



Lay Mission Newsletter



Comboni Lay Missionary Program

Summer 2006

Discernment Time for Potential Lay Missioners

Each month we receive preliminary inquiries from folks interested in serving overseas with our lay mission program. Most have learned about us from our website, or they have seen one of our ads in the *National Catholic Reporter* or the *Catholic New Times* of Canada. Some may have heard about us during our mission appeals in parishes around the U.S., or met a Comboni Missionary and wanted to learn more about the lay mission group.

We review their preliminary forms and talk with them via email and the phone. If we think they meet our qualifications and mission needs, we invite them to spend a weekend for discernment with us at the Comboni Mission Center in LaGrange Park, Illinois.

Our discernment weekends include presentations on our history, mission vision and values, and current mission opportunities. There is also time for interviews with the staff, discussions with former lay missionaries, and prayer.

Sometimes discernment for lay mission takes awhile--for some people, as long as two

years before beginning a training program. The decision deserves much consideration, thought, prayer, and discussion with friends and family. We try our best to accompany our applicants and give them the space and time they need to make a good decision.

Our next scheduled weekend is August 18-20th. We are expecting 4 potential candidates, including a married couple with two children, and two young women with teaching and volunteer experience.

If you would like to learn more about our Program, please take a look at our website (www.laymission-comboni.org) or give us a call.

We will be planning more discernment weekends in the coming months as we continue to recruit candidates for our next Orientation Program in the Spring.

Inside:

- Staff Changes
- Missioners in the field
- Website - FAQ
- Thank You's
- Alumni Updates

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A Letter of Farewell

Dear Friends,

I am writing to let you know that I will be leaving my position as Director of the Comboni Lay Missionaries on August 31st.

My wife, Sue Howard, has been offered a position at St. Mary's Hospital in Grand Rapids, Michigan starting in September. We are excited and happy about the move, but also a little sad because we have to say goodbye to many good friends.



Allen with Fr. Raphael

I began working with the Comboni Lay Missionary Program back in 2000 as a staff assistant.

In 2003, Fr. Dennis

Conway nominated me to be the first lay director of the Comboni Lay Missionaries. It has been a privilege to work with so many fine Comboni priests, brothers, sisters, and lay missionaries.

Over the last 3 years, we have sought to send our lay missionaries to mission sites where the needs are great and where they can live a simple lifestyle with the people. We have emphasized the importance of living as a community of lay missionaries and participating on pastoral teams of priests, sisters, and other lay leaders.

We have also taken steps towards becoming a more autonomous, self-sufficient lay mission organization within the Comboni Mission Family.

We are part of an exciting new expression of overseas lay mission service in our Church. As North Americans and as lay people, we can also bring a new spirit to the Comboni Mission Family.

I am proud of the spirit and commitment of our current lay missionaries -- Ralph, Theresa, and Hannah May in Peru, and Susan Coopersmith in Kenya. May we have many more like them!

My sincere thanks to all of you who have supported the Comboni Lay Missionaries with donations, volunteer help, and prayers. You are important partners in our efforts to reach out to the poor of Africa and Latin America.

The Lay Mission Program will continue to move forward with hope and energy. JoAnne Harbert will continue as Associate Director. Fr. Raphael Wokorach will join the team as our new chaplain and assistant. Fr. Raphael, who is from Uganda, worked for many years as a missionary in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We are happy to have him as part of our staff.

Our Board of Trustees has begun the search for a new lay Director and we hope to have someone in place in September.

Exciting and challenging times lie ahead as we work to develop strong lay mission teams in Peru, Guatemala, Kenya, and South Africa.

With your help, "the best is yet to be."

Peace,

Allen Scheid

Update: The May Family in Peru

Theresa May is busy these days working in the parish with the Confirmation program.



Theresa and Hannah May

There are 70 young people seeking confirmation and she has a team of some twenty others, mostly 18 to 24 year olds.

Theresa has a very dear friend,

Elena, who is deeply involved in the life of the parish. It is a great gift for Theresa to be able to work closely with Elena and learn how the Peruvians do things and what things are important to them. She helps Elena with the process of family instruction for First Communion in the parish.

Hannah is doing very well. She speaks like a native Peruvian--fast, and without an accent. In her kindergarten, she has dance and theater classes every week in addition to her regular classes. She loves the dance classes and does very well with them. She is growing up very fast!



Hannah with a friend from dance class.

Ralph has been working steadily with his various garden projects in the area. The Sisters who run the local school presented Ralph with the kind of challenge he loves: find a way to grow small vegetable plots on the dry sandy hillside, and teach the students how to do it! The land, a giant sand dune, receives little rain during the year. A half inch pipe brings water for two hours every other day.

Ralph and the students brought in over a 100 cubic yards of topsoil to place over the blow sand. They laid out 40 individual gardens, and planted a variety of vegetables. 200 secondary students enthusiastically work two afternoons every week to plant, weed and water their gardens.



Ralph May and students from the local school plant seeds for a vegetable garden.

After only a few weeks, the signs of a miracle began to unfold. On the desert hillside, patches of green began to appear, as the students proudly cared for their crops of spinach, carrots and beets.

Update: Susan in Nairobi, Kenya



Susan Coopersmith

During my first months at the Women Promotion Project, students would arrive at my door early in the morning and late in the evening. While I am available to these young women during the 9 hours a

day that I work at the Project, I try to save some time to myself for prayer, reflection, and relaxation.

Gently but firmly I let people know that my private time was precious. Without it I would not be able to face the challenges of each day--challenges such as helping the young students who have just learned they are HIV positive or the young women who are pregnant and unmarried. Or those who have barely reached 16 years old and have one or two small children, no parents, and no income.

The way of the slum is rough, but for most of our young women, it is the only way they know. We work not only to train these young women with a skill, but to form them holistically. We try to instill in them a spiritual strength, emotional well being, and high moral standards.

It has taken me some courage to get through this past year, but it is nothing compared to the courage of our students who struggle to turn their lives around -- for their own sake and for the sake of their children. I realize

that any struggles I have endured are minimal compared to what the people encounter in their world of the slums.

Along with my life at the Women's Center, I am also a part of the community of Kariobangi. I participate with my neighbors in our weekly Small Christian Community meetings. Each Thursday evening we get together to pray, read the Word of God, and discuss its meaning in our lives.



Industrial Education Class at the Women's Center

I encourage anyone who is considering becoming a lay missionary to seriously discern if this is your calling. If it is, please come on board because there is a great need.

Susan Coopersmith works with Comboni Missionary Sisters as the Training and Production Coordinator of the Kariobangi Women Promotion Project in a slum area of Nairobi, Kenya. To learn more about this project, visit: www.kwpp.org

Updates: Alumni, Board, and Visitors

Congratulations to Comboni Lay Mission alums, **Don Toomey** and **Bernadette Vanspall** on the latest addition to their family, six month old Joseph.



Anna and Joseph



Doug Kieffer and his wife Jojo -- along with their sons, Willy and Mathieu -- got together with **Chris Reano** after their mission appeal in

Minneapolis. Doug and Chris served together as Comboni Lay Missionaries in Uganda. Mathieu was born in April and baptized at the Comboni Mission Center in LaGrange Park, Illinois.

Chris will begin a new position as Autism Specialist this fall in the Edina, Minnesota, school district. She will be consulting, training staff, working with parents of children with Autism, and doing student assessments.

Thanks for your help...

A special thanks to all of the alumni and Board of Trustees members who helped with mission appeals this summer:

Tom Drexler
 Doug & Jojo Kieffer
 Chris Reano
 Paul & Maria Sermersheim
 Don Toomey

Thanks also to **JoAnn McCaffrey**, who leaves our Board of Trustees after serving many years as secretary and member of the Executive Committee.

We will miss you, JoAnn, but we wish you well with your new work in Virginia!

Fr. John Converset, a Comboni Missionary in South Africa, recently visited the Comboni Mission Center in LaGrange Park, IL.



(Fr. John is pictured here (left) with JoAnne Harbert, Associate Director, and Fr. Angelo Biancalana, the founder of the Comboni Lay Missionaries.)

Our Sincere Thanks to:

-the **Jerome, Idaho Knights of Columbus and Rotary Club** for your donations to benefit the work of the Mays in Peru.

-**St. Cecilia Parish in Tustin, California** for your regular donations on behalf of Susan Coopersmith in Kenya.

-**all of our supporters** for your prayers and donations.

-**and the parishes across the U.S. that have so warmly welcomed us for Mission Appeals:**

Providence Diocese:

St. Anthony
St. Barnabus
Our Lady of Lourdes

Saginaw Diocese:

St. Joseph
St. John
St. Maria Goretti
Our Lady of Visitation

Los Angeles Diocese:

St. Paschal Baylon
St. Paul of the Cross

San Francisco Diocese:

Our Lady of Loretto

Frequently Asked Questions...

What does it take to be a good lay missionary?

One of our missionaries in Nairobi, Kenya, said that it takes 3 things to be a good missionary: patience, patience ... and patience.

Along with patience, it takes a certain level of maturity, resourcefulness, and creativity for dealing with the many challenges that come your way. It takes a strong faith to remember that God is walking with you, as you walk with the people. It takes enthusiasm and joy -- and an ability to hang in there when the going gets tough.

It takes a willingness and ability to work well in teams and to live in community with others. It demands an attitude of solidarity to truly live and work **with** the people and not impose our "projects".

Language ability is important in most areas. A foundation in Spanish is important for service in Peru and Guatemala. For service in Kenya, our lay missionaries need to study four months of Swahili before they begin their service.

How do you know if you have what it takes?

Look back on your life experience up till now. How have you been involved in mission in your own parish and community? How have you been involved with people from other cultures and religious backgrounds? What evidence can you point to that indicates you have the skills and maturity for lay mission?

For more FAQ's, please visit the "Is This For Me?" page on our updated website at www.laymission-comboni.org

St. Cloud Diocese:

St. Mary's Cathedral
St. Michael
St. Agnes
St. Margaret

Gary Diocese:

St. Mary
St. Margaret Mary
Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Minneapolis Diocese:

St. Alphonsus
St. Philip
St. Austin

New York Diocese:

St. Joseph
St. Thomas
St. Clare
Holy Name of Jesus