



# Welcome to our new Director!



Paul Wheeler began working as the new Director of the Comboni Lay Missionaries in mid-November. He is no stranger to the Comboni Family. He has helped out in LaGrange Park many times with Discernment Weekends with potential lay missionaries, and served on the Admission Committee. Paul served as a lay missionary himself with the Society of African Missions in the 1990s. He spent two years in Liberia, and then returned to Ivory Coast for two additional years to help coordinate relief efforts for refugees from Liberia's civil war. He has an MBA from DePaul

University, and joins us after working many years with Catholic Charities in Chicago, and with a local Chicago-area business.

## *Update: Susan Coopersmith in Kenya*

My work of evangelization is carried out by showing love, concern, caring, and lending a listening ear. I try to inculturate the Gospel in a concrete way by bringing the values of the Kingdom – peace, justice, truth, forgiveness, and service – out into the community where I live.



A student in knitting class.

loom weaving, machine knitting, tie and dye, and embroidery, and also support courses in Business Education, Literacy, and Character and Spiritual Formation. Students also participate and assist in preparation of daily prayer. Among the challenges our students face are poverty,

Annually the Kariobangi Women Promotion Project in Nairobi assists approximately 100 needy young women (ages 13 – 30) by offering them vocational training in dressmaking, hand

physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, exploitation, drug and alcohol addiction, single motherhood, and many others. The inspiration of the Project, to further the

***Continued on back cover...***

# Food for Thought: *Kusindikiza*

*Kusindikiza* is a Swahili word that has been on my mind lately. It's true that I haven't been back to Tanzania since I finished being a lay missionary there four years ago, but the word and its meaning is still relevant to me.

*Kusindikiza* means to accompany--more specifically, it is what Tanzanians do when a visitor is leaving their home. Tanzanians walk with their visitors either halfway home, or to the nearest bus stop, and wait with them until the bus leaves. I experienced this many times when I visited the homes of my friends and students. I experience it now in Chicago, where I spend a few hours each week visiting an immigrant family from Ethiopia in their home, and answering their questions about adapting to life in the United States.

Every week, they welcome me with an elaborate Ethiopian-style dinner, and then we practice English. When it's time for me to catch the bus, we bundle up in coats, blankets, and hats and they walk me to the bus stop and wait with me. It doesn't matter that the neighborhood is not very safe, that there may be poor weather, or that they are tired from working 10+ hour days, six days per week--they accompany me until the bus arrives.

This spirit of accompaniment is one of the key values of the Comboni Lay Missionaries, as well. We seek, best as we can, to live among, work with, and accompany people in other countries. As you have most certainly read in reflections from our lay missionaries in the field, life can be extremely difficult in many parts of the world. Access to health care, education, electricity, plumbing, waste disposal, etc, is often lacking. Many times when people in developing countries encounter foreigners, they encounter tourists or business people who do not take much interest in the lives of the local people.



Walking together in Peru.

Our program is precisely the opposite. The people are what bring us to live and work in these countries, not the landscape or the opportunities. We go to learn, to grow, to share, to build friendships...and to accompany.

*Think about your own lives here in North America. How do you accompany others in your community, workplace, parish or school?*

We're a Catholic community of men and women who live out our faith by walking with the poor of other lands, helping to build a more just and compassionate world. Following a 14-week training program, our lay missionaries serve a 3-year assignment overseas in Africa or Latin America. Join us on a journey of love and compassion as we reach out to our brothers and sisters around the globe.

**Lay Mission Newsletter** is a quarterly newsletter of the Comboni Lay Missionary Program  
**Director:** Paul Wheeler **Associate Director:** JoAnne Harbert **Chaplain & Assistant:** Fr. Raphael Wokorach

# Update: Theresa May in Peru

About 30 of us struggle through the deep sand in the quiet of night. No moon, no stars, no light, I'm a little lost, but the others know the way, and I trust them. Finally, we arrive at the house; it's quiet and dark just like the others on the street. In silence, one in our group steps forward and knocks on the door. Teodoro stands ready with the guitar. The door opens tentatively, just a crack. *"Estas son las mañanitas que cantaba el Rey David..."* We start singing the traditional birthday song.

She swings the door open wide and with a huge grin on her face and her eyes wide with surprise and brimming with tears, she steps out. Cristina is a member of the parish's youth group and we've come to serenade her, bring her a birthday cake and wish her a *Feliz Cumpleaños*.



A birthday party at the parish in Peru.

Ralph, Hannah and I have been serving as Comboni Lay Missionaries in Peru for more than a year and as I reflect on all our experiences one in particular stands out – birthdays!

I spend a lot of my time with the youth from the parish since I coordinate the confirmation program, help out with catechist formation and the first communion program and just generally “hang out” with the youth. Poverty prevents most families from celebrating birthdays. People live on just \$2-3 a day and, as you can imagine, they struggle everyday just to put a very simple meal on the table.

When a birthday rolls around, everyone who is able contributes one sol (about 30 cents) to buy the cake. If there is enough left over, we buy a 3 liter bottle of soda. The people are very humble. I keep thinking that the surprise will wear off and the birthday person will come to expect their cake. That's not the case. The people here are grateful that the group cared enough to observe their birthday. I love helping make them feel so special and so loved.



A lot of times, we all barely fit into the birthday person's mud house. We stand on the dirt floor and candle light casts dancing shadows on the walls. These houses are quite dark and damp on the inside, but when we fill them with laughter and smiles, jokes and song, for me, they transform into some of the most beautiful homes I've ever been in.

I feel very privileged to share life experiences and faith with the people of Trujillo, Peru. Their tremendous sense of hospitality, their love of fiesta and their concern for one another inspires me to be more welcoming and attentive to the needs of others. Plus it never hurts to kick back and celebrate a birthday party or two!

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## Thank You!

Thanks to **Mike Haasl** for his contributions to the Board of Directors in 2006. Best of luck with your continued ministry in the missions office of Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Thanks to **all of our donors** who make our work in mission possible. Your donations and prayers are greatly valued by us, and we give thanks for you!

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## Susan *(cont'd from pg. 1)*

church mission by serving young women who are seen by the community as social outcasts, comes from Ephesians 4:12-13 with the sole purpose of building up the Body of Christ to full maturity into the image of Christ Himself.

The main aims of K.W.P.P. are to help trainees to discover their dignity as children created in the image of God, to teach them technical skills in order to contribute to their long-term economic independence, to enable them to achieve family and social stability, and to provide them with the self-assurance needed to overcome situations of crises in their lives.

## Frequently Asked Questions...

### What are the key values of the Comboni Lay Missionaries?

*A strong, mature faith commitment:* We are very committed to the spirit and theology of the Catholic Church's Post-Vatican II era.

*Cultural sensitivity and awareness:* We seek to be sensitive to the cultural values of the people with whom we live and work. We also take plenty of time to learn the local language.

*Teamwork and community:* Working on a pastoral team is a must for us! Our program also emphasizes the necessity of taking time for regular prayer, reflection, and meals with the lay mission community and the pastoral team.

*Solidarity and accompaniment:* We seek to live and work with the people. We strive to live a simple lifestyle in the areas where we work.

*Qualities we value:* Resourcefulness, Creativity, Maturity, Humor, Humility, Perseverance, and Patience.

*For more FAQ's, please visit the "Is This For Me?" page on our updated website at [www.laymission-comboni.org](http://www.laymission-comboni.org)*

## New Lay Mission Newsletter Format

Beginning in March 2007, this Lay Mission Newsletter will have a new look and format. We will be submitting our stories to the newsletter produced by the religious Comboni Missionaries, which will reduce our production costs. Nothing will change in our relationship with you--just our look. Watch for us in your mailbox in March!

