



For We Are
God's Helpers
2023 Summer Newsletter

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

Making a Sustainable Difference

Thanks to your support, Josie Cruz is already half-way through her three-year assignment in Damongo, Ghana. Her missionary service exemplifies the unique way Lay Mission-Helpers make a difference in mission communities. Whether we serve in education, health-care, or like in Josie's case, administration and accounting, our model of mission not only urges us to serve the immediate needs of the people but also (and more importantly) compels us to create sustainable systems that local professionals can use for the benefit of their communities for years to come.

Josie does a lot of day-to-day administration and accounting for the diocese. The bishop asked her to take charge of bookkeeping operations at the Diocesan Finance Office and to monitor the accounts of St. Anne's Girls Senior High School, St. Cyprian Minor Seminary, St. Kizito's Vocational Institute, Kalba Health Centre, Tuna Health Centre and Bole Health Centre.

However, Josie's work in the Finance and Development offices, per the bishop's request, focuses on systemic changes. While collaborating with local professionals to achieve the objectives of the Diocesan Strategic Plan 2021-2026, her expertise adds to securing long-term benefits. Particularly, because of her extensive experience as an auditor, the bishop asked her to develop policies and systems to ensure transparency and accountability for the diocese and its educational, healthcare, and income-producing entities. (Last year, another LMH missionary Karen Hunka worked on such systems at all the parishes in the diocese.)

In addition, Josie plays a pivotal part in the management of various educational and healthcare projects which depend on outside funding. She oversees those projects from the initial inquires for funding to writ-



Josie Cruz has created sustainable systems as a Lay Mission-Helper in Damongo, Ghana.

ing proposals, accounting, and reporting on the use of funds. One of the major projects is securing funding to supply computers, printers, scanners and all the needed software for the parishes and the diocesan offices. Another one is securing grants for internet connectivity for the Chancery and the income-generating guesthouse and restaurant.

All of Josie's activities are designed to create sustainable changes which will serve the community far beyond her presence. Consequently, since her missionary work is possible only because (cont. on page 2)

Difference *continued*

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of you, you are part of the sustainable impact on the entire population of the region.

Besides her official duties (as if she were not busy enough) Josie is following her other passions. She helps with the Rosary Ministry for youth and adults and assists priests with creating engaging activities for those groups. She also utilizes her 20-year experience in the hospitality industry and happily helps with the reviewing and updating of the policies and procedures for the diocesan guesthouse and restaurant which will help get them ready for the Ghana Bishops Conference which will take place in Damongo in 2024.

As she goes about her service, she finds extra joy in the many meaningful relationships she cultivates with the local clergy, fellow professionals, neighbors, and ordinary Ghanaians. As she says, "I have very good interactions with them and their families, friendly discus-

"I have very good interactions with them and their families..."

sions and sometimes sharing of their hopes and dreams." Mutually enriching each other, she offers her gifts and they help her navigate cultural pitfalls, encourage and motivate her in her mission, and offer her their friendship.

Thank you for your support of Josie's missionary service!

"...They laughed"

For five years, you have accompanied Karen Hunka as she shared her professional gifts with the Diocese of Damongo, its parishes, and St. Anne's School. However, there is much more to her mission! In addition to serving as the bursar at St. Anne's, Karen shares how she also cares about the students' welfare.



Karen Hunka teaches the joy of reading at St. Anne's School in Damongo, Ghana.

"In 1995, when the Damongo Diocese was created, a survey revealed that there was a 96% illiteracy rate among females and 76% among males. This was one of the reasons the then Bishop, Philip Naameh, established St. Anne's Girls' Senior High School. Statistics now show that the illiteracy rate has fallen to 67%. Females still fall behind males, but the difference from 1995 until now is much better.

Here at St. Anne's, however, the girls are not reading as well as expected. Some come to us reading

well below a high school level. The staff is determined to ensure every girl leaves here not only reading at the appropriate level but also knowing the importance reading can have in their lives. We want them to know that the inability to read well will keep them from continuing their education and hamper opportunities for gainful employment.

Every Monday, we have an assembly to talk about the week's activities. I often talk to the girls about the importance of reading, not just for studies, but for pleasure. I tell them 'Read, read, read. Write, write, write. That is what will help you excel in life.' The very first time I told them how reading for me is pleasurable they laughed, loudly. They thought I was teasing. That is when I decided to introduce them to reading for pleasure and relaxation.

On my last trip to the U.S., I purchased 12 young adult books that would be easy enough for them to read without frustration and therefore enjoy. Sundays, the girls gather to discuss the books. For some my plan is working. They are excited about reading and see that it can be enjoyable. For others, however, maybe someday they will remember my words.

The girls are a privileged bunch. They may not know it now, but in the future, they will understand how lucky they are. I am blessed to know that I may have helped at least one girl accomplish more because she improved her reading skills by making time in her schedule to sit down, relax and enjoy a good book."

How can I carry out my mission in the best way?

Mark McGraw, who with your generous support serves in Ghana, shares the following reflection on his mission experience:

"When I first discerned the call to go on mission, the primary question was, 'Why do I want to do this?' After four months of instruction in the Los Angeles Lay Mission-Helpers Mission House and arriving in Damongo, Ghana, the question changed slightly to, 'Why am I here?' After five months of observation and participation in my assignment, the question has become, 'How can I carry out my mission in the best way?' I expect that question to remain with me for the next three years as I continue to learn and serve the diocese and the people.

While I am growing in my mission experience, my 30 years in the restaurant business is very valuable. My assignment is to oversee the development of the existing diocese-run restaurant/bar/guesthouse complex (The Unity Centre) that is the sole source of income for the diocese. The money generated here will help to fund a variety of projects including local health care, financial aid to the poor, and catechism training.

I take this responsibility very seriously and am humbled by the trust placed in me jointly by the partnership of the diocese and Lay Mission-Helpers. The goal is to produce positive results that will not only help the needy in the short term but also in passing on my knowledge to coworkers so that they might develop skills to benefit their families and community long after I am gone.

The objective is to carefully as-

similate my United States experience with local customs and cuisine. Damongo and all of Ghana is in a very critical state of transition on many levels, not least of which is a clash of Western culture with traditional tribal customs. I'm very cognizant and respectful of this precarious balance. While I'm not here to help establish fast food outlets on each corner, maximizing profits for the benefit of the people is primary.

Damongo is growing very quickly. The main goal of the Church here is the welfare of souls. However, the diocese exists also as a stakeholder in the community in other ways: providing jobs to local people as well as meals and rooms for visitors.

As Damongo grows, so will other existing and new stakeholders.

It is my job to help this diocese business concern to remain competitive by staying aware of any new trends -- an extremely important foundation of any hospitality venture.

While the 'bottom line' must always be the bedrock of any serious business, Christian values must never be sacrificed. I have always considered those I work with as family and have done my best to treat

them in a way reflective of that.

I hope to lead by example in such a way that we will not only learn how to conduct business by assimilating each other's strengths



Mark McGraw is using his over 30 years in the restaurant business to help develop diocese-run businesses in Damongo, Ghana.

and remaining true to traditions but also will be present to each other and keep the work experience positive. Cultivating a feeling of 'ownership' is the best way to achieve this. Shared success builds that ownership and healthy pride. Healthy pride in oneself can lead to spiritual awareness that will unlock doors that otherwise might never even have been noticed."

Rose Gala 2023

You are invited to the Rose Gala 2023 which will be at Luminarias in Monterey Park, Calif., on Saturday, October 7th from 4:00 to 8:00 PM. This will be our first in-person Gala since the onset of the COVID pandemic, and we are looking forward to spending time with you!

Our keynote speaker will be Fr. Eugen Nkardzedze, Ph. D. who served in his home diocese of Kumbo in Cameroon as a priest, school manager, chancellor, and professor. He had much to do with the work and personnel of the Lay Mission-Helpers, some of whom became his personal friends. The title of his presentation will be "The Passion for the Mission."

This year's Ernst Ophuls Award will be presented to Art and Ruth Munoz in recognition of their missionary service and continued support of LMH. Born and raised in Southern California, Ruth and Art joined Lay Mission-Helpers in 1995 and were sent to teach at Xavier High School in the Chuuk Islands of the Federated States of Micronesia. Art taught algebra, geometry, and physics, while Ruth taught language skills and guitar. Their daughter Gina, age 19, taught at the local Catholic elementary school. Christof, 15, Mark, 12, and Vincent, 8, attended local Catholic schools.

The St. Therese of Lisieux Award will be given to Cheryl Fabien in recognition of her service on the Board of Directors and her generous financial support of LMH. She encountered LMH at her parish St. John the Evangelist in Los Angeles, the parish home to LMH since 2000. Over the years, her relationship with us became stronger by creating a garden for the students of the Parish School in the LMH backyard, co-chairing the Parish/LMH/MDA Community Health Fair, and attending celebrations at the Mission House. She joined the LMH Board in 2013.

You can learn more about the Gala at www.laymissionhelpers.org/gala.

Fr. Eugen Nkardzedze, Ph.D. (top) will be the keynote speaker, and Art and Ruth Munoz (center) and Cheryl Fabien (bottom) will be honored at the Rose Gala 2023.

