



# Lay Mission Newsletter

Comboni Lay Mission Program

Spring 2006

## Looking for Folks to Serve in Africa and Latin America

We are on the lookout for good candidates to serve in our mission sites in Africa and Latin America.

We are running ads in a few Catholic publications, like the *National Catholic Reporter* and the *New Times* of Canada. We speak in churches and we invite folks to check out our website (at [www.laymission-comboni.org](http://www.laymission-comboni.org)).

From past experience, we know there are many potential candidates out there. They are single people and married couples who have been considering serving overseas for several years. They talk about it with their family and friends and sometimes they participate in "immersion trips" to other lands to get a taste of what it is like.

They are folks who feel the pain of others and want to do something about it. Many have worked for various social causes that provide help to those in need and struggle for more justice in our world.

Could you be one of the people we are looking for? Or do you know someone searching for this kind of opportunity to serve overseas on a team of folks seeking to live out their faith working with the poor and oppressed of our world?

### Priorities:

Our priorities this year are to find candidates to join our current lay missionaries in Peru and Kenya and to form new teams in Guatemala and South Africa.

### What We Do:

In **Peru**, we work with poor families in a shantytown on the northern coast. We live close to the people, teach in the parish schools and help with community projects to provide health care, food, and jobs.

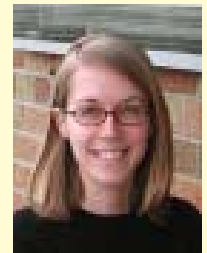
In Nairobi, **Kenya**, we work with Comboni priests and sisters in one of the poorest slums in the world. We work in a women's center that provides education and training for women seeking to support their families. We also care for the orphans and those dying of AIDS.

In our new site in the rural highlands of **Guatemala**, we will join a new team of priests and sisters that provide pastoral care, education, and medical clinics for the rural poor.

In **South Africa**, we hope to form a team of lay missionaries to work in AIDS ministry in the area around Pretoria and Johannesburg.

## New Associate Director Joins Lay Mission Team

Originally from Indianapolis, Indiana, JoAnne Harbert is excited to return to the midwest and begin working with the Comboni Lay Missionary Program.



JoAnne, who served as a Jesuit Volunteer in Tanzania, recently completed a Master's degree in Pastoral Ministry at Boston College. Her concentration of study was in Social Justice and Human Rights.

As a lay missionary, she taught courses in English and Graphic Communication. During the school vacation, she also spent two months working in village education and rural development.

JoAnne is very committed to lay mission and sees partnerships between religious and lay groups as key for the future of Catholic mission work.

## Inside

- Program Update
- New Board Members
- Our Lay Missioners in Peru
- Working Together in Mission

## Letter from the Staff

Sometimes you can learn a lot about the values of a group by looking at what they hang on their office walls or put on their desks.

On one of our walls, there is a poster of a penguin ready to clang two brass cymbals as he stands on the back of a big, sleeping polar bear. The caption is: "**A Time to be bold!**".

On one of our desks is a framed quote of George Bernard Shaw that says, "You see things and you say why? But I dream things that never were, and I say why not?"

We like to think it is part of the *Comboni Spirit* to be bold and to dream things that never were as we strive to faithfully follow Jesus and serve our brothers and sisters.

Our Founder, St. Daniel Comboni, was bold, creative, and courageous in his efforts to get the Catholic churches of Europe to reach out in solidarity to the suffering people of Africa. He was bold and ahead of his time as he sought to organize men and women — religious and lay — to serve the poor and spread God's word.

Our Comboni Lay Missionary Program, which began back in 1993, seeks to be a bold and creative way for Catholic lay men and women — singles and married couples — to live and work with the poor and suffering of other lands.

Our overseas commitment as lay missionaries is more than a brief immersion experience among the poor of another land....and it is more than



setting up our "pet project." It is about living out our faith as a small community among the poor of another land. It means learning another language and culture, sharing our talents and experiences, and learning from one another.

Overseas mission is hard work — even discouraging and lonely at times. It is not always easy to hang in there for the long haul — especially for us North Americans who are accustomed to

having so many comforts and options in life.

To be a Comboni Lay Missionary means to hang in there, to learn the language and culture, to build relationships, and to work with others in helping to build God's Kingdom of compassion and justice.

Comboni Lay Missionaries live together in small communities and work on pastoral teams with priests, brothers, sisters, and local lay leaders.

We have begun to form new lay mission teams in a shantytown on the northern coast of Peru and in a slum area of Nairobi, Kenya. This year we hope to add more lay missionaries to these teams and form new teams in Guatemala and South Africa.

We hope that those of you who have helped us over the years with your prayers and donations will continue to help and be a part of our work. We hope that more will join our family of supporters...And we hope that some of you will explore the possibilities of serving overseas with us!

*Allen Scheid and  
JoAnne Harbert*

## Welcome to New Board Members

Four new board members will begin their term of service at our next board meeting on April 3rd.

**Doug Kieffer**



*Doug served as a Comboni Lay Missionary in Uganda from 1994-96. He currently works for Spectrum Technologies in Plain Field, Illinois.*

**Gisela Grundges Andraos**



*Gisela, a former lay missionary in Peru, works in the Mission Office of the Archdiocese of Chicago.*

**Michael Haasl**



*Mike served as lay missionary in Venezuela. He currently works on the Parish Twinning Program in the Mission Office of the Archdiocese of St. Paul.*

**Chuck Carey**



*Chuck, a local businessman at Randall Manufacturing, is interested in supporting our work through his service on the Board..*

# Our Lay Missionaries in Peru

## A Letter from Theresa May in Alto Trujillo

Rain is rare where we live in the arid desert sands of the northern coast of Peru, but last night the sky opened up a deluge – about a half an inch of rain. That's a lot of water for our neighbors, most of whom live under mud and plastic roofs, surrounded by adobe walls. This morning we greeted one another in the streets as we removed muddy water from our houses and climbed on the roofs to reattach the plastic coverings.



*Ralph May uses his farming skills to help with a new project to develop vegetable gardens.*

The City of Trujillo usually delivers water to us every other day for only two hours at a time. Sometimes we go three or four days without water. During that precious two-hour period, we would collect water in every container possible and take advantage of its flow to flush toilets, do laundry and clean house.

About a month ago, we installed an underground cistern that collects water.

We don't know how the people live day after day, year after year, with so little water. We miss long, hot showers, but our friends and neighbors can't even follow basic sanitation procedures, such as handwashing and toilet flushing.

We have indoor plumbing in the Comboni Lay Mission house, but the majority of our neighbors do not. Most of the people here "work to eat" which means they make enough each day to buy food and that's about it. Their kitchens consist of a plastic bowl that serves as a sink and they cook using firewood.

Although we live in the midst of overwhelming poverty, we still don't fully understand its depth.

Women unravel old torn sweaters and use the yarn to knit new ones. No one has money to buy new yarn. People live an entire lifetime and never sit on a toilet. Money is too short and precious to spend it on such a luxury. People work long, twelve-hour days, only to earn \$3 to \$5 a day.

Sounds horrible, doesn't it? It is...and yet it isn't. Outside our house we always hear the sound of children laughing and playing. Peruvians love fiestas and are very hospitable. People string up



*Kate and Brian May visited their parents in Alto Trujillo in December. The May family is posing here with the parish youth group with whom Theresa works.*

volleyball nets in the middle of the street and just step aside and raise the net to let vehicles pass. We enjoy talking and interacting with our neighbors, even though we're still learning to speak Spanish. Our four-year old daughter Hannah has hoards of friends and they have a good time playing together.

As Lent approaches, the children here have the tradition of throwing water on people and vehicles as they pass by (where they find the water I don't know). People tell me it has something to do with *Mardi Gras*. I hear peals of laughter from children and adults alike when the water surprises an unsuspecting target.

*Ralph and Theresa May teach at a Catholic grade school, mentor a youth group, and help with parish and community development projects, including a new project to develop community vegetable gardens.*



*Hannah May with her new friends, Jessica and Melanie*

## Our Youngest Lay Missioner

In the poor shantytown of Alto Trujillo, Peru, **Hannah**, the four-year old daughter of Ralph and Theresa May, is our youngest lay missioner. In her own unique way, she tackles the challenges of being a missioner overseas:

- learning a new language and customs,
- making new friends,
- being willing to follow sometimes,
- caring for those in need,
- and remembering to have fun along the way.

# Updates

## Susan Coopersmith in Kenya:

Susan Coopersmith is continuing her work with the Women's Promotion Project in Kariobangi outside of Nairobi, Kenya.

Because most of the women in the Women's Promotion Project are illiterate, Susan has organized a new training program in literacy. Classes are beginning mid-February 2006. Susan is encouraged by the enthusiastic response she has gotten from women interested in participating in this program.

## Outgoing board members:

Our sincere thanks to **Jim Lindsay** and **Don Toomey** for their dedicated service on our Board of Trustees. Jim served as President and Don as Vice-President.

## Donation Report for 2005:

We offer our sincere thanks to the 158 donors who supported our Lay Missionaries in 2005.

### A special thanks to:

- the family and friends of our lay missionaries currently serving overseas,
- the parishioners of St. Cecilia in Tustin, California,
- the Knights of Columbus of Jerome, Idaho,
- a special donor in the south suburbs of Chicago.

The total individual donations for 2005 was \$31,571 — almost 3 times as much as 2004. These donations helped us cover about 15% of our expenses for 2005. The rest of our support came from mission

## Working Together in Mission

*The following reflection, written by Fr. Benito De Marche of the London Province of the Comboni Missionaries, highlights the importance of collaborative ministry in mission. In our Comboni Lay Mission Program, we look for mission sites where we can work on pastoral teams with priests, sisters, brothers, and lay leaders.*

Today's mission is the mission of the Christian community as a whole, in the totality of its gifts, vocations and ministries. In plain words, and taking into account the rather clerical and hierarchical view of both Church and mission of the last centuries, we should say that today's mission is inconceivable without a direct involvement of the laity, and more precisely without a partnership of women and men.

Moreover, if the proper horizon of mission is the dream itself of a new creation, the advent of God's kingdom and the promotion of a new reconciled global community, then we should say that not only the lay presence is decisive for mission, but rather mission itself is and has to be a lay-centred mission.

This represents a Copernican shift in the model of mission...and the consequences of such a shift are not totally clear yet. We will learn from experience. The key element is to leave space for the lay people to be protagonists in mission.

In reality, however, too much concentration on the laity as such could confuse the issue and undermine what is at stake here, namely a communion in mission and a collaborative ministry. The very dichotomy of clerics-laity, or even religious-laity, needs to be overcome as an unfortunate historical heritage and the original vision of the whole Christian community/Church as the People of God needs to be recaptured. The rediscovery of this vision and its practical restoration is itself mission — a taste of shalom, of a free, equal and reconciled society in the midst of a world of divisions and discriminations reflected even in the Church.

*This is an excerpt of a longer study on the challenges of Mission today. The complete text of Fr. Benito's paper on Mission can be found on our website at [www.laymission-comboni.org](http://www.laymission-comboni.org).*

appeals in the churches (28%), and a subsidy from the Comboni Fathers (57%).

Because our subsidy decreases each year, we will need to continue increasing our

funding from other sources. With your help, we can continue to recruit, train, and support lay missionaries to serve the poor, sick, and oppressed of our world.

We consider you part of our family.

**Lay Mission Newsletter** is a quarterly newsletter of the Comboni Lay Missionary Program in La Grange Park, IL

**Director:** Allen Scheid ■ **Associate Director:** JoAnne Harbert **Phone:** 708-588-1602

**Comboni Lay Mission Program, 1615 E. 31st St., La Grange Park, IL 60526** [www.laymission-comboni.org](http://www.laymission-comboni.org)