

# Mission Connections

Volume 63

Summer, 2020



## A Vocation Blessing

*I hope you come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you.  
Something worth living for — maybe even worth dying for —  
Something that energizes you, enthuses you,  
And enables you to keep moving ahead.*

*I can't tell you what it might be —  
That's for you to find, to choose, to love.  
I can just encourage you to start looking,  
And support you in the search.*

*- Sister Ita Ford, M.M. (Murdered in El Salvador in 1980)*

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

## We Remember Fr. John Kaiser

Fr. John Anthony Kaiser was from Maine Township, St. Cloud Diocese, Minnesota. He served as a Mill Hill Missionary Priest in Kenya for 36 years. It has now been 20 years since he was found dead on August 24, 2000, beside his pick-up truck near the Kenyan town of Naivasha. Fr. Kaiser died of a gunshot wound to the back of his head. Eyewitness testimony at the 2003 Inquest Hearings revealed that Father Kaiser was “dragged out of his pick-up by two men in a saloon car moments before a gunshot rang out” on the night of his murder (Kenyan Daily Nation of Sept. 5, 2003). It is still unknown who killed him, but it was well known that he was an out-spoken critic of the former Kenyan government, and was aware that his life could be in danger.

Fr. Kaiser is remembered in Kenya for his strong faith, his defense of people’s right to land, encouraging the powerless to speak and claim their rights, and for championing the cause of the innocent and powerless.

As we remember Fr. Kaiser’s work and example 20 years after his death, we look to how we can find inspiration and strength for the struggles we face today. We asked some people who knew him, or have been actively involved in the promotion of his story to reflect on his impact today.

*The following reflection was written by M. Carolita Mahoney, Fr. John Kaiser’s sister.*

Johnny was the middle son of Arnold and Mary Catherine Kaiser. Francis, the oldest, was congenial and outgoing; John more serious and introspective (also the brother that teased me); Joseph, the youngest son, was curious and mischievous. Mom and Dad worked hard to provide for us. Number one of their “must do list” was to give their children good, Catholic Educations. That meant St. John’s Preparatory for the boys and St. Francis High School for me. They did not have new cars, tractors, or furniture. Cows were milked by hand. After prep school, John spent one year at St. John’s university and then enlisted into the paratroopers. John enjoyed maneuvers and took every jump over the required amount. He thought it was fun and he liked the extra money. He was helping our parents pay off the farm mortgage. When John was discharged from the Army, he returned to St. John’s University. He met an elderly priest recruiting young men to join the Society of St. Joseph, an international missionary society – Mill Hill, England. John stopped in to visit. The priest was wiping up a drop of ink spilled from his fountain pen. He said to John, “There is always this waste.” John decided that was the Society for him.

St. Louis University was connected with Mill Hill, so John finished his last two years there, earning a degree in English Literature. After that, he went to Mill Hill, England (North Suburb of London) for two years of Philosophy and two years of Theology. John was ordained at St. Louis Cathedral by Bishop Gavin Flaven in 1964 and offered his first public mass at St. James Catholic Church in Underwood, Minnesota. John was fluent in Spanish and thought his assignment would be South America. Instead, it was Kenya, East Africa. The first year, he taught English to the Seminarians, all while he was learning Swahili. A gift God gave John was his ability to learn



new languages. Fr. John met a young seminarian, Joseph Maruru Okemwa; Fr. John predicted the young man would be a bishop someday. Fr. John was then assigned to the Kisii tribe, a farming community. The five-acre farms were so productive, they would support a large family. Fr. John built several Mission Churches, a Girl’s Boarding school, and a maternity clinic and would ride his motorcycle to the mission churches. Rakwardo girl’s school was successful. Fr. John’s second bishop was his friend and student, Bishop Joseph Maruru Okemwa. Prediction fulfilled.

Fr. John was a parish priest for 37 years. The last 10 years were difficult. Fr. John had been assigned to Bishop Colin Davis of the Ngong diocese. He was sent as a chaplain to the Maela Refugee Camp. The Kikuyu tribe had been driven off their land by two of President Moi’s Cabinet Members – known as landgrabbers. Fr. John was a witness. He himself was harassed, beaten, and dragged into the bush to be jackal food. Fr. John credited his survival to a “strong guardian Angel and a big stick.” Fr. John testified for 13 hours before the Akiwumi Commission for the Kikuyu who held land titles. The commission was squashed. Fr. John now had powerful enemies and a target on the back of his head. On August 24, 2000, they found their target. At Fr. John’s funeral, the main celebrant, Giovanni Tonucci, the Papal Nuncio, said, “Fr. John Kaiser did not die just as a political assassination” but as a martyred Catholic Priest.” The Papal Nuncio had met with Fr. John the day before his death. At the time, Fr. John had knelt and asked for his blessing. “I gave it. I wish now I had knelt for *his* blessing,” the Nuncio stated.

The Kenyans loved to give nicknames, especially to their foreign friends. Fr. John had three nicknames. First, as a young priest, he was, “Father Seven Oxen,” as he was young and strong. Later, he was known as, “Rhino for the poor,” for he spoke out

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

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and stood up for his people. Finally, he was, “The Key,” which in Kenya referred to the “voice.” At Fr. John Kaiser’s funeral, the Cathedral Basilica of the Holy Family in Nairobi was crowded. Outside there were many more mourners, some carrying signs saying, “we lost our key.”

Thank you to the Mission Office who gave Fr. John Anthony Kaiser great support over the years. Thank you for this opportunity to express my love and memories of my brother.  
- Filios et agape’

***The following reflection was written by Father Anthony Kroll, a priest of the St. Cloud Diocese***

Fr. John Kaiser is the greatest treasure our diocese ever produced. He loved Jesus, the church, and people. He had a deep faith which he put into action. He wanted to share his faith and his love with all people all over the world....which he did by leaving a comfortable life and going forth to faraway places to people he had never seen before....He learned their language, he lived with them, he loved their food, and he suffered with them when they were abused.

The Kenyan people had been colonized by the white people and so their culture was disrupted. Their political institutions were weakened. The Kenyans had to rediscover themselves in our fast-changing world. Fr. Kaiser accepted their situation and loved them all the more. Fr. John Kaiser's faith in action emerged in solidarity with the Kenyans, and when the day came that their corrupted leadership was threatened by his denouncing the corruption, they eliminated him. This martyr became the great treasure of the Diocese of St Cloud. We need to imitate his spirit and sacrifices. He left us a legacy that should never be abandoned.

Today the Kenyan Bishops make a poster of John Kaiser every year to animate their people. Parents name their children after him. Scholarships and projects have been started in honor of him. People go twice a year to pick the garbage on Stearns County Highway # 138 in memory of John Kaiser. Sad to say, some people have not yet heard about him. May his memory come alive again all over this great diocese...."Dear John Kaiser, help us grow in faith that you so well modelled for us. We need you in this epidemic. We do not want to go back to the normal life so full of consumerism and arrogance. May your legacy help us be humble and real servants. Amen"



*“My son if you aspire to serve the Lord,  
Prepare yourself for an ordeal.  
Be sincere of heart, be steadfast,  
And do not be alarmed when disaster comes.  
Cling to Him and do not leave Him,  
So that you may be honored at the end of your  
days. Whatever happens to you, accept it,  
And in the uncertainties of your humble state, be  
patient,  
Since gold is tested in the fire,  
And chosen men in the furnace of humiliation.”*

*– Sirach 2:1-5  
(This bible verse was prayed every night by Fr. Kaiser)*

Want to learn more about Fr. John Kaiser? The Mission Office has copies of video documentaries and books on Fr. Kaiser, which are available for loan from the office. In addition, we also sell some books on his life, including: “You Will See Fire: A Search for Justice in Kenya” by Christopher Goffard; and the fictional book based on his life “The Collar and the Gun” by Dean Urdahl.

***The following reflection was written by Father Lawrence Otieno, a Mill Hill Missionary, serving the people of God in South Africa. He also reflects on how Fr. Kaiser impacted his own vocation.***

August 24, 2020 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the late Fr. John Anthony Kaiser. We commemorate this day with honor, pride and grateful hearts for his life and missionary service. We celebrate the life of a great Mill Hill Man, a spiritual father, a friend of the poor, a champion of social justice and a modern day martyr. His tragic death shocked parishioners of Lolgorian, Kisii diocese and all people of God in Kenya. Those who did away with his life thought that they won but they did not know that his spirit lives on. The gift of faith he brought to the people of Kisii and Ngong dioceses is alive. His love for the poor, the marginalized, and the call for their fair treatment are still on. His dream for a new constitution was implemented and launched in Kenya in 2010. It is the current Kenyan constitution. Children named after him have grown up. Fr. Kaiser’s spirit is with us and this is why he is remembered with grateful hearts. Truly the *blood of a martyr is the seed for the faith.*

I met Fr Kaiser in 1995 in Lolgorian Catholic Parish, diocese of Ngong. He was transferred to this parish from Kisii Diocese. He came to continue with missionary work among the Maasai. He lived a simple life style and reached out to his parishioners in 18 outstations. He traveled far and wide around the parish to share the joy of the gospel. I stayed with him in Lolgorian and witnessed his compassion and work which transformed the lives of many. He was a man of prayer. His daily activities begun or ended with Eucharistic celebrations. These drew the local people closer to the Church and deepened their faith. Members of Christian communities in outstations used to assemble for Sunday masses and services in classrooms and halls in primary schools. Fr. Kaiser witnessed the situation and took a step further to build churches, starting from the main mission. In building these churches, he gave a sense of identity to the parishioners. He helped the Catholics to own their land, develop it and meet regularly for pastoral activities without any interference from school administrations. Those churches are now filled up by the Maasai men who had not been coming to the church. He also built primary and secondary schools in villages where there was none to provide education for the youths. These schools are forming, transforming the lives of Kenyan students and empowering them with the gift of knowledge that enables them to liver better lives and contribute in building Kenya and the Church in many ways. There are teachers, nurses, policemen and women, doctors and nurses and civil leaders from schools that were started and built by Fr. Kaiser in Lolgorian.

Fr. Kaiser’s love for the poor and appeals for social justice cannot go unmentioned. He visited the poor, the homeless, fed the hungry and provided medical assistance to the physically and mentally challenged. His love for the poor left a deep impression

*Continues on next page....*

... *Continued from last page:*

on the lives of Kenyans. This is because he accepted them with their struggles, their pain, gifts and their possibilities for growth. He revealed to them that they too were special children of God and were included in His saving plan, revealed to all in the teachings and works of Jesus. He went an extra mile to show love and respect to the dignity of the poor particularly by standing behind the victims of the ethnic violence in Transmara and Macla in 1993 -1994. He provided shelter and openly spoke against the injustices and sufferings which they were subjected to. He strengthened the faith of many, advocated for equality of all Kenyans regardless of ethnic, economic and political boundaries. It is his act of taking side with the poor and advocating for social justice that led to his death. His life and selfless missionary work prompted by the spirit of love and service won him a special place in the hearts of Kenyans. He is honored with a great pride for the gentle transformation which he brought to parishes where he served.

**My Missionary Vocation:** Like other people of Lolgorian, the life and the inspiring work of Fr. Kaiser left a profound impression on my life. His life of prayer, hard work, courage and deeper love for the poor evoked a missionary priesthood desire in me. I informed him about it and he commented that it was a good idea but not easy. His death which occurred in my



Fr. Lawrence at the grave of Fr. Kaiser in Lolgorian

1<sup>st</sup> year in Secondary school proved his comment. The death of Fr Kaiser was a huge setback, it instilled fear in me and proved that missionary call and service was dangerous and risky for one can lose his life because of serving the people. However, as time went by, my fear drifted away, I had to accept the loss of my spiritual father, work hard and change my school in order to continue with secondary studies. In the face of all these, the desire for missionary

priesthood did not disappear. I kept on doing my best in my studies until I passed the national exams in 2005. Good examples which Fr Kaiser showed me and his prayers sustained and kept me on the missionary discernment path. They enabled me to join the Mill Hill Missionary formation program in 2006. I met the mill hill missionary priests who were friends of Kaiser (Fr. Tom Kean, the late Fr. Denis Treacy, and others) during the period of formation. They too were kind and supported me in my discernment. They made the missionary priesthood dream which I shared with Fr. Kaiser in early 2000 to come true on my priesthood ordination ( 6<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2016). I am keeping the light of faith alive in the parish at the moment in a low key. I do it with love within my means as I follow good examples that Fr. Kaiser showed me. I remember him with gratitude on this 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary for leaving a powerful impression on my life at an early stage and showing me the missionary path of loving and serving the people of God. May his life, courage and his inspiring missionary service strengthen us in vocations.



## Spotlight on Mission

*There are countless mission activities happening all the time both in the St. Cloud Diocese and around the world. All these mission activities are important to the work of celebrating our global Church. In this issue we highlight Fr. Gabriel Ssenkindo who is serving in Tanzania*

Back in our Spring 2019 Mission Connections Newsletter we included a letter from our friend Fr. Gabriel Ssenkindo in Tanzania. In this letter he explained that Tororo Girls High School, where he is Chaplain, does not have nearly enough chairs for all the girls who wish to come to Mass on Sundays. One of our readers saw this article and reached out to us to see if they could help provide chairs. Through communicating over the next few months an arrangement was made and Fr. Gabriel wrote us in February (2020) to tell us he had received the chairs! We've included his letter and some pictures from the reception of the chairs. It's truly amazing how Mission connects us across the world!



Dear Mission Office,  
Today, I went to Tororo Girls School where we were so excited to receive the 100 chairs that were purchased by your generous donation. The head teacher the Patron of the Catholic girls and the catholic student leaders and I gathered to formally receive them. With the Christmas gift, I was able to pay school fees for my niece who has joined this Girls school and my nephew who joined a minor seminary because he told me he wants to become a priest. I am so grateful for your friendship and continuous support.

Fr. Gabriel Joseph Ssenkindo.



# So... What Does the Mission Office Do?



As Mission is asked to adapt to a World in the midst of a pandemic, we are reminded of the importance of both the overarching and foundational aspects of our work here in the Mission Office. Sometimes we get so caught up in different aspects of our ministry or the projects that we are doing we have to pause to refocus on what is most important. Mission does not stop because of COVID-19; it is simply different.

With all these things in mind, we decided to include in this Newsletter a general summary of the different aspects of the Mission Office. ***\*If you are interested in continuing to support the work we do, we have included an envelope for you to use\****

The Second Vatican Council document *Ad Gentes* described the Church as “missionary by her very nature” (2) and explains that mission is part of our baptismal promises. This means that *all baptized* are called to be missionaries. For some this will mean traveling to other parts of the world, while for others it means welcoming guests and strangers here, and for others it means supporting mission efforts through prayer or sacrifice. Regardless of how we live it out, we are all called to mission!

**The Role of the Mission Office:** We work in conjunction with the St. Cloud Diocese as the global arm of the local church. It is our ministry to create opportunities for all members (youth, school children, mission groups, pastors, parishioners, staff, men and women, multicultural communities, etc.) of the Church of St. Cloud to participate in Christ’s love by living out our call to mission, unity in diversity and the Catholic Social Teachings. We promote solidarity between the Church of St. Cloud and members of the global community of faith, considering ourselves bridge-builders. The primary work of the Mission Office is about building right relationships with God and with others around the world.

**Catholic Relief Services:** CRS is the Official international humanitarian agency of the Catholic Church in the U.S. since 1943. This involves working towards relief, development, solidarity, and empowerment work across the globe. Through CRS we are able to participate in partnerships, emergency relief, Food Fast & youth programs, Fair Trade, Rice Bowl & CRS Collection in Lent . We also do our Rice Bowl local grants.

**Global Solidarity Partnerships with Homa Bay Kenya & Maracay Venezuela:** We have been in partnership with Maracay Venezuela since the 1960’s and partners with Homa Bay Kenya since 1999. In these partnerships we have 3-year travel cycle with delegations coming & going for each partner diocese and a mutual exchange of gifts and sharing of resources. We also have had an exchange of long-term missionaries, most recently Fr. Oswaldo from Maracay.



**Fair Trade:** We sell: Coffee, tea, chocolates, drinking & baking cocoas, clothes, fabrics, global crafts from a variety of organizations that are ethically sourced based on principles of fair and just wages and conditions.

The purpose of fair trade is to uphold the dignity of artisans and farmers around the world by providing just work and livable wages for them, while offering a global market for their high-quality products

**Pontifical Mission Societies:** There are Four Pontifical Mission Societies: Society for the Propagation of the Faith (our legal name), Missionary Childhood Association (formerly Holy Childhood), St. Peter the Apostle, and Missionary Union of Priests and Religious. Branches of PMS exist in every Diocese in the world to raise funds, awareness, and prayers for dioceses most in need. PMS supports 9,000 clinics; 10,000 orphanages; 1,200 schools; plus, vocation support & formation and building of chapels & churches in 1,150 mission dioceses today.

**Missionary Cooperation Plan (MCP) Appeals:** The purpose of this is to educate and broaden our local parish while supporting global mission of all kinds. Those who do MCP Appeals are chosen from over 250 mission organizations that apply each year. Each parish in the Diocese has one assigned every 3 years, but voluntary MCP’s are great too!

**Diocesan Missioners:** About 35 missionaries from or connected with St. Cloud Diocese serving in over 20 countries around the world. That number includes lay, clergy, and religious. At the Mission Office we serve as a bridge and share their stories with the Diocese.

**Mass Stipends:** Over 1,700 Masses were prayed by our missionaries and mission connections around the world for the intentions of St. Cloud parishioners. For some global priests mass stipends are their only income. These stipends are given individually or from parishes’ excess.

### **Mission Animation &**

**Education:** Mission Education provides service ideas, gifts, and projects for all ages across the St. Cloud Diocese. We produce the Mission Connections Newsletter (what you are currently reading!) and try to get people involved through social media. We promote solidarity, mission, mission vocations & Catholic Social Teachings. We had over 60 mission speakers or events at schools, parishes, etc. in 2019.



**World Mission Rosary:** “Embracing the World in prayer.” Begun by Fulton John Sheen in 1951. The 5 colors representing the regions of the world: Red, Green, Yellow, White, and Blue. These Rosaries are made and donated by mission groups or other rosary-makers and are shared free of charge to schools, parishes, and mission connections.

**Mission Trips:** We bring Diocesan Delegations to Kenya and Venezuela as well as special delegations and immersion trips. There are also some regular trips planned by others in the diocese to mission connections and relationships. We provide support such as formation and follow-up to individuals or groups looking for a mission trip. The purpose of these trips is to encourage others to walk together in solidarity with global brothers and sisters, and ensure that it is done in a respectful and successful way for both sides

**Mission Groups:** There are about 120 Mission groups throughout the diocese. These groups have been supporting mission for over 100 years (before there was a Mission Office). Quilts, baby quilts, dishtowels, knit items, hygiene & personal care items, children’s clothes & baby items, and more are donated by mission groups and then gifted to over 20 local & global organizations. They contribute thousands of dollars and hours to the office and missionaries abroad.

Thanks to the generosity of so many in 2019, over \$700,000 went through our office in various ways to support the different ministries we are a part of. This number also does not include the thousands of rosaries and other items that were distributed in 2019. Thank You!

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## New Faces in Mission!

We had some new staff start at the Mission Office this **Spring!** Carolina (Nina) Walz (pictured on the left) is the new Office Manager. Teresa Trout (pictured on the right) is the new Education Coordinator. They are both very excited to be a part of the Mission Office. We've included a brief introduction to both of them below but you can read their full bios on our website (<http://mission.stcldio.org>) under "Meet the Staff."



"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,  
'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'  
And I said 'Here am I. Send me!'"  
- Isaiah 6:8

Carolina Walz started working as the Office Manager in April. She has been connected with the Mission Office for many years because of her father-in-law's involvement as a Missioner from the Diocese of St. Cloud to her hometown of Maracay, Venezuela. Carolina moved to the U.S. in 2004 with her husband and two oldest children. She studied accounting at the Accounting Technical Center in Maracay and graduated in 1998. Her experience ranges from bakeries to retreat and community organization. We're excited to have her with us!

Teresa Trout started working as the Education Coordinator in May. She was part of the most recent delegation to Homa Bay, Kenya in the Spring of 2019, and since returning has been passionate about being more involved in Mission. She is a graduate of the College of St. Benedict with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Theology. Her past experience ranges from food service management to working and volunteering with children of all ages. Teresa is excited to continue learning about mission and sharing that joy with others!

## Stay Connected!

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



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## World Mission Sunday 2020



"Here am I. Send me!" - Isaiah 6:8

World Mission Sunday is  
October 18th!  
And World Mission Rosary Day  
is October 2nd!

Contact the Mission Office if you would like to  
learn more or would like World Mission Rosaries  
for your class or group!