

# Mission Connections

Volume #83

Spring 2026



*"You want a better, more fraternal, more just world? Well then, start building it....Build it inside yourself and around you, build it with those who want it. Build it small, and it will grow."*

*Lanza del Vasto*

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From Whom and Where in the World do our stories come from?

## Updates From Missioners

Shannon Hillestad started serving in Jamaica over 15 years ago as a lay woman with Mustard Seed Communities, a group of Catholic homes for children and adults with special needs. As she completed her training in Occupational Therapy her mission shifted to a therapeutic focus.

After being introduced to the Missionaries of the Poor, Shannon witnessed the love and hard work these Brothers and Sisters gave to those they served and it was apparent to Shannon the potential for developing a partnership that evolved into the Little Flower Catholic Therapy Mission in Jamaica. It has been an exciting partnership as they challenge us to grow in our love for the Lord, and we challenge them to grow as caregivers in recognizing the dignity and quality of life for those in their care. Fast forward a few years for Shannon in her ministry which include marriage to husband, Grant, who is also an Occupational Therapist and member of the team, and expanding their family.

It's been an interesting and humbling process growing an organization while also growing a family. Things often move slower than I would like, but it all seems to be in God's time. He has been blessing our organization over the years! In 2025, we led 11 people on a mission trip, 8 of which were therapy professionals. We continued our work with the Missionaries of the Poor in Kingston Jamaica, working to establish therapy programming at their primary children's home, Bethlehem.

Bethlehem houses around 55 children with various levels of disability. Most do not receive any professional therapy services due to lack of access and funding. Due to this lack of services, they suffer an exacerbation of conditions such as contractures, dislocated joints, bedsores, poor development or motor skills, lack of mobility, poor cognitive development, lack of ability to communicate, and chronic aspiration. Our organization sponsors a local Jamaican to serve as the home's full-time therapy provider. We provide her training and sponsor any equipment needs. It was a blessing to have so many professionals on the 2025 trip, helping us develop a program that is both comprehensive as well as sustainable. In 2026 we have plans to expand the group number to 20 volunteers. While our intent is to continue with the work at Bethlehem, we also hope to lay the framework to expand our therapy programming to an additional MOP home in Jamaica in 2027.

Thanks for all you do,

Shannon

Little Flower Catholic Therapy Missions





**Kingston, Jamaica**

**May 30, 2026 - June 6, 2026  
and/or June 6 - 13, 2026**

*Goal:* partner with the Missionaries of the Poor to establish therapy programming for children with disabilities, promote participation, and train local caregivers



**Volunteers needed**

- Physical therapists
- Occupational therapists
- Speech Language Pathologists
- General volunteers (11 yr+)

**Cost:** \$550 + airfare

**Email:** catholictherapymissions@gmail.com

**Website:** <https://www.catholictherapymissions.org/>

**Apply:** application found on our website below the volunteer tab, we hope to hear from you!

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Donations for any of the missioners, mission connections and our relationships may be made in care of the Mission Office.

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## Updates From Missioners

Hello rafiki,

Greetings from South Africa. I hope you are well and enjoying the good weather. I am fine and glad to get this chance to send greetings. I am glad to inform you that I have completed celebrating the masses that were sent in December on Holy Thursday. I will celebrate 10 more for the Mission Office in this Easter Octave. I am very grateful for the kindness and generosity of the Christians from your diocese. Their support means a lot to me and the Christians of my parish. They have expressed their sincere thanks, too. So far I have not used the whole fund sent in December, though I have used part of it for petrol to villages for primary evangelization, the repairing of 2 churches, the training of lay catechist leaders, purchasing food for families in great need and the purchase of two missals. At least now where the Christians are not able to read, they can hear the word of God in their own language.

Once more, thanks rafiki. Mungu akubariki.

The Easter Sunday celebration in 2026 was a special day in St. Anne Parish.

Like the Catholics in other parts of the world, the parishioners from 16 villages of our parish gathered at one place to honor and celebrate the resurrection of the Lord for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in 10 yrs. Catholics are the minority in the area, however, this year's celebration of the resurrection of the Lord, brought all mission stations together, to strengthen their faith, unity and identity as a Catholic family living among members of other denominations.

It was an important day for the parents and adults who went through a long process of catechetical formation, prayer and doing works of mercy.

Four infants and nineteen adults encountered the Lord in His word, in the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist for the first time. They were joyfully received by the parishioners as new members. A common meal was organized and shared to welcome and honor them for their response to be Disciples of Christ and members of His Body. The joy of the Risen Lord renews His disciples, the new members and parishioners were spiritually renewed, received the gifts of peace, hope and encouraged to be joyful messengers of forgiveness, love and peace in the society where, crime, conflicts, unemployment and poverty have pulled many people away from the Lord and the Church.

I am immensely grateful to God for the catechists who spent their time and skills to catechize the new members and encouraged them to join the Church. The Lord sends us and accompanies us in the mission and I owe a lot to Him for His unnumbered blessings. I thank Hm for enabling me to witness the fruits of primary evangelization that I have been doing in this parish for the past 2 years. The joyful gathering of the Parishioners to celebrate Easter as a family and the presence of those who encountered Him for the first time in the sacraments filled me too with joy and restored my hope to keep on serving His people. The Lord is truly risen, may His gift of peace, reign in our hearts and in the war torn zones of the world.

I keep you in my prayers.

Fr. Lawrence MHM

St. Anne Parish, South Africa



*If you know of a missionary from our diocese, and/or a missionary who has served with our diocese or you yourself have actively served in mission, please reach out and come in for a visit! We are continuously adding new names and faces to our website, historical documents and Missioner Wall.*

*We are proud of you all!!*

## Dreams Do Come True



My uncle, Father Herb Gappa, a Maryknoll Missioner, arrived in Bariadi Tanzania in 1977. He spent over 30 years shaping and growing the Catholic community in and around Bariadi. In addition to building churches, schools and parish centers, Father Herb mixed ecology into parish life by planting trees and digging wells so the locals would have a safe source of drinking water and plenty of firewood for cooking. Herb's big dream was that the Church in Bariadi would continue to grow, prosper and eventually become a new diocese. Father Herb left Bariadi around 2011 and passed away in December 2023.

Earlier this year, we received a letter from the Bishop of Shinyanga Diocese in Tanzania, announcing that Herb's dream had come true.

The letter explained the dedication of the new 'Diocese of Bariadi' and the installation of the 1st Bishop would be celebrated in March. Included in that letter was an invitation requesting that the Gappa family and the St. Cloud Mission Office be represented at the celebration. I was very fortunate to travel with Elizabeth Brown and Father Bill Vos, representing the St Cloud Mission Office, along with Marty Roers, another family member. We were welcomed with open arms by the church and diocesan officials and by many locals who knew and remembered Father Herb.

On Wednesday, March 18<sup>th</sup>, we attended a ceremony at 'the crossing' of the river between the Shinyanga Diocese and the new Bariadi Diocese. This was a vibrant celebration and included an impressive motorcade back to St. Lukes Parish in Bariadi with hundreds of school children and Christians cheering and singing along the highway. Later that evening, we attended another celebration at Herb's home parish and the new Cathedral, St John's, where the new Bishop was introduced to the community. After the ceremony, there was social time where we were able to meet with the new Bishop and other Priests and clergy from the area.

Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, we attended a huge outdoor Liturgy and opening of the new Diocese, along with installation of the first bishop of the Diocese of Bariadi, Bishop Prosper Balthazar Lyimo. I now realize why Father Herb enjoyed so much how the locals celebrated with song and dance included in the liturgy. I have never seen so many people so excited to go to Church, as Mass numbers topped 5,000 parishioners and celebrants! During the Liturgy which lasted over five hours, we were presented gifts from Bishop Prosper honoring Father Herb's contributions and accomplishments.

Following Mass, we were invited to the Boniface family home for lunch. The late Boniface was the Catechist when Father Herb moved to Bariadi. Father Herb lived with the family for about ten years while building up the churches and parish centers.

Thursday evening, we traveled fourteen miles to the neighboring town of Nkololo and were overnight guests of Father Paul Fagen. Father Paul is a missionary Priest who has been stationed in Tanzania since the 1960's. He was instrumental in getting Father Herb assigned to Bariadi. Father Paul gave us a tour of his



church, Adoration Chapel, and his very impressive hospital, the Songambe Health Center.

Friday, our last day in Bariadi, we stopped back at St John's and had another nice visit with the Bishop. We visited the "Herbert Gappa Primary School" campus. We then had a four-hour drive back to Mwanza to start our journey back to Minnesota.

I feel so very blessed and thankful for the opportunity to go on this safari and see for myself how a Maryknoll Priest from small town Minnesota could make such a huge impact on a community halfway around the world. It was amazing to see how, with Father Herb's guidance and example, the Tanzanian people have accepted the Word of God in their lives.

- Rick Gappa

## 'We are a Church Alive...'



Pope Francis wrote that "It is impossible to believe on our own... By its very nature, faith is open to the "We" of the Church... Here we see why those who believe are never alone, and why faith tends to spread, as it invites others to share in its joy."

This faith described by Pope Francis is vibrant, inviting and filled with joy by its very nature. I believe a small group of us from the St. Cloud Diocese were blessed to experience this type of joy filled faith with the church community of Bariadi Tanzania this past March. This relationship goes back nearly 50 years, rooted in the missionary work of

Fr. Herb Gappa, M.M., from Sacred Heart Parish in Urbank, MN. He arrived at this simple out-station in the late 1970's after accepting the invite of Fr. Paul Fagan from Prairie du Chien, WI. Building upon the foundations laid throughout the surrounding area by the Missionary White Fathers and other Maryknoll Missioners, Fr. Gappa worked for decades together with the local catechist, faith leaders and the Maryknoll Sisters to help grow the church in Bariadi. We were fortunate to witness truly joyful expressions of the Tanzanian faith during very special liturgies for the installation of their first bishop and the creation of a new Diocese of Bariadi on March 18. We experienced what I believe is the profound "Joy of the Gospel" as seen in the exuberant 350 member choir as they sang their newly composed songs rejoiced for their new bishop and enthusiastically celebrated the blessings and growth of their faith community. Our hearts were invigorated by the youthful joy and energy of the hundreds of school children as they danced choreographed liturgical movements to every song. The Pope's Papal nuncio ambassador, 37 Tanzanian Bishops, and hundreds of priests and religious sisters together with over 5,000+ local Tanzanians shared a joy of our universal Catholic church. We were inspired by the liturgical celebration along with a welcoming ceremony, evening vespers and several communal dinners which were over-flowing with excitement and profound joy at the installation of the Diocese of Bariadi's first Bishop.



I wish everyone in the St. Cloud Diocese could experience this type of joy filled faith as shared by our Tanzanian Catholic family. When was the last time you joyfully celebrated a 5+ hour mass? Indeed, experiences like these celebrations with the Catholic Community in Bariadi remind us that we are not alone. This joy in our faith is deeper than any daily economic, health or political challenges we might face. As Pope Francis expressed, it is in the sharing of this joy that our faith is truly open to the "We" of the Church. We accompany one another on our faith journey to God as Bishop Kinney used to remind us. We can encourage one another and grow in our faith as we share our collective joys together.

Thanks to the support of the St. Cloud Mission Office and many of you throughout the diocese over the years, this simple parish has continued to share their joy, spread the faith and has grown to include the two main churches of St. John & St. Luke, more than ten additional outstation

Chapels and over 96 Small Christian Communities in addition to other growing parish communities throughout the area. Amazing to see that this local Tanzanian church has grown into a diocese. In these joy-filled celebrations with our sisters and brothers in faith in Tanzania, we are a church alive, growing and spreading our faith as we are also blessed to share in these joys together.

-Marty Roers

## Updates From Missioners

Dear friends, Happy Easter! May the strength of the Risen One continue to fill you with courage to keep walking with you through the world overflowing with blessings. We look around here in the Amazon and see the same exuberant creation of the Great Traveler with his companion. Rivers flow endlessly, filled with countless fish. We delight in the pink dolphins that accompany travelers along the river, and marvel at the immense variety of boas and snakes of every size and color, as well as the frogs whose voices weave the music of the forest. It is beautiful to hear the birdsong, and each afternoon in my garden hundreds of tiny yellow canaries arrive to eat and rest. We give thanks to the Great Traveler, Jesus Christ, who together with the Father and the Spirit continues to say "let it be," and it is so. We pray that what God created with such love—the human being, man and woman—may not be destroyed, but that our intelligence may be sown with the desire to protect and care, not to possess and destroy. We continue our mission in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Our health is good and the rest of the team are doing well. We continue our outreach to the community of Barrio Rio Coca and those in charge of family ministry for the Vicariate. Our spirits remain high. May God continue to bless your work. We pray to God for your great work and ask for your prayers and support for this mission. We continue to build the legacy missions of Sister Joan Gerads, as we have felt her intercession in the missions.



A hug from afar.

Your brothers and sisters, Iris, Glahecer, and team.

Dr. Geetha and I, Tom Chitta, are co-founders of Foundation for Children in Need, a not-for-profit organization started together in 2002. The work and ministry of FCN is noble, direct and transparent and has been for nearly 25 years. The services of FCN are beyond religion, creed and politics. Those most in need receive from the tireless efforts and meticulous planning of Geetha, our co-workers and myself and are assisted through the Missionary Appeal programs where I just presented in the Diocese of St. Cloud where we have been in relationship with for over 15 years. We are all convinced that education is the path for sustainability, development and a bright future. We work very hard to organize and support a sponsorship program serving many orphans, children and college students, some of whom are differently abled but all who are needing some financial support and guidance as they journey through life. Today FCN provides financial assistance to 1,500 students and elderly in 17 locations in the States of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in the country of India.

In the last financial year, FCN was able to distribute 90,000 notebooks and 1,500 school bags to students in rural village schools. New clothing and blankets were distributed to 20,000 and 15,000 needy students and elderly. FCN also distributed library books and sporting equipment and items to 20 rural village schools.

Dr. Geetha believes that prevention is better than cure and she conducts important health education classes for village people and school children. Geetha organizes workshops for teenage girls on health and hygiene and provides each young woman a book that helps explain the many benefits associated about "women's health" management and how to take preventive measures to protect themselves. As another major Program of FCN, Geetha also provides the Free Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate Surgeries every month at GSR Hospital in Hyderabad. FCN staff members are at the hospital to receive the parents and their children after traveling 10-15 by hours by bus or train to the city. In the past 11 years,



2,300 children as well as adults have received facial reconstructive surgery giving them the gift of a smile and speech possibly for the first time in their lives. We are also providing tailoring classes and embroidery training for 100 women each year which is having a very positive impact on creating a sustainable income for many families. Each and every student is awarded with a brand new sewing machine so that she is able to continue to share her talents in the community.

So many of our elderly and those with disabilities are often looked upon as burdens for the family and therefore end up in the streets. Geetha and I wanted to do something so we built our dream project FCN Home near Hyderabad for the elderly and physically challenged which provides an atmosphere presently to 50 guests to have a dignified and peaceful life in their senior age.

With Prayers and much gratitude-  
Tom and Geetha

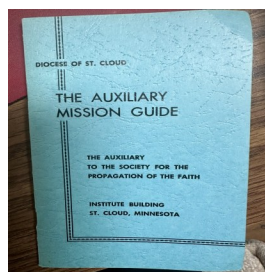
# One in Christ, United in Mission

The St. Cloud Mission Office is the diocesan home for the Society for the Propagation of the Faith— which is the Pope's own mission society and the largest and oldest mission-aid organization in the world. We are the second oldest office in the diocese of St. Cloud but NOT a diocesan office- created in 1927 by Bishop Joseph F. Busch when he established the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in the Diocese of St. Cloud.

Most Catholics should know of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and all should be active members in it. Being an active member is easy because we are all baptized Catholics and through our baptism we are one in Christ. Through our baptism we are called to share our lives, and our love with our brothers and sisters around the world united in mission. More than 200 years ago in France, Blessed Pauline Jaricot began the first recorded mission connections and support with pennies being collected from fellow female factory workers and women in her neighborhood and sent to missionaries in China. In 1893, a large group of married and single women in Germany organized the Missionary Association of Catholic Women and Girls for the purpose of giving financial aid to missionaries in every part of the world. In 1916, a branch of the Association was established in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Three years later on May 5th, 1919, in the presence of 200 women and girls in downtown St. Cloud, a branch of the Missionary Association of Catholic Women and Girls was introduced into the diocese of St. Cloud by Miss Mary Gockel, national president and organizer of M.A.C.W. The women of our diocese were paid high tribute as 'faithful, loyal and generous, who were never known to fail in any great undertaking'. To this day, more than 100 years later, these groups of missionary women in our diocese are completely unique and the only one of it's kind still left in the country.

Between 1919-1928, there were women for some years doing a variety of mission work on their own in the growing communities and parishes throughout the diocese. When Bishop Busch established the SPOF office for the Diocese of St. Cloud in 1927 with the appointment of Fr. Henry Frank as the first Diocesan Director, his responsibilities included Holy Childhood, the Mission Society of Catholic Women and Girls, the Near East Association, Propagation of the Faith, and all affiliated organizations. June 1928, M.A.C.W. officially became the Auxiliary to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith which is the charitable, educational and social work of the diocese for the promotion of mission.

## What is the Auxiliary?



The Auxiliary to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith is a mission organization or group of individuals responsible with promoting mission among the clergy; the religious; the laity; our families; our ACC's; our communities; our workplace;...and educating all about our baptismal call to mission. These groups most often belong to a certain parish or can be part of an interparochial parish of mission groups within the Diocese of St. Cloud yet always under the Mission Office/ Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

**ALL** Mission Circles, Mission Groups, CCW, DCCW, Christian Mothers, Women's Auxiliary, Women's Guild, Quilting Circles, Quilting Groups, Christian Women... combined constitute the Auxiliary to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and **ALL** evolved and began out of our Mission Office/SPOF. In June 1928 there were @ 90 mission circles. In 1951 there were over 5,000 members— many of which were non- catholic. In 1968, there were 625 circles with about 10,500

members. (These groups all had various names as noted above.) In 2011, there were 250 Mission Groups with about 5,200 members. Our current Spring Mission Rally mailing was for 81 mission groups and for about 500 members.

The work and ministry of all of these groups have evolved in the last 100+ years and they continue to be challenged to uphold the dignity and integrity of those that they are connected to in mission. Many of these projects are still being done but in a modified format based on the current realities and needs: aiding the sick and the aged; making bandages, masks and preparing medical supplies to ship overseas; funeral luncheons; quilts; knitting sox and sweaters; promoting Victory Gardens; canned and dried produce; clothing distribution; emergency food distribution; school uniforms; Food stamps; Medical assistance; sewing quilts, dresses, layettes, diapers, dish towels, shorts, t-shirts, pillow cases; personal care items and ditty bags; serving meals at a homeless shelter; making rosaries; mass stipends for missionary priests; Garage Sale; Craft and Bake Sale; Quilt Raffle; Fish Fry; sewing curtains; contributing to National Collections; prayer; buy and sell Fair Trade; practice our Catholic Social Teachings....

Our understanding and practice of mission has changed over the years, but the call for each and every one of us to go forth and to share our gifts, our life and our faith with all we encounter remains the same. We are asked to embrace the spirit of the first missionaries and all of our own missionaries who left home, family and friends and all they knew to share their gifts and their love with others by making God's love visible day after day. The Diocese of St. Cloud still has the most mission minded people in the country and probably even in the world. Why don't you come and join us **ALL** of you Auxiliary to the Mission Office/Society for the Propagation of the Faith—for we are One in Christ and most definitely United in Mission!



Father Frank H. Ebner, Sartell; Mrs. P.V. Mattheisen, St. Cloud; Miss Rose Mary Lang, Miss Edith Braun, Mrs. Willard Weber, Sister Guadalupe, OSB, of the Venezuela Mission, Sister Josua Behnen, OSB, of the Formosa Mission, Bishop Alphonse Sowada, OSC, Agatz, Indonesia, Mrs. Benno Binsfeld, Very Rev. Richard John, OSC, Provincial of the Crosier Fathers, Rev. Msgr. Frank, Bishop George H. Speltz, and Father Mark Willenbring, who had returned from the St. Cloud Mission in Venezuela for a short vacation.

Elizabeth Brown  
Director  
St. Cloud Mission Office/SPOF

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## World Fair Trade Day- May 9th, 2026

Fair Trade is a means to help create a better future for economically and socially marginalized producers. It's premise is built around relationships and is based on trust and respect for all, by empowering each individual producer to learn & understand the true value of their contributions, to the success of their community.

With trust and economic growth that people can count on comes better education and health care opportunities.

Fair Trade also helps to protect the rights of all people to work and live in a safe and secure space and celebrates the cultural diversity and traditions of people all over the world through works of art, foods, oils, clothing and much more.

What can YOU do to help Fair Trade every day???

Visit us here at the St. Cloud Mission Office.

We are blessed to have unique gifts, food,...from all around the world, Coffee, Chocolates and much more, that are all from Certified Fair Trade organizations.

We look forward to seeing you soon!



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