



# For We Are God's Helpers

2020 Annual Newsletter

*Share your gifts, live your faith, change the world ... and let the world change you.*

## Returning to Mission, Thanks to You

On November 9, Karen Hunka boarded a plane back to Damongo, Ghana, to resume her three-year term of service as a Lay Mission-Helper. Karen, and fellow missionary Diane Yonga, left Ghana in March when the coronavirus first emerged in the county. Now, after eight months, she's finally free to return.

"I'm so excited! I can't wait to go back," says Karen. "I'm most excited about seeing the villagers and my friends in the Secretariat." Because of your generous support of Lay Mission-Helpers, Karen will be able to continue her service as an accounting clerk in the Bishop's Office.

Karen, who had been watching the news bulletins from Ghana almost daily since she returned, was the first to find out that the country's border had been opened on Sept. 1. She immediately called Program Director Janice England, and the two began working on a plan to return.

There were five conditions Lay Mission-Helpers established that needed to be in place before anyone returned to mission. First, the State Department lifts the country's Level 4 Health Advisory of "Do Not Travel." Second, the borders of the mission country are re-opened. Third, international flights are flying to the mission country. Fourth, lock-down restrictions are lifted in the mission country and the LMH'er is free to work. And finally, the mission bishop says that he is willing and able to allow the LMH'er to return.

Now that all conditions have been met, Karen is anxious to get back to her work. "It was pencil and paper accounting, but I loved it," she says. "My job was also to sell hosts and wine to the priests, and there were 13 different parishes in our diocese. The priests would come in periodically, some from as far as four hours away."

She's kept in contact with friends, neighbors, and work colleagues during her time back home through



**Lay Mission-Helper Karen Hunka returned to Ghana in November, thanks to your faithful support.**

WhatsApp, an app that allows for free international calls, texts, and video chats. "It's not like it used to be," she says. "It's been easy for me to keep in contact. I miss everyone in the Bishop's Office. I kept in contact with one gentleman I worked with who is my youngest son's age, and he called me on Mother's Day. I also really miss seeing and playing with the children."

The time living at home has been challenging for Karen. She has been living with her son in Greensburg, Penn. In August, while still in limbo, she went on a one-week retreat at St. Paul of the Cross Monastery to

# Why I Support Lay Mission-Helpers

By Barbara Fortson, LMH Supporter

Some years ago, while casting around for information on mission efforts abroad, I learned of Lay Mission-Helpers. I read with great interest about its long history of fulfilling the mission Jesus gave His followers — to go and spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

LMH's track record was so compelling that I called up the LMH office to learn more about its current mission efforts. LMH staff are utterly committed Christians and champions of God's work in communities that urgently need loving support. And that support is delivered in the form of caring, skilled volunteer missionaries — individuals and families who leave comfortable, familiar living circumstances to act as the hands and feet of Christ in serving their brothers and sisters abroad.

My prayer is that LMH will be able to send ever more missionaries to carry out the Gospel commission. Thank you, Lay Mission-Helpers!



**Barbara Fortson is a faithful supporter of LMH.**

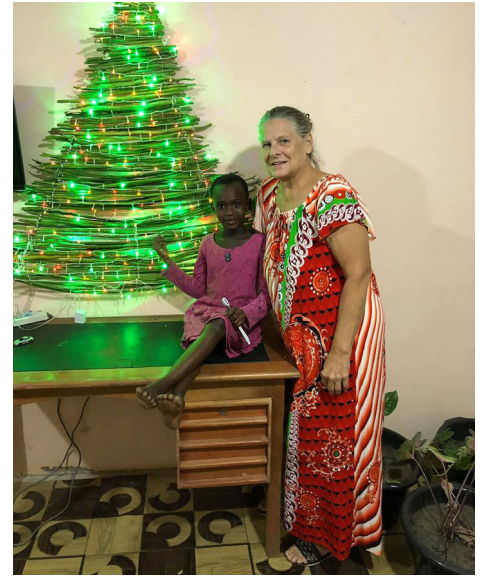
# Returning to Mission continued

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strengthen her faith.

"I believe in God and I trust God, but I was starting to get nervous about all of it, including the not knowing," she says. "It was a silent retreat. I thought I might get kicked out! But it was wonderful and allowed for contemplation. And I met with a spiritual director who helped me sort through my emotions. It helped my patience come back and was just what I needed."

Karen knows there are risks to returning, but she's not worried. "I'm not nervous about the virus," she says. "The village I live in has no cases, and if I get it, I know there is a hospital. The Bishop is very excited that I am returning, and I am looking forward to getting to work."



**Last year, Karen celebrated her first Christmas in mission in Ghana. She creatively shared her tradition of decorating a Christmas tree with her new friends.**

# Remember LMH

Thank you for showing great compassion and generosity in helping us support the work of our missionaries. By partnering with Lay Mission-Helpers, you serve the needs of our brothers and sisters around the world. You send men and women to be the hands of Christ.

"In Cameroon, they often say, 'We are together.' I think it is a beautiful phrase. I feel like we represent not just our family, but all the people who sent us. We share with those we serve the love that people send from back home," says returned LMH missionary, Maura Martin.

There are a couple of ways from your own home you can be "together" with our missionaries and those they serve. First, your monthly donation

ensures continued support for missionaries. Second, by including

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**"We represent not just our family, but all the people who sent us."**

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Lay Mission-Helpers in your will or estate plans, you can support nurses, teachers, and other professionals sharing their gifts for years to come.

For more information on specific ways you can include LMH in your charitable giving plan, please visit [www.LayMissionHelpers.org](http://www.LayMissionHelpers.org) or call (213) 368-1870.

# Training the Next Class of Missionaries

Training new missionaries looked a bit different this year for Lay Mission-Helpers, but we are excited to be moving forward.

“Before COVID, we had planned to start Formation this past August,” says Janice England, program director. “We had already held a Discernment Weekend in February, and accepted someone into the program. Four or five more people had signed up to come to our April Discernment Weekend when COVID hit. In the beginning, we were hopeful that the lockdowns would be short lived, so we moved the weekend to May, then to June. That’s when we realized it would not be possible to have another Discernment Weekend or a Formation Program this year.”

Even if LMH could have held the Formation Program remotely, it is unclear what the state of things will be like in January, 2021, when Lay Mission-Helpers traditionally leave on mission. “We didn’t want people to give up their homes and their jobs and be stuck here for months on end because they weren’t able to go out to their mission site,” she says.

All aspects of missionary training has been postponed until 2021. There’s still one candidate in the pipeline. “We’ve been in communication with her all along. She’s still interested and has adjusted her timetable,” says Janice.

“The people who were in process last spring attended a Virtual Discernment Intro Day in September, and for those who have signed up since then, we hope to hold another virtual event in December. We plan to have in-person Discernment Weekends at the end of February and April and start Formation in-person next August, God-willing.”

And, as of November, 2020, some of our current Lay Mission-Helpers are beginning to return to their mission sites. The plan is that the next class will leave for mission in January, 2022.

As for now, LMH is gearing up for a new recruitment season. “We are accepting applications, and there is still a great need,” says Janice.



**Bishop Peter Paul Angkyier (top) and students at St. Ann’s Senior High School of the Diocese of Damongo, Ghana, (bottom) are excited for Lay Mission-Helpers to serve in their diocese.**

## *New Board Members Join the Team*

In July, the Lay Mission-Helpers Board of Directors welcomed two new members: Alicia Johnson and Ann Crockenberg.

Johnson and her family previously served as Lay Mission-Helpers in Cameroon from 2007 to 2010. She is an attorney who is currently deputy executive director of the Legal Aid of Western Missouri in Kansas City, Mo. Ann Crockenberg is an accountant at Kathleen Spiegelman Design Studio Inc., a tax preparer in Los Angeles, and a member of St. John the Evangelist Church where we commission our new missionaries. Welcome to the Board, Alicia and Ann!

## Thank You for Standing with Us in 2020

Thank you for standing with us, for supporting us, and for continuing to believe in us during this extraordinary year. The pandemic has touched every one of us, but it has also shown the grace of God as we are drawn together in compassion and kindness.

Your financial support helps us continue our mission of sending Catholic professionals to mission dioceses around the globe, including Ghana, Uganda, Papua New Guinea, and possibly Honduras starting in 2022. Your prayers encourage us and our missionaries as we discern our next steps.

With supporters like YOU, we are looking to the future with optimism, excitement, and courage.

Thank you for caring about others and for making a real difference in people’s lives.

# Cleanse Your Heart Beforehand

By Earl Fong, LMH Class of 2009

In 2008, my wife Diane and I were living in San Francisco, she working at an adult daycare center run by Catholic Charities; me, self-employed as a computer geek. Having previously spent time as volunteers at a Jesuit high school in Micronesia, we were feeling called once again to serve abroad.

Luckily, we found the Lay Mission-Helpers through an online search and reached out to them. Before we knew it, we had been accepted into their residential formation program in L.A. After four months of study, prayer and living in community, we were commissioned and posted to Tanzania to a Catholic secondary school in the town of Mtwara on the southern coast of Tanzania on the Indian Ocean.

I have so many good memories of being there for the three years: the hot, dry East African savannah; the colorful fabrics of the women's clothing; the locally-grown cashews; the warm, beautiful ocean; and the simplicity of our parish church.

At times I did question my sanity in coming to an oppressively hot climate with swarms of malaria-infested mosquitos, where the water is not drinkable, and people drive like maniacs.

But beyond all that, what made it worthwhile were the joys and the struggles of teaching and mentoring a couple of hundred adolescents with their energy, stubbornness, and unrestrained laughter; working with our colleagues, some newly out of school, some raising young children, some grandparents; and attending daily morning Mass in the Swahili language.

Once again, I saw the glorious commonality and differences of humankind, all of us children of God. We are called to serve and to be present with each other everywhere on this earth.

Our second Christmas there, we saw an invitation on a cellphone. Translated, it read: "The family of Joseph and Mary of Bethlehem would like to invite you to the celebration of the birth of their dear child Jesus, to take place the 25<sup>th</sup> of December in the hearts of all Christians everywhere. Cleanse your heart beforehand. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year."



**Earl Fong and his wife, Diane Prell, served in Mtwara, Tanzania, as Lay Mission-Helpers from 2009 to 2012.**