COVID-19 restrictions.

*Middle:* **Incarcerated women** in their prison cell in the state of Bahia (PHOTO courtesy of Prison Pastoral Ministry of Brazil)

*Bottom:* **Prison ministry meeting** in the state of Bahia (PHOTO courtesy of Prison Pastoral Ministry of Brazil)

Her son, Paulo, had not done anything wrong.

As a “motoboy” (picking up and delivering documents from businesses and individuals), Paulo had worked in a stressful and dangerous job in São Paulo, weaving through gridlocked traffic to meet rigid delivery deadlines. Rodrigo had just been robbed by someone on a motorcycle and attacked Paulo, mistaking him for the thief.

Meeting Mariza face to face, Rodrigo accepted responsibility for his crime and begged for forgiveness. “In that moment,” Mariza says, “I saw another young man just like my son and was able to forgive.”

This encounter changed both Mariza and Rodrigo’s lives. As part of his restitution, Rodrigo now tells his story to other at-risk youth. Mariza works with children and helps mothers whose sons have been killed or who are in prison.

### From grief and rage to forgiveness

Again and again, Joanne has experienced this level of extraordinary transformation from grief and rage to forgiveness and a new sense of purpose. As she puts it, restorative practices use “storytelling to break isolation and demonizing, and to build empathy that leads to a sense of community.”

The fact that both Rodrigo and Mariza are involved in addressing ongoing issues of violence in the community is an important aspect of the work. For Joanne, violence is often “like an iceberg” and the penal system deals “only with the tip of the iceberg — the relational violence between people and groups.”

In restorative justice, she reports, “The idea is to see that many individual conflicts also have to do with

structures that are unjust — not to remove individual responsibility but to recognize that there is also a collective responsibility. Violence (whether psychological or physical) many times is a scream for justice.” CDHEP therefore includes analysis of levels of structural violence in their trainings.

In another case, Thiago, an adolescent who hijacked a car, agreed to a restorative justice process while on probation. The process included the victim, her family, representatives of the school, social service workers and other members of the community.

During the dialogue, it was revealed that Thiago’s mother, who was struggling with mental illness, would often disappear for days or even weeks at a time. Thiago had turned to stealing to feed and clothe himself and his siblings. The penal justice system punished him for his actions, but did nothing to address the conditions that led to the crime.

In cases like these, Joanne believes true justice must take account of the needs of both the victim and the offender—who may be trapped in circumstances that make returning to crime inevitable unless help and support are provided.

In restorative justice, Joanne says, “there are no ready-made answers and each process is different. At times we enter the process trembling yet believing that . . . the power of the Spirit will be at work.” Another challenge is that the process only works if all parties are willing to participate and the offender accepts responsibility for their actions.

Despite these challenges, there is growing evidence that restorative justice is more effective at reducing crime and violence than a system based on punishment.

“Restorative processes,” a UN handbook states, “have a greater potential than the standard justice process operating alone to effectively resolve conflict, secure offender accountability and meet the needs of victims.”

More than 90 empirical research studies in seven countries have found positive impact of restorative justice dialogue in juvenile and criminal cases. According to one mega study, restorative justice processes reduced the recidivism rate by 55 percent for grave crimes as compared to the high recidivism rate in the penal system.

While Joanne and her colleagues at CDHEP have been training people in restorative justice for many years, this project raises these efforts to a national level. That is important because, as the UN points out, restorative justice processes can only become a viable alternative if they are integrated into the culture of a nation’s approach to and assumptions about justice.

The U.S. is a case in point. Some states, like Vermont and Minnesota, have been using restorative processes, especially in cases involving juvenile offenders, since the 1990s. But rules governing these processes vary by state, and on the whole, restorative practices have not been fully integrated into the national system. Therefore, even when restorative practices are available, the prevailing tendency is to resort to the more familiar patterns of a system focused on punishment.

### ‘Curing souls’

Responses to courses offered by CDHEP have been overwhelmingly positive. One participant described learning about restorative practices as “a revolution, almost like the invention of light.” Another summed it up well: “This course cured my soul.”

Best of all, judges and other participants in the current, UN-sponsored program seem enthusiastic about incorporating restorative justice practices into their tribunals in the future. “This course brought us hope that there is another model [of justice] that is humane and more effective in dealing with violence and injustices,” one participant said.

Joanne, too, has been profoundly affected by the work CDHEP is doing. Accompanying people through their journey of recovery after a crime has deepened her understanding of the Paschal mystery of dying and rising. It has taught her that “out of pain and suffering can come hope ... [and] a liberating process for all, where the fire of the Spirit heals and frees up energies for the building of God’s reign.”

Joanne also sees these processes as getting to the heart of “what mission is: accompanying people but not doing for them or to them. The collective energy of these processes brings out an inner wisdom that can heal people and build a community spirit that can bring more justice and peace to our communities.”

Perhaps her experience points to what mission is in another way too. In an increasingly interconnected world, missionaries offer their skills and talents in the communities where they are placed. But they also learn from the people and cultures they live among, and they bring those stories back to the U.S.

There is no question that, like Brazil, the U.S. yearns for a different future for its police, court, and prison systems. Perhaps the vision of justice being lifted up in Brazil can provide a model for the U.S. as it strives to live up to the promise of being a nation that offers liberty and justice to all.



**Vicki Armour-Hileman is the admissions manager of Maryknoll Lay Missioners. She is the author of *Singing to the Dead* (University of Georgia, 2002), a book about her experience as a Maryknoll lay missionary serving refugees in Thailand from 1992 to 1994.**

**Unless otherwise noted, photos courtesy of Joanne Blaney.**

*Top:* Joanne leads a **restorative justice circle** in a carjacking/assault and robbery case in 2012. The victim is seated at left (in yellow shirt), accompanied by the director of the school where she works (in blue sweater).

*Above:* Joanne giving a presentation on restorative justice at the plenary meeting of the May 2018 International **CURE Conference on Human Rights and Prison Reform in Kigali, Rwanda.**



# Love in the midst of struggling

*Returned missionary  
Sheila Matthews continues a life  
of service and accompaniment*

| BY PATRICK NORBERTO |



Sheila learned a valuable lesson from the villagers with whom she worked. “They helped me to remember that you can celebrate God’s love in the midst of struggling,” she recalls.

In 1996, Sheila was called to a new challenge when she was elected to a leadership position with the Maryknoll Mission Association of the Faithful. For the next seven years, she played a **pivotal role in molding the association into the present-day Maryknoll Lay Missioners.**

Having been in mission for 16 years, Sheila understood better than most the challenges and issues lay missionaries face every day. That experience enabled her to support new missionaries as they adapted to new languages, foreign cultures and customs, and government structures. Sheila encouraged missionaries to listen to local people, “appreciate the fuller picture”

and “learn about the needs of the local communities.”

Marj Humphrey, Maryknoll Lay Missioners’ director of missions, points to Sheila’s kindness, compassion and integrity as her core strengths. “Sheila is very strong with accompanying people in their struggles. She is always present,” Marj says. She has also witnessed Sheila’s deep and abiding commitment to peace and justice. When violence and unrest surrounded Marj during her mission work in southern Sudan, Sheila comforted and supported her.

In the 15 years since she left Maryknoll Lay Missioners, **Sheila has continued a life of service and accompaniment.** She cared for both of her elderly parents, when their health was declining. Her mother died in 2005, and her father in 2012. She has also continued to be actively involved with the organi-

zation. In 2006 and 2008, she guided “Friends Across Borders” mission immersion trips to El Salvador for dozens of participants and she continued to give church talks.

Sheila’s generous heart has also inspired her to make monthly contributions as a

Sheila continues to believe, “It is important that we listen and allow them to find their own voice to express their needs and issues.”

Sheila is active on her parish’s social justice committee and is involved with Pax Christi and the National

“Companion in Mission” (CIM) sponsor — something she started while still a lay missionary.

Today Sheila is a **chaplain and faith community nurse** at St. Anne’s Hospital, an acute care Catholic hospital in Fall River, Massachusetts, founded by the Dominican Sisters of the Presentation. Working with patients with limited means,

Shrine of Our Lady of La Salette. She is also a student at the Boston College Graduate School of Theology and Ministry. Studying Pope Francis’ renewal of the mission of the church has led her to reflect on her own time in mission, especially in light of the pope’s recent document *Querida Amazonia*.

Sheila is quick to point out that during her time in Guatemala and El Salvador, she learned more from her neighbors than vice versa.

In one Guatemalan village, Sheila accompanied a severely malnourished child to the hospital. As the father and the child boarded Sheila’s jeep to head to the hospital, friends and neighbors came to see them off, wishing them well and also contributing money to help with the child’s medical expenses. They shared what little they had, which consisted mostly of coins. Sheila realized that she was not bringing the girl

to the life-saving treatment at the hospital; their village was *sending* them. By this act of generosity and compassion, they would accompany the little girl and her family.

“When we help, we do so as a community,” says Sheila. There is no better definition of mission.

**Patrick Norberto is the Donor Relations Officer of Maryknoll Lay Missioners.**

*Opposite page, left: Sheila Matthews, with returned missionary Jane Redig and Carmen Che de Caal, on their way to one of the villages in the Petén jungle of Guatemala to hold a clinic with a health promoter (c. 1990). Carmen, an indigenous Q’eqchi’ woman, went on to become the director of the health program.*

*Opposite page, right: Sheila at the Kerigma Quetzal educational center in Poptún, Guatemala, with neighbor kids (c. 1985).*

*Left: Sheila at St. Anne’s Hospital in Fall River, Massachusetts.*



## walk with us — become a ‘companion in mission’

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For more information about COMPANIONS IN MISSION, please contact **Jepi Rivera** at [jrivera@mkim.org](mailto:jrivera@mkim.org) or **(800) 867-2980**.

Or visit [mkim.org/become-a-companion-in-mission](http://mkim.org/become-a-companion-in-mission)





Black Lives Matter mural, Portland's Epicerie (PHOTO ddburtoni via Flickr)

# Our commitment to anti-racism and the 'Beloved Community'

*A Maryknoll Lay Missioners statement*

In June, the joint leadership of Maryknoll Sisters, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, and Maryknoll Lay Missioners issued the statement **A Call for Anti-Racist Transformation in the United States**. Maryknoll Lay Missioners has continued to reflect on what we hope is a kairos moment of transformation — for our association, church, nation and world — that will lead us to no longer accept racism as a given. We issued this additional statement on July 1:

No matter where we live in this world, the evil of racism afflicts every person. Institutional, structural and systemic racism fosters obscene inequity with respect to power, opportunity, wealth, employment, access to health care and education, the environment, safety and many other areas.

The sins of white supremacy and white privilege serve only to divide and wound what the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. referred to as the Beloved Community.

"The Beloved Community," the [King Center](#) summarizes, "is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the

Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood."

We believe that real progress toward this vision of one human family and global justice is possible, but — echoing the joint Maryknoll statement — only with sincere sorrow and atonement for our own failings and sins of commission and omission, followed by conversion rooted in a deep commitment to solidarity and substantive concrete action.

## Recognizing our own sins

"Inspired by the mission of Jesus to live and work with poor communities in Africa, Asia and the Americas, responding to basic needs and helping to create a more just and compassionate world" ([Maryknoll Lay Missioners Mission Statement](#)), we also uphold a vision in which we strive to become "a dynamic anti-racist organization that reflects the ethnic and cultural richness of the Catholic Church in the U.S. and the world."

We acknowledge that too often we have fallen short of these ideals. Too often, we have directly and indirectly — through our silence or failure to act — perpetuated the

very policies and perspectives we strive to work against.

We acknowledge the historical reality of colonial and paternalistic approaches to mission in the Catholic Church, whereby white Euro-centric people entered predominantly non-white spaces with the intent to alter those spaces. This is our history and a legacy we must work actively to overcome.

We also acknowledge that within Maryknoll Lay Missioners, our missionaries of color and other nationalities, as a minority voice, have not always received the space they deserve despite, at times, their closer proximity to the populations we work alongside. Likewise, the communities who welcome us have not

always been fully considered in decisions that impact how we engage with them.

While our intentions have been good, our actions typically reflected the practices of the times. We acknowledge that white-centric belief systems often shaped the way we work, even at the expense of fully welcoming all cultural families to Maryknoll Lay Missioners.

We believe it diminishes our ability to listen and accompany in what Maryknoll has called "the fields afar" when our institutional bias is historically inculcated in our practices.

We recognize that we need to unlearn and learn, and to realign our mindsets and actions in solidarity with our diverse team of missionaries and Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples throughout the world.

We humbly and sincerely ask forgiveness for our sins and shortcomings, our past and present racist actions, and our silence and failure to act when something more was demanded of us.

We ask for God's grace to be an instrument of change as we strive to more faithfully

mirror our mission, vision statement, and purpose with regard to diversity, equality, and anti-racism.

## Our commitment to resist racism in Maryknoll Lay Missioners

As we strive to deepen our solidarity with our sisters and brothers marginalized by racism, ...

- We commit to examining our complicity in the sin of racism, to atone for our sins, and to courageously open ourselves to the grace and gift of God's creative work for internal change.
- We commit to surrounding those suffering from and mourning the effects of racism with our compassion and prayers.
- We commit to truly listening with open hearts and minds by stepping out of our usual spaces in order to dwell silently in the truth of our Black, Brown and Indigenous sisters and brothers too often ignored.
- We commit to sharing the sorrow, anger and frustra-

tion of Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples and to joining them in speaking truth to power with the Black Lives Matter and other movements around the world that strive to dismantle the systems of injustice, inequities, and racism that exist in our institutions.

- We commit to deepening our reflections with our missionaries and staff on racism and white privilege.
- We commit to making our way forward as a place of diversity, equality, and inclusion by inviting experts to partner with us as we strive for systemic and sustainable change in our organization.
- We commit to an ongoing discernment of our collective call to "love God with our whole selves, and our neighbors as ourselves."
- We commit to developing culturally sound guiding principles as benchmarks of our transformation so that we may ...

*Lift ev'ry voice and sing  
'Til earth and heaven ring*

*Ring with the harmonies  
of Liberty  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the list'ning skies*

([Lift Every Voice and Sing](#) by James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson)

May we — and the entire family of God — open ourselves to the breath of God that our hearts may overflow with love, that our will be God's will, that we be formed by grace and courage for the opportunities before us, and that our collective work lead us to become the beloved community God desires for us.

[Learn more about the Maryknoll Lay Missioners Anti-Racism Task Force here.](#)

*As the world and our nation continue to struggle to overcome the sin of racism, the task force asked missionaries around the world for their reflections on how racism and discrimination come up in the regions where they live and serve.*

[Read the series of blog posts here.](#)

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Maryknoll lay missioner Minh Nguyen in Tacopaya, Bolivia (PHOTO Nile Sprague)

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# Joe and Linda Michon receive 2020 Bishop McCarthy Award

*Returned missionaries help migrants  
and promote fair trade and  
many other social justice efforts*

| BY DEBBIE NORTHERN |

**O**n Nov. 22, Maryknoll Lay Missioners proudly conferred its 2020 **Bishop McCarthy Spirit of Mission Award** to **Joe and Linda Michon**. The award is given annually for continued service after missionaries have returned to the U.S. This year it was presented during a live-streamed event that was part of a virtual Jubilee gathering of returned lay missionaries.

Linda and Joe were part of the Class of 1990 and served for 13 years as Maryknoll lay missionaries in **Oaxaca, Mexico**; the altiplano of **Bolivia**; and at the **U.S.-Mexico border** in El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.

In all their placements, Joe, an ophthalmologist, and Linda, a teacher, worked as a team to establish **medical and surgical eye clinics and train networks of community eye-health workers**. In Oaxaca, they also worked with Child to Child, an international program that empowers older children to care for their younger siblings and educate the community regarding public health issues such as hygiene, clean water, nutrition and alcoholism.

At the border, they additionally served as advocates for migrants and refugees in adult and child detention centers.

After completing their time as Maryknoll lay missionaries in 2003, the couple continued to run two eye clinics in Ciudad Juárez, traveling frequently to train rural eye-health promoters throughout Mexico and Central America. They taught basic eye care at a program for Central American students set up by Georgetown University and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Throughout this time, they worked closely with Maryknoll lay missionaries, sisters and priests and brothers.

Leading a delegation from El Paso's Cathedral Parish to a **fair trade** cooperative in Chiapas, Mexico, they helped El Paso become the country's first fair trade diocese. After moving to Claremont, California, in 2010, they helped their parish and four other faith communities become fair trade congregations.

Since 2014, when an influx of unaccompanied children from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras to the U.S.-Mexico border created

a crisis, Linda and Joe have traveled to El Paso frequently to assist at Annunciation House, which provides hospitality to migrants. Today Joe and Linda live in New Hampshire, where they teach English to refugees, who come mostly from the Congo.

They came to know Maryknoll while attending liturgies at the Maryknoll novitiate in Massachusetts. In 1979 Maryknoll Sister Dorothy

Erickson, a physician, invited them to visit Guatemala with their four young children. Little did they realize that mission trip would lead to full-time mission 11 years later and would blossom into the life-long service for which they are now honored.

Both Linda and Joe say they have received many blessings from living and working with the people in Mexico, Central America



and Bolivia. "I have been inspired by the people," says Linda. "They gave us life and showed us that the world could be better if we all work together." Joe adds, "We want to stay engaged with life."

The two show no signs of slowing down, and even as they are now entering their 80s, they continue to look for more ways to walk in solidarity with marginalized populations.

"We want to do what really matters," said Linda, "to wake up each morning and say 'This is an important day.'"

Inaugurated last year, the award is named after the late **Bishop John E. McCarthy**, the third bishop of Austin, Texas. Known for his social justice and advocacy work, he was fond of quoting St. James, "By our works you will know us."

Bishop McCarthy was dedicated to promoting the role of laity in the church and Catholic Social Teaching. To help fund the many charitable and social-justice ministries in his diocese, he initiated a Catholic Services Appeal.

An indefatigable promoter of mission and an ardent supporter of Maryknoll Lay Missioners, Bishop McCarthy also was a strong advocate for the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees. In particular, he hugely supported Austin's Casa Marianella, which houses and provides food and social

services to refugees and asylum seekers.

The award was presented by **Heidi Cerneka**, who, together with fellow Maryknoll lay missionary **Coralis Salvador**, today is walking in Joe and Linda's footsteps in their own border ministries in El Paso and Ciudad Juárez.

**Debbie Northern is the missionary engagement and programs manager for Maryknoll Lay Missioners.**

*Far left, opposite page: **Linda and Joe Michon** during one of their many volunteer stints working at Annunciation House's Casa Vides shelter in El Paso, Texas.*

*Left: **Linda Michon** at Manos de Ayuda eye clinic, Oaxaca, Mexico. (c. 1996).*

*Below: **Joe Michon** gives a boy an eye exam at Community of the Holy Spirit eye clinic, Ciudad Juárez, Mexico (c. 2000).*



## ALWAYS A MISSIONER NEWS



**LISA SULLIVAN (Class of 1984)** continues to serve the people of **Venezuela** during the ongoing extreme economic crisis. The poverty rate is now 96 percent, and some 5 million Venezuelans have had to emigrate. Working together with the children in her village of Palo Verde, Lisa is growing a bounty of vegetables at "Hummingbird Farm." The community garden, the idea of 10-year-old Fabi, now provides urgently needed food for the children's families.



**JET BIRONDO-GODDARD (Class of 1990)** and her husband, **FRED GODDARD (Class of 1985)** live in Davao, **Philippines**. Jet has combined her passions of working with indigenous peoples and advocating for young children by forming the Indigenous People's Education Advocates to build a Tribal Learning Center for Children. The construction is on hold due to the pandemic. Jet also published a book with reflections of church workers who lived through the Marcos regime.



**JEAN WALSH (Class of 1997)** is a **chaplain** at New York-Presbyterian/Weill-Cornell in Manhattan, where she focuses on palliative and critical care. Throughout the **COVID pandemic**, she has been ministering to patients, families and hospital staff. Jean has accompanied many in their dying and helped others as they recovered. Much of her work is in Spanish, as she attends to the needs of Latinx communities, hit particularly hard by the virus.



# NEWS

## TWO VETERAN MISSIONERS RETIRE

Two of our longest serving missionaries have just retired: **Liz Mach** (44 years) and **Susan Nagele** (36 years).

Thank you for dedicating your lives to building a more just and compassionate world with us!

## 40th ANNIVERSARY OF U.S. CHURCH WOMEN

Due to the pandemic, this year's planned large commemorations in



**El Salvador** of the 40th anniversaries of the martyrdom of Archbishop Óscar Romero (March 24) and the four U.S. church women (Dec. 2) were canceled. Maryknoll lay missionaries reflect on the

legacy of the church women at [mklm.org/reflections-on-church-women](https://mklm.org/reflections-on-church-women).

The **Maryknoll Mission Institute** hosts "Called by the Energy of the Four Church Women: We Too Respond" on Dec. 2, 7 pm [on Zoom](#).

## VIRTUAL PROGRAMS

Maryknoll Lay Missioners created a host of new virtual events this year to promote mission education and discernment, orient candidates, highlight missionaries' work, worship together and raise funds online.



## GOOD SAMARITAN AT BORDER

### EL PASO, TEXAS

**Coralis Salvador** is now serving migrants and asylum seekers in two ministries in El Paso. At a **migrant shelter**, she serves as cook, driver, first-aid provider and also cleans and does administrative work. "We also pray, play, sing and listen to their stories," she said. At **La Tilma**, a parish food ministry, she prepares hot meals. "This ministry brings to life the story of the Good Samaritan," Coralis said.



## MORE HENS FOR HAITI

### GROS MORNE, HAITI

On October 15, the Caritas hen house, where **Sami Scott** works, welcomed the arrival of 700 new hens. "We had to wait for over two months, but they are worth the wait," said Sami. The hens arrived in 70 crates, and Sami and Guy Marie Garcon, the director of the **Karitas Agronomy Projects**, took inventory, as they released them. The young hens wasted no time, already laying 70 eggs on their way to their new home.



## COMMUNITY GARDEN

### SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL

**Margarita Duran** volunteers at **Horta das Flores**, a local community garden in São Paulo. It is one of the only green spaces left in the neighborhood of Mooca. During the pandemic, most of the work in the garden came to a halt. Margarita and other volunteers are reviving the soil and planting produce and vegetation. The produce is donated to organizations and families in need of fresh foods.



## PEACE VILLAGE

### KURON, SOUTH SUDAN

**Gabe Hurrish** recently began a new ministry of assisting with the management of **Kuron Peace Village**. This model initiative in remote Eastern Equatoria is a project of Catholic Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban, with whom Maryknoll lay missionaries have previously collaborated. Over the past 15 years, Bishop Taban has built a community where people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds "can live side by side with confidence in harmony and fellowship."



Filo Siles (third from right) and the first group of trainees, proudly showing off the cookies they have baked.

## New skills training center for people with disabilities

**M**aryknoll Lay Missioners' **Social Inclusion Project** in Bolivia received a multi-year commitment from the town of **Entre Rios** for the rent-free use of a new center for its skills training programs. Several large rooms in a new bus terminal have been set up for orientation and training for persons living with disabilities. The center is equipped with

ovens, baking equipment, work benches, tools and storage facilities. **Filomena Siles** and her Bolivian team mates inaugurated the new center in September with three-day workshops. The center will also provide opportunities for income-generating projects. The training includes baking and the creation of bracelets and decorative jewelry boxes.

## Missioner puts deaf education expertise to good use in Cambodia

**I**n August, **Julie Lawler**, a highly experienced deaf-education teacher, started her ministry with the **Deaf Development Programme in Phnom Penh, Cambodia**. The COVID-19 shutdown of DDP had delayed her ministry start for several months, but she has now helped with the reopening of the school and is serving as an educational advisor for basic education, sign language, interpreting services, job training, social services, and deaf community development. Julie is also working one-on-one with a deaf-blind student.



On a field work trip to the countryside in September, Julie Lawler (center) joins fellow DDP staff at a deaf girl's house.





# Helping to heal this crazy world of ours

*Board member (and returned missionary) Vicki Simon helps Maryknoll Lay Missioners prepare for a strong future*

| BY MEINRAD SCHERER-EMUNDS |

**M**aryknoll Lay Missioners has a special role in peacemaking and in healing this crazy world of ours,” **Vicki Simon** believes. That role, she is convinced, is ever more urgent in today’s increasingly divisive world.

After facing several major life disruptions and challenges in her 50s, Vicki participated in a yearlong Ignatian spiritual-retreat program. During the program she found, “All these thoughts about mission started to come back to me.” She took the plunge and joined the Maryknoll Lay Missioners Class of 1998. She never looked back.

Back in St. Louis, Vicki had been an MBA career advisor at Washington University. Now as a missionary, arriving at her placement in **Nairobi, Kenya**, she found herself mentoring street kids, trying to help them not just to survive

but to better their lives. The goal was to get them off the streets and into schools or vocational trade programs or jobs. “But there is no time to plan for tomorrow,” she says, “if you still have to figure out how to eat today.”

Vicki recalls that “they were very faith-filled kids, and they taught me what it was like to slow down, live day by day, to be present to others and to be in the moment. In the U.S., we talk about that a lot and we may try it for a while, but we usually don’t really do it. In places like Kibagare [the informal settlement where Vicki worked], you have to.”

The young people at her two ministries — the Kibagare Good News Centre and the Ukweli Home of Hope — also inspired her through their hospitality and sharing.

At Ukweli’s drop-in center, street kids could get a meal and find a place to lie down

and rest. The lunch was just two slices of white bread and chai tea, but for many it was the only meal they would get that day. Even though they had next to nothing themselves, when other kids arrived late and the bread was already gone, those who had received bread shared it with them without hesitation.

Many would hang out in groups of two dozen or so, and the older ones would look out for the younger ones. “It’s how they survived,” she explains, “taking care of each

other, as together they faced a very difficult and often violent life.”

She admits it was disturbing to witness the level of poverty and the sheer number of people living in difficult circumstances in Nairobi’s informal settlements. But Vicki says it was almost more difficult to come back home to the States: “Seeing the contrast, noticing the waste, constantly living on the clock, the lack of attention to relationships and living in all this plentitude



and taking it for granted.”

Vicki had mostly worked in corporate America, but says her time in mission “completely changed what I wanted to do when I came home.” After her return in 2002, she spent another three and a half years working for Maryknoll Lay Missioners in the U.S. in human resources and the mission services department.

Returning to St. Louis and her Jesuit connections, she then became the director of social ministry for St. Francis Xavier College Church, where one of the main ministries was again with the homeless population (this time mostly

with adults). Her time in Nairobi was good preparation for relating with people experiencing homelessness in the inner city of St. Louis.

Vicki retired for a year in 2011, but after serving as an Ignatian volunteer, was asked to become the director of the St. Louis program of the [Ignatian Volunteer Corps](#). IVC matches retired and semiretired professionals with charities and nonprofits seeking skilled volunteers.

In 2017, she joined Maryknoll Lay Missioners’ [board of directors](#). She has been chairing the board’s governance committee for the past two and a half years. Vicki feels “a

great responsibility to bring good and strong new members to the board who can help us achieve our goals.”

She is a strong proponent of Maryknoll Lay Missioners’ approach of requiring a comparatively lengthy service commitment (three and a half years). She sees it as vital for establishing the kind of real relationships with people that Maryknoll is known for.

“It takes a while to establish that trust and relationship, to be invited into people’s homes, and to welcome people into your own home as well. Time deepens relationships,” Vicki says.

And yet, Vicki — and the board — are also thinking about ways to give those who cannot make that kind of commitment a “taste of mission” through short-term trips and other opportunities.

“I love serving on the board because it has reconnected me with the mission

and goals of Maryknoll Lay Missioners,” Vicki says. “I am very hopeful for our future — that we can remain true to our mission and continue working with those that are in great need, while also not being afraid to change some directions and adapt to the challenges of our times.”

**Meinrad Scherer-Emunds is Maryknoll Lay Missioners’ director of communications.**

*Opposite page, top:* **Vicki Simon** speaking with Nairobi gradeschoolers during recess (c. 2000).

*Opposite page, bottom right:* Vicki (front center, in blue flannel shirt), with fellow **board** members during the April 2019 meeting of Maryknoll Lay Missioners’ board of directors (PHOTO Father Charlie Dittmeier)

*Above left:* Vicki [volunteering at Casa Óscar Romero](#) in El Paso, Texas, last year.

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