



For We Are God's Helpers

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Summer 2020

You Teach Students in Papua New Guinea

While others have returned from abroad, Danita Kurtz is still serving in mission in Kimbe, Papua New Guinea.

"I prayed about staying or leaving, and I chose to stay in mission knowing full well all of the complications that came with making that decision," says Danita. She teaches 9th grade English at St. Joseph Junior High School in the Diocese of Kimbe in Papua New Guinea.

When she made her decision in March, things were still operating normally in Papua New Guinea. A week after she decided to stay, the country went on lockdown and schools were cancelled for about five weeks. On May 4, the schools reopened for grades 7 and up, so she is teaching again. Lower grades will resume sometime in the near future. Classes will open on a trial basis and will be closely monitored. If there are any new cases, schools might be closed again.

"Lock down looks a bit different here than it does in the United States," she says. "We still have daily and Sunday Mass in the church, but people are trying to practice social distancing. The stores shortened their hours and their shelves are stocked with most essentials, however, products coming from other countries are in somewhat short supply. People are required to wash their hands before entering the store and the sale of alcohol is prohibited."

Danita is living on the diocesan property in a supportive community.

"When I made my decision, I talked to the Bishop and other people in the diocese and their support helped me to ultimately decide to stay," she says. "I have people who stop by to check on me. I'm in a good place."

Unlike many other countries, Papua New Guinea has not felt the full effects from COVID-19. "Even now, PNG has not seen many cases at all," she says. "There are only eight reported cases as of today and they are being closely watched as well as their villages."



Lay Mission-Helper Danita Kurtz (center) teaches at St. Joseph Junior High School in Papua New Guinea.

But she did not make the decision to stay lightly. "One of the biggest questions that I pondered over was, 'What if something happens to my sisters or brother living in the United States, and I couldn't fly home to be with them?'" she says. "That was the most complicated situation I thought of, but after talking it over with my family and praying, I think I ultimately made the right decision."

May God bless you for supporting missionaries like Danita, and for sending compassionate servants overseas to be the hands of Christ.

LMH in the Midst of Coronavirus

On March 11, LMH Director Janice England and Development Director Damian Kabot met with Executive Director Elise Frederick of Mission Doctors Association regarding the rapidly changing situation with COVID-19. They came to a mutual agreement to request that both LMH and MDA missionaries consider returning home temporarily to the United States.

“The missionaries were not ‘mandated’ to return,” said Janice. “But we wanted to give them our recommendation so they could make an informed decision based on their own personal health and situation.” The current plan is to have the Lay Mission-Helpers return to their mission sites when it is safe for them to do so.

Thanks to the generous support of friends like you, we were able to bring our missionaries home quickly, to pay for last-minute plane tickets, and to keep the missionaries on our insurance as they await their return to mission. You made it happen. Thank you!

Upon hearing the news, the missionaries felt a mix of emotions.

Goodbye to Ghana

Karen Hunka, serving in Ghana, said the decision to come home was easy. “I’m 61 years old and high risk, and I understood that I was vulnerable,” she says. “I didn’t want to leave. But at the



Karen Hunka (left) and Diane Yonga (right) serving in Ghana.

diocesan hospital there is no oxygen machine or ventilator.”

Before she left, Karen worked at the diocese’s secretariat as an accountant. She loved living in Ghana. “I loved the simplicity of it,” she says. “People don’t have money, so they just make it work with what they have.”

Karen returned to Greensburg, Penn., and is staying with her son.

Diane Yonga also served in the Diocese of Damongo with Karen. She was surprised when she received Janice’s email recommending she return home.

“I took the night to pray about it and decided to come home. The biggest thing was my family. If I was to be sick, or if any family members were sick, I would want to be in the United States.”

Knowing the decision wasn’t permanent also helped. “What made it possible was that LMH said that it was temporary,” Diane says. “If they had said, ‘Once you get home that’s it,’ I would have needed more time to discern.” Your generosity enabled us to give Diane, and all of the Lay Mission-Helpers, the assurance that they will return to the mission field.

Diane was teaching nutrition classes and acting as the secretary for St. Anne’s Senior High School when she left. “We were just preparing the term two final exams for my students.”

She returned to her hometown of St. Paul, Minn., and is staying with her sister. “I’m reflecting on my experience. It was really difficult to say goodbye.”

“I was able to say goodbye to people I worked with,” says Karen. “But there were a few people at the town market I wanted to say goodbye to that I couldn’t.”

Both women look forward to returning to Ghana when it is safe to do so. “But regardless of what happens, I plan to continue to do mission work however I can,” says Karen.

“I’m preparing myself to be open to whatever happens,” says Diane. “But I really want to go back.”

Leaving Uganda

Matthew Kadavy had been serving as a Lay Mission-Helper for 15 months in the Diocese of Kabale in Uganda, but Tony McConnell had only arrived five weeks prior when they both received the news from Janice.

“We were in the middle of so many things, it was hard to imagine leaving,” says Matthew, who worked as a project manager.



Matthew Kadavy (back left) and Tony McConnell (back right) with a Sister and a priest in Uganda.

“The tea fields had been an amazing success,” he continues. “The chickens were laying 900 eggs a day. And Tony had just arrived. But Bishop Callist wanted us both to go.”

Tony had already begun his work as an IT tech. “My first project was to get unified internet service to diocesan administrative offices,” he says. “Right before I left, I succeeded in getting it up and running. But without me there, they are going to continue on their own separate internet plans, and we will reconfigure that when I get back.”

It’s an easy decision for both men to think about going back. “I miss the people,” says Matthew. “Every morning I walked down to Mass and I would see the same people. I miss the bishop; I miss the Sisters; I miss Tony.”

In the meantime, Matthew is back on his family farm in Nebraska.

“I’m going to plant food and give it away,” he says. “And I’m going to help people. Maybe I’ll volunteer at our local homeless shelter.”

“I definitely look forward to going back,” says Tony. “I was just beginning to learn some of the local language. I want to continue my work on the internet service. It’s hard not to have a definite timeline. I understand the reason, but without a set date it’s been challenging.”

In the meantime, Tony is back in Colorado living with his parents and working for an IT company in Denver.

Decisions in Papua New Guinea

Maria Luisa Garcia, serving in Papua New Guinea, was the first to decide to return, but the last to arrive back in the U.S. She taught English and business at Caritas Technical Secondary School in the Diocese of Kimbe.

“I have been diagnosed with prediabetes and am over 61, so I was concerned,” she said.

But returning home in late March proved more challenging than she imagined. She was to fly from PNG to the U.S. via Australia.

“At 10 p.m. the night before I was to fly out, the prime minister of Australia shut down the border, only allowing Australian residents into the country. After six hours of waiting, I was told that Australia would not allow me to fly through the country.”

There were exemptions. First, she had to apply for and receive a temporary visa, then she could apply for an exemption. Another long wait. A call to Janice. She was sent to her hotel and told to come back Sunday morning. After waiting all day Sunday, she was sent back to the hotel and told to return Monday morning.

She ended up on a flight to Singapore, but as she arrived in that country, she was told that it was closing its borders at midnight. Her flight to the U.S. was the next morning.

“I thought, ‘God help me,’” she says. At midnight, she was escorted by



Maria Luisa Garcia serving in PNG.

Singapore police to an immigration waiting room where officials took her passport and itinerary to review before finally approving her to fly to San Francisco.

“I left my home in PNG on Friday and flew out Tuesday – after four days,” she says. “But despite the travel woes, I want to say thank you to Lay Mission-Helpers, because I was respected as an adult to make my own choices. I felt supported the entire way. Janice was literally my companion all the way home.”

Maria Luisa is staying with her sister in El Paso, Texas. “I’m living in the now,” she says. “Everything is in God’s hands.”

Delayed Departure

Ed and Cathy Medina were just days away from departing for Uganda when they received the email from Janice, advising them to remain in the United States. Ed, a physician assistant, and Cathy, a nurse, had already quit their jobs in Colorado, planned a going-away party, and packed two suitcases.

But for the Medinas, the decision to stay at home was easy. “We are in the medical field, and had been watching what was happening in China,” says Ed. “Cathy has asthma, so that was a con-

cern. But it was still such a shock! We were to leave within the week.”

Another concern was for their family. “We have children and grandchildren and there’s no way we wanted to take the risk of being out of the country,” says Cathy.

Once the decision was made, Ed called up his old boss, only to find he had already been replaced. Instead, Ed was hired back as a floating healthcare provider and travels between clinics in the nearby area. Thankfully Cathy is also working again.

When the Medinas previously served



Ed and Cathy Medina are waiting to serve in Uganda.

with LMH in Cameroon from 2001 to 2004, they learned that God’s timing is often different than our own.

“When we were in Africa the first time, one thing the Africans taught us is that if you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans,” says Cathy.

“If that ain’t real now, I don’t know what is,” says Ed. “It’s His plan. Our job is to discover and trust. People ask how long we are going to be here. I don’t know. And that’s just the way it is.”

Your prayers and your support during this time is invaluable. We know not everyone is in a position to give right now. With this newsletter, we are enclosing an envelope for those who are able to help.

Together We Serve

Update from the Home Office

Together, we all have been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. We are praying for peace and hope for you and your loved ones, and for those working to end this crisis.

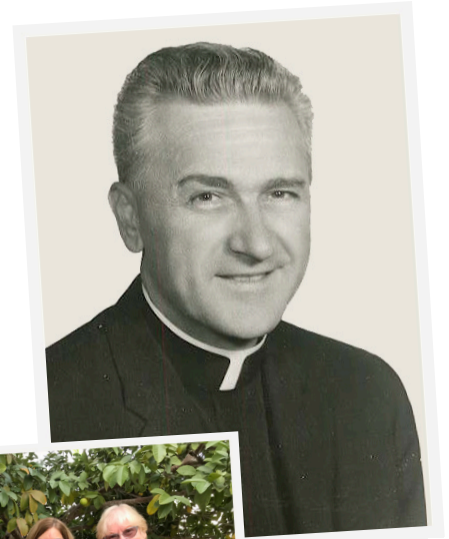
Though we are in a pandemic, the Church continues her mission to transform lives through the love of Christ. While the life-changing work of Lay Mission-Helpers has taken on a different form right now, our mission, like the mission of the Church, continues.

Due to quarantine restrictions, our Spring Discernment Weekends and Fall Formation Program were postponed. We plan to begin holding Discernment Weekends again this Fall and welcome a new class of missionaries to our Formation Program in Spring 2021. And as soon as they are able, our current missionaries will return to serve in their mission dioceses.

In July, our offices are being relocated to the Mission House. Our new address is on the front page of this newsletter, and we will have a mail forwarding service for the next year. This shared space will allow for closer interaction with Formation candidates, and to conserve resources in light of our fiscal responsibilities. Thank you to those who continue to support Lay Mission-Helpers. Our vital work could not continue without your partnership.

For the last five years, we have held an annual Gala in the Fall celebrating you, our partners in mission. This year marks the 65th anniversary of the founding of Lay Mission-Helpers by Msgr. Anthony Brouwers. We had planned to celebrate this milestone at a Sapphire Anniversary Gala in October. Although we will be unable to gather physically together, we will be marking the event with an online video and silent auction. Watch your email, follow us on Facebook, and visit our website for more information. We look forward to marking this anniversary together with you at next year's Gala.

Everyday we rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us. We look forward to the day when we can gather together and tell stories of how Christ is continuing to build his Church around the world.



Pictured: Msgr. Anthony Brouwers (top); LMH staff members; One of the earliest pictures of Lay Mission-Helpers is of Adeline Coronado, Class of 1957, serving in Tanzania 63 years ago; School girls in Cameroon; The Mission House (bottom, far left); The Mission House chapel (bottom, near left).