

Mission Connections

Volume # 71

Spring 2023



There is Mission– Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

*Wherever hearts overflow with the love of God and joy-filled voices sing God's praise
There is Mission*

*Wherever Hearts open to invite in strangers and enemies no less than neighbors
There is Mission*

*Wherever hearts cry out for justice and peace and dream of a far better world
There is Mission*

*Wherever hearts break and tears flow and people bend beneath heavy burdens
There is Mission*

*Wherever borders dissolve and walls collapse until all become brothers and sisters
There is Mission*

*Wherever the reign of God calls people to leave what is and sacrifice all for what yet might be
There is Mission*



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

FRANCISCAN MISSIONARY SISTERS HARD AT WORK IN NICARAGUA



Story and photos by Monica Rudawski, a lay missionary currently serving in Nicaragua

During the 45 some years that Father Teddy Niehaus (pictured on left) lived and worked in Nicaragua as a missionary, he never squelched his ongoing desire to form men and women religious. Despite his deep longing to form priests, only one man, Father Flavio Murillo, from the community of La Cruz de Rio Grande managed to answer the call. Among the women, however, Father Teddy had great success. In 1972, Father Teddy (Padre Teodoro for us here in Nicaragua) formed a remarkable group of ten women who became Nicaraguan Franciscan women religious. They are called Las Hermanas Misioneras de Cristo (The Missionary Sisters of Christ). Just as he ran the rivers, climbed the mountains, and trekked through the jungle – so did they. Their mission was principally focused on women including evangelization to women in the rural areas of Nicaragua and teaching women means to support themselves and their family through sewing, cooking, and baking. Their mission also included teaching reading and writing, reaching out to the sick and elderly, church activities like leading the rosary and catechism classes, and working with youth in workshops centered around the Gospel. Father Teddy gave them regular retreats and guided their formation as a religious community for 42 years.

Sister Lidia Roque (pictured to the right along with Sister Juanita Polanco) joined the community in 1989. By that time, the ten sisters had dwindled down to three. Seven of the women left the community to defend their country as soldiers in the war between the Sandinistas and Contras. During the time that Sister Lidia has been a Franciscan Sister, the community grew to 14 members. The sisters continued their mission in the communities of Hormiguero, Mulukuku and La Cruz de Rio Grande. The absence of Father Teddy, however, has taken its toll on the sisters since his unexpected departure in 2014. Nine sisters have left the community due to conflicts with one another, choosing to marry, and/or their own families pressuring them to leave the community. It has been hard. A word of reassurance or encouragement from Father Teddy, or an intervention in what seemed like an impossible conflict surely would have made all the difference.



Despite that, Sister Lidia, now the Community Ministry Leader, has gladly taken the reigns to guide her five sisters along their path. Sister Lidia along with Sister Juanita are in Mulukuku while Sisters Gabriela, Francisca and Juana Contrera are in

Hormiguero. The sisters had served in La Cruz de Rio Grande since 2014 at the bishops request when Father Teddy left urgently to attend his health. Now with only five sisters, the new bishop would not allow them to be spread so thin between three different locations. Although leaving La Cruz was very difficult, the sisters could see their best interest at heart especially given the tough life lead in the remote area of La Cruz compared to Mulukuku. In their ministry here, they have quicker access to medical facilities, more options for food and other necessary supplies, and a chance to have more frequent connections among the five sisters.

Mulukuku has been their “home” community so to speak for many years. It is on a large parcel of land that is owned by the sisters. There are multiple buildings on the property including a school, sewing center (pictured below), chapel, kitchen, and the sister’s home. Additionally, there are buildings for a library, teaching center and housing for people who live far away. There is even a small guest house for visitors. Large gardens and mature trees are interwoven between it all. Unfortunately, over the past nine years with the sisters in La Cruz, nearly every building has fallen into disrepair. The overgrown trees are urgently in need of pruning before they collapse on any number of frail roofs topping the buildings. All the



MISSION CONNECTIONS is published by the St. Cloud Mission Office, 11—8th 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, 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.

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buildings need new roofs and new beams. Since everything is made of wood, the termites are having a field day. And it goes without saying, new tin roofs and metal beams are not inexpensive.

Considering all the costly pending projects, one would think the sisters might be defeated – but not a chance with these women who have really known the hard-missionary life. They continue to be busy with their ongoing mission. Their sewing center is a buzz with machines at work while women from the city and the countryside learn how to make patterns and sew school clothes for their children. The sisters run a milk and medication program for special needs children which also consumes their time. In between those two principles projects the sisters also bring communion to the sick and elderly, visit those ill in the



hospital once a week, and assist the local parish with their pastoral work and mission assignments in the community. On top of that, the sisters have a rustic wood-burning oven (pictured to the left) which they use to bake bread and other goods to sell to raise money for their projects. Apart from that, the sisters in Hormiguero have a mission outreach to youth and use their site as a Formation House for two

new young women interested in the community.

With all this going on, I asked Sister Lidia recently what she felt was the project they considered had most priority for them. She answered as I expected – their chapel (pictured to the right). Father Teddy and a mission group from Minnesota built this small chapel in the early 2000's. Dedicated to Father Teddy's mother, Lucille Niehaus, her picture still hangs in the chapel. Although the sisters simply want to paint it, what it really needs is a new roof and new beams. Regardless, the sisters continue to celebrate weekly mass in the chapel as well as gathering for daily prayer.



Anyone who has ever met Sister Lidia and the other sisters cannot help but be moved by their humility and spirit of service. They have been and continue to be an enormous inspiration to me and all who rub shoulders with them. This year they celebrate 51 years of existence thanks to their founder, Father Teddy Niehaus. "We know Padre Teodoro continues to guide us daily," Sister Lidia told me last week. "We feel his presence in all we and couldn't be more grateful."

Rest in Peace, Fr. Linus Doerner

This note was written by Rosanne Fischer

I write to inform you that dear, blessed Padre Lino, Fr. Linus ('Frankie') Doerner, is now fully enveloped within the Realm of Love.

Padre Lino's dear friends, Claudio and Elvira, who we all met when they accompanied him to St. Cloud his last time here, were with him every Sunday as he neared the fullness of the Reign of Love, and every day sat vigil with him



(pictured to the right) during his final week. Below is a photo of Claudio, who read Psalms in the chapel, along with his wife, Elvira, while Padre Lino's body awaited its final abode. He was born in 1934 in St. Cloud, Minnesota, entered Gethsemani in 1953, made solemn profession in

1958 and was ordained a priest in 1962. He was sent to La Dehesa, (Miraflores, Chile) in 1968 where he made stable vows in 1972. He was titular Superior of the community from 1986 until 2004. He was 88 years old, professed monastic for 67 years and 60 years a priest.

Padre Lino's deepest desire, what he found deepest within himself, was to give his life for his friend. My own experience being in his presence that last time he was back to St. Cloud, as well as the days I was with him in



Hot Springs, SD as he accompanied his sister Dorothy in 2019, was that he was a man of deep peace, humility, wisdom, holiness and love. I feel incredibly honored and blessed to have known him.

Spotlight on Mission



In this issue we highlight Alan Lane, a native to the St. Cloud diocese, who is living and ministering in Rwanda and has been building relationships through a mission of love and presence for over 4 years with his wife, Nathalie and his co-missioner, Claudine.

Having grown up in St. Cloud during the 70s and early 80s, where there wasn't much diversity in terms of ethnicity and culture, I never guessed that I would end up in the villages of Rwanda, otherwise known as the Heart of Africa. But to be in a place where I feel so firmly planted and to find so much meaning in what I do and who I spend time with is a testimony of God's love.

I am extremely fortunate and blessed to be here in the first place since in 2005, while serving in Iraq with the Marine Corps, the vehicle I was in was blown up by a roadside bomb. I wasn't injured much physically but my nerves were extremely shattered. I found my way back overseas as a civilian teaching foreign militaries, but there wasn't anything that could remove the memories of my experiences in the war. After a third time being hospitalized and medevac'd home, I came to terms that I had to find something else to do in order to keep my sanity. Eventually that led me to pick up a camera and my life has never been the same since.

At first I was interacting with and taking pictures of people at an assisted living center in Jacksonville, NC and then the local soup kitchen. It was humbling to share with these guests a moment in time for they to see their beautiful humanity. A couple years later, there were 2 opportunities to go to Kingston Jamaica to visit the Missionaries of the Poor where I met many of the residents who were challenged by mental and/or physical disabilities. They lived in community where they carried themselves with dignity, laughed easily and were loved and cared for by the brothers and each other. These experiences and those whom I met along the way, prompted me to search for more opportunities to connect with others. Eventually I came across Photographers Without Borders which had a project in Rwanda so I eagerly applied for it and was accepted. As is the case with most people, I associated Rwanda with the Genocide in 1994. When I arrived in March of 2019, I came across a beautiful country full of people that were incredibly warm, welcoming, kind, joyful and peaceful. I was only there for only two weeks, but I felt at home. I returned to stay in September of 2020.



Soon after I arrived, I went with a lady friend who is now my wife (Nathalie) to the small village of Kibeho, the only Vatican approved Marian apparition site in Africa. The blessed Mother's said in one of her apparitions, "I am beautiful because I love. If you want to be beautiful, just love. There is no one in the world who doesn't desire beauty." That

statement has been a guiding principle for me ever since. After some hesitation, I gradually got out in the community with my interpreter, Claudine. What started with a few pictures here and there and giving some common greetings to people has evolved into what Claudine calls 'comforting the community' and what I feel are the Corporal Works of Mercy. We have come to realize that it is our responsibility to accompany them along the journey; to walk through hell with them, as it were; to be present, to listen compassionately, to share the experience as best we can and to join their suffering to our own. There are a number of people we spend time with in this way. Among them is Asterie, a very sweet (and tiny!!) 90-year-old lady who spends much of her time in bed or laying outside in her compound. She never asks for anything but is always very gracious when we stop by to check on her. There is Mediatrice, who looks to be in her late 60's. She lives on the side of a mountain in a small two room home. She was raped twice when she was younger and bore two children as a result. Her spirit remains strong and she gives what she has; drinking water to passersby on the mountain.

There is Vestine and her son Jean Remy, who was severely malnourished when we met them at a medical clinic last year. With assistance for proper nutrition, he is now out of harm's way. We also helped Vestine start her own fruit-selling business, tho not a big money maker helps her have some independence. We visit them every couple of weeks as well as

Vestine's mother, who remains traumatized from the memories of the Genocide. There is Janviere, a twenty-something mother of a two-year-old daughter. Her mother and four of her siblings were killed during the Genocide and her father passed away when she was six. After moving around from place to place she eventually found her way to Muhanga, the town where I live. Even though she was dealing with malaria, we helped her to restart her business of selling rabbits. We also spend time visiting patients at the hospital, as well as residents at a nearby center (similar to Assisted Living) where it functions more like another village, with cows in stables, goats eating grass, young women washing and drying clothes outside, people with all abilities picking and sorting beans, peeling potatoes and residents who are active participants in the well-being of the community. Most recently, Nathalie and I took a young girl to Kenya to get her a prosthetic for her amputated leg. We met her a couple of years ago at the hospital where she had an infection in her foot that had spread so that her leg was amputated below the knee and then unfortunately above as the infection continued. Last fall I came across a Foundation in the US called Limb Kind that travels to Ethiopia, Kenya, and the Philippines to provide children with free prostheses. While Nathalie and I were out for a walk by the hospital we were stopped by a woman who asked, "Do you know Jesus?" I didn't hesitate to say yes, but what exactly does it mean to know Jesus? When I am interacting with someone, especially the people Claudine and I spend time with, I am with Jesus.

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." And, He knows me. He knows my intentions, my heart, my everything. I feel His love for me through the kindness and love of so many of the people I encounter. As scripture says in Galatians, "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." This is something I am reminded of on a daily basis. Thankfully it is easy to feel this way, as the majority of people I encounter are full of gratitude, kindness, graciousness, peace, joy, and love. Many seem to be filled with the fruits of the Holy Spirit, made possible because of the Grace and Mercy they have experienced since the Genocide. An elderly woman who was one of my first friends, asked me why I chose her. I told her that it was she who chose me, and that it was her kindness, gentleness, and warmth that helped me feel welcomed here. Though I may not have always recognized it, I have felt God's love for me all along the way as I have said yes to the urgings and promptings of the Holy Spirit in all of these experiences. I couldn't be more grateful and feel more blessed. I have much to learn about myself and the people I



encounter but I feel as though I am on the right course, and I know that the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus will continue to be with me and within me as I continue to try and answer their call.

(Reflection and photos provided by Alan Lane)



Together in Christ we are change-makers

Article and pictures by Fr. Zawadi Sambaya, OSC



I have just come back from the Congo where I went for a mission trip with some of my friends; Jim from Las Vegas and Andreas from Detroit. I wanted them to join me so that they could see and experience the joys and challenges of the people of the Congo, as well as the vibrant Church that shines in spite of all these difficulties.

It was a happy coincidence to be in the Congo at the same time as Pope Francis. As he filled the stadium during his recent visit, Pope Francis shared with the people of the Congo: *"Tormented by war, the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to suffer within its borders from conflicts and forced migrations and to suffer from terrible forms of exploitation, unworthy of man and creation. This huge country full of life, this diaphragm of Africa, hit by violence like a punch in the stomach, have lost its breath for a long time. And as you, Congolese, struggle to safeguard your dignity and territorial integrity against despicable attempts to fragment the country, I come to you, in the name of Jesus, as a pilgrim of reconciliation and peace. I have longed very much to be here and at last, I come to bring you the closeness, affection and consolation of the whole Catholic church."*

Yes, the joy of the Gospel in the face of danger is our strength and hope.

We met and prayed with many different people, especially the victims of the conflict in the Congo.

Abigale and Agnes, who left their families and relatives in the East Congo and are now living in Kinshasa shared, *"Rebels have stolen everything from us, but not our faith in Jesus Christ who is alive and taking care of us through the generosity of people of good will."* In the middle of the struggling, they believe that Jesus has sent to them people who are supporting them and this is a miracle in their eyes. I am sure that it is their faith that helps them to endure and to pass through these difficult situations. The joy of the Gospel in the face of danger is their strength and hope.

As part of our mission trip, we visited a number of villages with rural farms where we saw some new initiatives. Some were planting bananas and others were taking care of their cows, goats and pigs, ... all of this hard work being done even if they knew they may possibly be kidnapped or even killed. These people are very courageous...Yes, faith can give hope and strength in the middle of suffering!

We visited our new project of building the K-12 Catholic school for 1,600 students in Butembo. I am happy to inform you that we, the Crosier Fathers and Brothers, are going to complete this project and open the new school in September 2023. Thanks be to God for the many of you who are supporting this wonderful project through prayer and financial support. For the children and youth in need of their education in the Congo. Together we can dream big and make a difference. I am planning another mission trip to the Congo this September 2023 for the opening of the school and I am sure that many of you friends would like to go with me!

Lastly, I have discovered that I have two countries. When I am here, I miss people in the Congo and when I am in the Congo, I miss people here. How can you understand that? Our body is really a mystery. I have responded to a mission call of leaving my family and culture to keep the gospel alive and proclaimed here. Go all over the world and make disciples of Jesus... Together in Jesus Christ, we are change-makers wherever we are needed.



2023 Spring Mission Rally

What an amazing and long awaited gathering this past April of over 160 women, men, missionaries, clergy, religious, Bishop Patrick and our friends from Homa Bay as we 'Walked Together in Christ's Love'. Coming together after 5 years was an opportunity for collaboration, learning, sharing at table, praying together and celebrating the Eucharist, as we learned about living out

our Baptismal call to mission by sharing God's love with our brothers and sisters throughout the world. By living in love and acceptance with everyone we encounter, we

create opportunities for living mission through Openness, Presence, Service and Community. Love changes everything.



"Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy. That is not our business and, in fact, it is nobody's business. What we are asked to do is to love, and this love itself will render both ourselves and our neighbors worthy."

Thomas Merton

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