

# Mission Connections

Volume #66

Summer 2021



## *A Prayer to the Creator*

*Lord, Father of our human family, you created all human beings equal in dignity: pour forth into our heart a fraternal spirit and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter, dialogue, justice and peace. Move us to create healthier societies and a more dignified world, a world without hunger poverty, violence and war. May our hearts be open to all the peoples and nations of the earth. May we recognize the goodness and beauty that you have sown in each of us, and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects, and shared dreams. Amen.*

*- An Ecumenical Christian Prayer, from Fratelli Tutti*

World Mission  
Rosaries Pg. 5

"God is in Control"  
Pg. 3

Parish Neighborhood  
Renewal Ministry Pg. 2

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

# Parish Neighborhood Renewal Ministry

*“We follow the footsteps of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi, open to the Holy Spirit and the renewal that the Spirit is working in the Church.” – Sister Joan Gerads (Co-founder of PNRM)*

This story is provided through collaboration with the PNRM Board of Directors

## Building Base Church Communities – A Service of the Evangelization Community to Catholic Parishes

It is estimated that 90% of Latin America’s baptized Catholics have no real church or parish home due to the shortage of priests and church facilities. Parish Neighborhood Renewal Ministry (PNRM) has a solution for this challenge: We take the church to the people in their own neighborhoods. Our mission is to seek out families who are interested in developing their spirituality and mutual support within their neighborhood. We establish relationships and then, using the Base Church Communities concept, invite people to gather in each other’s homes, the first step in building small communities of faith. “For when two or three gather in my name, there am I with them” (Mt. 18:20).

PNRM primarily works in Ecuador and Venezuela. Our goal is grassroots evangelization. We knock on every door in the neighborhood where we have been invited, blessing each home; we welcome the people to attend a neighborhood mission to be offered in the house of one of their neighbors who has previously offered to host the mission. A successful mission will result in the formation of a new base community, a “cell” which serves as an instrument of renewal in their parish, often paving the way for further growth and development for the broader neighborhood and common good of all.

### The Joy of the Lord is Our Strength!

Parish Neighborhood Renewal was founded in 1975 by Sister Joan Gerads, a Franciscan Sister of Little Falls, Minnesota, and Maryknoll Father Tom Maney. For over 40 years, Sister Joan trained missionaries to create base church communities as a means to bring the Gospel to very poor, remote areas of Latin America.

By identifying leaders and engaging people in their own neighborhoods, PNRM has allowed the development of hundreds of small groups of faith-seekers to grow stronger in their relationship with God and with others.

### Leading the Mission

Glahecer Baque and Iris Prieto de Baque met years ago while they were receiving missionary training from Sister Joan. They fell in love, married, and became part of the evangelization community. They have been working with the Base Church Communities model for over 30 years. “They’ve dedicated their lives to this work with their hearts on fire for evangelization! They make a great team,” said founder, Sister Joan.



Glahecer recalls one day when they were arriving in Chone, a city on the coast of Ecuador:

A young worker came with his wheelbarrow to take our suitcases to the bus to Quito. The young man asked, “Do you remember me?” We looked at each other and answered the truth, “We do not remember you.” He told us, “A year ago you missioned in our neighborhood. I listened to the preaching and God touched my heart. At that time, I did not want to work. I was taking drugs and my life didn’t make sense. But that day changed me, but now I have been working for a year and am helping my family.” Everything we do, no matter how insignificant it may seem, will have its effects. That is why we continue to do God’s work.

**“Go, Francis, rebuild my church, which has fallen into ruin.”**

A young Francis of Assisi heard these words in a vision from our Lord as he prayed before the San Damiano cross. Parish Neighborhood Renewal Ministry is dedicated to rebuilding the church and bringing the love of Jesus Christ to the people. To accomplish our mission, we need help to provide basic living expenses for the missionary leaders as well as transportation as the evangelization team travels throughout the region doing the work of creating base church communities.

Even during the pandemic, missionaries Iris and Glahecer have done their best to carry on their evangelization efforts.

**MISSION CONNECTIONS** is published by the St. Cloud Mission Office, 11—8<sup>th</sup> Ave. South, St. Cloud MN 56301 (320) 251-1100

It is distributed to the Catholic faithful in the Diocese of St. Cloud and to others concerned with the mission of Jesus Christ and global solidarity and justice. There is no charge for the publication, but tax deductible donations for our educational work are gratefully accepted.

Donations for any of the missionaries or mission connections mentioned here may be made in care of the Mission Office.

\*\*Please direct comments, suggestions and articles to Teresa Trout, at [missionofficeeducator@cloudnet.com](mailto:missionofficeeducator@cloudnet.com)

\*\*The mailing list is managed by Carolina Walz, at [missionofficemanager@cloudnet.com](mailto:missionofficemanager@cloudnet.com)

\*\*For further information about the work of the Mission Office, contact Elizabeth Neville Brown, at [enmission@cloudnet.com](mailto:enmission@cloudnet.com)

Zoom technology allowed them to continue ministering to the people and spreading the good news. The vaccine is slowly making its way across Ecuador. Iris and Glahecer report that they have received their first dosage. Soon they will resume their travels and in-person ministry of forming Base Church Communities. In fact, they are expanding their work to the



Amazon jungle with funding from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, an exciting opportunity for the mission. Despite the pandemic, we are in the process of continuing a housing project for Iris and Glahecer, and currently the basic structure is in place.

Sister Joan's passion for the Gospel and the people of Ecuador continues to inspire PNRM and the missionaries who carry on her legacy. Like many other organizations, we have not been able to hold our usual fund-raising events, relying instead, on donations through appeal letters. We are grateful for the generous response in the past. To those who have supported us, thank you!

### **Our future is bright, and we need your help!**

The work of PNRM is expanding to the far-reaching regions of Ecuador. People are hungry for the Gospel, a stronger spiritual life, and a closer relationship with God. Many parishes have been asking for our services in forming base church communities, a tried-and-true model that is rebuilding the church in Latin America. Missionaries Glahecer Baque and Iris Prieto de Baque and their team need our support to continue their evangelization efforts.

If you're interested in supporting PNRM in finishing their housing project and continuing their ministry, you can send your donation to Saint Cloud Mission office at:

**St. Cloud Mission Office/ Society for the Propagation of the Faith**  
**11- 8th Ave. So.**  
**St. Cloud, MN. 56301.**

\*First picture: Iris and Glahecer, second and third picture: the crew currently working on the housing project in Ecuador\*

## **God is in Control**

### **By Peter Steele, currently in China**

Greetings! My name is Peter Steele, a St. John's University graduate who stepped into the Maryknoll lay volunteer teacher program in China in August of 2007 and has been there basically since then. I'm here to share a bit of my story with you. Back in the early Spring of 2007, I was about two months away from graduating SJU. I was sitting at a computer at the library at the College of St. Benedict, when I saw an email pop up in my box regarding a guest speaker, Fr. Scott Harris M.M. M.D., was to give a lecture on what it's like to be a Maryknoll lay volunteer teacher in Mainland, China. Seeing that I had no job prospects, no significant other, and no true compass on what I wanted to do after graduation, I will say the Holy Spirit swooped in and blew a fair wind for me towards the doors of that room where Fr. Scott was giving a lecture. After listening to him speak for an hour, I was honestly blown away, and ready to partake. I passed their interviews, was accepted into their volunteer teacher program, and giddy as could be. My plan was to be a volunteer teacher in China for a year, then make my way to Africa to offer my hand with volunteering there, and then settle back in Central,

MN. Well, the Holy Spirit once again visibly blew into my life, and told me what's what, because fast forward 10 years, I'm still in China, with a beautiful wife, Jenny, who is a local from the city in which we live, which is Jiangmen, Guangdong. We have 5 children: Simon 9, Philip 7, Eve 5, Solomon 4, and Phineas 3.

Within the first ten years of my time in China, a lot of...let's say "opportunities for growth" happened...and to be brief here...

My first 4 months living and working at a University in Jiangmen, I had no hot water. You'd think in a sub-tropical climate, that wouldn't be too much of an issue, but it turned out to be the coldest winter in decades that year. Upon finally complaining that "the water is just getting too cold for me to shower", the university's foreign teacher liaison (called a Waibon), came over to my university apartment, looked for about 5 seconds, then flipped a switch in my kitchen, and voila, hot water, as he looked at me incredulously. To this day, to cover my self-embarrassment, I attest "how could I have known? The instructions were LITERALLY in Chinese." It

seriously was just a switch that needed flipping. So embarrassing...

In my 5<sup>th</sup> month there, I broke down in tears during class. I gave students a role-play assignment whereby they had to re-enact the story of The Prodigal Son. The assignment was to “finish the story” right at the part where the Prodigal Son returns. As I read the actual ending to the class, I could sense a shiver up my spine, and suddenly felt like I was my dad, Deacon Greg Steele, reading the Gospel during mass. I told some onlooking students as I teared up that I must’ve had some dust stuck in my eyes.

In month 8, I fell into an open, jagged, 1 foot wide, construction trench in the middle of campus one evening, gashing open my leg, and thereby requiring stitches by a doctor at a nearby hospital. The doctor put out a cigarette on the floor seconds before stitching my leg up, which then got infected, and required further medical attention in nearby Hong Kong. Beware of the nightshift doctor was the lesson I learned that night.

I met Jenny in the later part of 2007, we married at the chapel of the Maryknoll House and Headquarters in Stanley, Hong Kong on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009. My father was able to fly over there and marry us. In attendance were Jenny’s parents, sister and brother-in-law, my sisters, Andrea Wolf, Theresa Sartori, brother Matt Steele, along with a few friends and Maryknoll Brothers and Fathers and staff at the Maryknoll house.

After 6 and a half years of teaching at Wuyi University in Jiangmen, Jenny, who was pregnant with Philip at the time, Simon, and I returned to Minnesota. We left because we didn’t know how the government would perceive having a second child. Jenny was a Chinese citizen, and we heard horror stories. Another couple, husband was British and wife was Chinese, had recently experienced trouble. She was 8 months pregnant with her second child and the local authorities showed up at their door and told them either they get rid of their second child or leave within the week. Fearing a similar outcome, we left.

We had our second child, Philip at Maple Grove Hospital in 2014, and in mid-2015, we came back to live in China once again, back to Jiangmen, only this time I would venture out and start my own language training instead of working for a school or university. I started with 8 students and now we have 92. I love teaching kids and working with them, making them laugh until they cry, but also making sure they do their work and learn and practice the language. I make short weekly videos for the students to practice new vocabulary and expressions and I draw heavy influence from the likes of Mr. Bean and the character Kramer from Seinfeld, as I’ve come to find that body language, especially humorous body language, transcends spoken language and children are exceptionally intuitive and aware of that, far more than us adults.

I remember so many times, especially in my earlier years in China as a Maryknoll lay volunteer teacher, wondering, “what’s my purpose here? How am I bringing anyone closer to God, to Christianity, to our faith?” as I hadn’t once done any sort of “converting” of the sort, not like I envisioned. Then one day, I was perusing online and went on the St. John’s St. Ben’s website and recalled the Benedictine Values. I started reading through them again, like I had recited them back in college, and suddenly shivered

down my spine as I had realized at my office where I tutor all these kids, these were precisely the values I was gleaming off to these young students and I wasn’t even aware I was doing it! Ugh! The humility! Community living: we were doing that with our summer and winter camps. We took several camps abroad to Ireland, the UK and Minnesota. Respect for persons, listening, dignity of work, hospitality, stewardship, truthful living, I was checking each one off the list as I read them and was just besides myself. I had no idea I was creating this environment for myself, my staff, and these wonderful kids I’ve been working with over the years. It was an absolutely warm moment in His presence, and such an uplifting feeling from Him.

In February 2020, my wife, five kids and I made a trip back to Minnesota to visit my father, who had suffered a debilitating stroke a couple months prior. We kept delaying our flight back to China, as we wanted to see if COVID-19 would de-escalate in China before going back. On March 25<sup>th</sup>, my father passed away. Two days later, the Chinese government had closed its borders to all non-Chinese citizens, which meant we were stuck here until notified otherwise. We were so thankful to be in Minnesota when my father passed and to be a part of the funeral, none of which would’ve happened if COVID-19 didn’t exist, however here we were half a world away from our home and our things with five kids. Thank God for family and community. People from all over the area, in particular Buffalo and St. Michael, helped us get situated and settled. Nine prayerful and worrisome months later, we were able to return back in China and have been here since then.

That experience really hit home the lesson that God is in control, no matter how hard I stubbornly try (advertently and inadvertently). What’s more frustrating, I vividly recall learning in religion classes and from my parents as a kid the phrase “He is in control” many times over, but when I get in these moments of uncertainty, especially as an adult and becoming a parent, I found out I never really took the lesson to heart and would worry myself senseless.



Peter, Jenny, and their children; Simon, Philip, Eve, Solomon, and Phineas

Beyond that, I got to experience the generosity and unending kindness of people in these communities.

Since being back in China, our life has changed quite a bit.

## World Mission Rosary Day is October 1st, 2021

The World Mission Rosary was envisioned by Archbishop Fulton John Sheen, then the national director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, in 1951. He made the request on a radio show that his listeners "Embrace the world in prayer." To do so he introduced this Rosary.

Its uniqueness is in the five colors represented in each of the decades. Color symbolism in a rosary is a gentle reminder on which to focus our prayers.

This rosary honors the work of mission, our call to be missionaries, and world unity and peace through its special emphasis on each of the Earth's regions, where prayers are needed and our brothers and sisters in Christ live and play and pray just like each of us! Each region is represented by a different color; it is not only a beautiful rosary, but rich in symbolism.



### Do you have your World Mission Rosaries?

If you would like rosaries for your school, class, or church, or more info about World Mission Rosaries, please email [missionofficeeducator@cloudnet.com](mailto:missionofficeeducator@cloudnet.com) or find the request forms on our website: [www.stcloudmissionoffice.com](http://www.stcloudmissionoffice.com)

All five of our kids are homeschooled, and receive Chinese and other language tutoring at home, while Jenny and I manage their other subjects. We make weekly visits to a Hansen's disease facility about an hour away from our home. The place is managed by an Italian Salesian, Roberto, along with several Salesian Sisters and Brothers. This was a place I had visited 4-5 times before with my father and with fellow Maryknoll volunteer teachers, and we are today, driving there at least once a week to have mass with their community, my oldest, Simon, just received the sacrament of Reconciliation after he went through 1 on 1 class-style discussions with Roberto and is set to get his First Communion soon. After each mass we attend, we gather for a meal at Roberto's housing where he and 4 Salesian Brothers live and work from. My wife and I are just beside ourselves, thanking God nonstop for this incredible blessing to happen to us. If we didn't homeschool our kids, we wouldn't be able to get there for mass and get to know this community like we have. If my father didn't come visit our family in China those many times in the past years before he died, I wouldn't have gotten to know Roberto, the community he serves, or have his contact information.

Exactly 9 days before my family and I had prayed a novena to St. Joseph to sell our home in China so we could return to Minnesota permanently, we drove to our local church and suddenly and sadly discovered they were closed, with a sign saying they were "shut down for Chinese New Year" for 2 weeks. At that very moment, I recalled I had Roberto's information, sent him a text asking if they had mass that day. Immediately, he responded and said "yes, two hours from now. You're welcome to join us." We drove the hour-long drive it takes to get there. And that was the first of our since weekly visits to their community to attend mass and then share a meal with Roberto and this Salesian-based community. What was so strange and unforeseeable at that time we prayed the novena, we were expecting some sort of answer from St. Joseph nine days

after praying it every day, and here we had already received God's response, not nine days after, but nine days before! We had tried every and which way to sell our home because we thought Minnesota was where we should be, but once again "He is in control" blindsided me. But because we said "YES" to the Eucharist that day we went for mass and drove an additional hour to get there, God has given us this community. The bond we've built with Roberto, the Salesian Brothers and Sisters, and this community there, and how our kids love going there and built these beautiful memories with these people, and just being with these incredible servants of the Lord, we now know that God absolutely heard us loud and clear in our novena and prayers, and He was giving us a "home". He was giving us the home we needed, not the home we thought we wanted. And once again, I learned He is in control, and this time around the lesson He's teaching me turns my legs weak and makes me want to drop down and cry in humbleness and thanks.

Now I'm at this moment, I've been asked by Roberto to teach English to 3 Chinese Salesian Brothers who are planning to enter further education in theology and philosophy that will be taught completely in English two years from now. The Brothers and I meet twice a week, and I just feel His presence more than ever. I'm also helping them in their work that they do with the disadvantaged youth in the poor rural areas of China. It's amazing how He works in our lives. *Sometimes it's so subtle, sometimes is blaring loud.*

*We want to hear from you!*

If you are in contact with a Missioner from our diocese that you believe we might not be aware of, or, if you yourself have had a mission experience and are interested in sharing about it, please reach out and let us know!

**Mission Office/SPOF**  
 11—8<sup>th</sup> Avenue South  
 St. Cloud, MN 56301

Non-Profit Org.  
 U.S.POSTAGE

**PAID**

St. Cloud, MN  
 Permit No. 2382

## Donations to the Mission Office:

*We're often asked about donating to the Mission Office; here's what we're currently accepting:*

Quilts, Embroidered Dish Towels, School Supplies, Personal Care Items, Feminine Products, Mass Intentions, Prayers!

*All items must be new! Used or damaged items will not be accepted!*

**If you would like to drop off a donation PLEASE CALL AHEAD so that we can insure someone will be present to accept your donation. If you have any questions about donating please contact the office by email or phone. Thank you to all who have and continue to support us!**

## Stay Connected!

Looking for ways to stay connected with us on a regular basis?  
 Visit our Website, like our page on Facebook, and follow us on Instagram!

[www.stcloudmissionoffice.com](http://www.stcloudmissionoffice.com)



@SaintCloudMissionOffice  
<https://www.facebook.com/SaintCloudMissionOffice/>



@stcloudmissionoffice  
<https://www.instagram.com/stcloudmissionoffice/>