



ENCOUNTER

Catholic laity on mission – everywhere

May 2020

Welcome to Encounter!

Who knows where mission will take us? From our own neighborhood to Texas to India to Kenya. Mission does not discriminate based on one's age or location. We are all called. We are all welcome. We can support ongoing efforts like the members of the St. Matthew's Catholic Church Mission Group in San Antonio. We can also recognize the presence and love of the Blessed Mother amidst grief, poverty and religious tensions like Fr. Kip Stander, SM. Mission is alive! Even when we are still on lockdown and resources are tight. Now is the time to support missionaries. They need money. They need prayers. The need is urgent. The money is used for missions – to feed the hungry, heal the sick, and teach the young. Prayer strengthens their spirit, it keeps their hope alive, it gets them out of bed in the morning. Give [HERE](#). Pray every Monday for missionaries. There is no better time than now to support the global efforts of the Church through your prayers and financial support. #CatholicCares.

On Mission to Support the Children of Honduras

You're never too old for mission. And if you don't believe that, ask the members of the St. Matthew Catholic Church Mission Group in San Antonio, Texas. Many of the two dozen or so members are in their 50s and older, including some retirees. But age hasn't dimmed their commitment or enthusiasm to acting on their faith and Gospel values.

The group was formed in 1997 and first ministered to Zapotec Indians and a children's home in Oaxaca, Mexico. In 1998, after Hurricane Mitch hit Central America, killing more than 7,000 people in Honduras alone, the Archdiocese of San Antonio invited the mission group to travel there to aid survivors.

In Tegucigalpa, they met the sisters who run Casa de Niño, an orphanage for girls. The structure had survived the hurricane but was in serious need of repair.

"At that time, we were able to raise money to fix the roof and do some construction," said Chris Rios, a



retired nurse who wanted to join the Peace Corps in her youth. She and her husband Roberto, now a deacon at the parish, found they had the time to volunteer with the mission group once their children were grown. They made their first trip to Honduras in 2001.

The mission group provides ongoing financial support to Casa de Niño, speaking on the phone with the sisters several times each month and wiring money from parish donations for food and medicine.

“So far, the girls are doing very well. They’re getting an education, getting the sacraments, they’re well-nourished,” said Chris. “We support them financially but also spiritually and emotionally. We call them our girls, or our children. They call us the grandmothers.”

She added, “We’re helping to bring the love of Christ to them and letting them know how much God loves them. I would say that is what mission is about.”

The mission group also provides financial support to Casa Esperanza in Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, across the border from Del Rio, Texas, and members visit several times each year to play with the children and offer religious activities.

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Mary Baird has belonged to the group for about three years. She and her husband Raymond, also a member, joined St. Matthew’s parish—where one of their sons sings in the choir, which they’ve since joined—after years of moving about for his military career. Mary has taught CCD and adult education and been a DRE, and the couple has taken part in Marriage Encounter.

At the time the Bairds joined, the mission group had been sponsoring pilgrimages to Rome and the Holy Land as well as fundraising cruises. The group’s focus has shifted since to incorporate praying the rosary, days of reflection, local trips to religious shrines and guest speakers at meetings, as well as supporting the orphanage and other communities. Mary is currently the president.

The group raises money for people living in the colonias on both sides of the border in Piedras Negras, Mexico, and Eagle Pass, Texas. Members collect clothing, household goods, non-perishable food items, school supplies, medical supplies and equipment, toys and other items. Typically, they would deliver these supplies monthly, but those trips have been put on hold because of the pandemic.

The mission group also supports activities for the local Burmese community, which has about 200 families in St. Matthew’s parish. Deacon Roberto has assisted them with Sunday liturgies, weddings, First Communions and

special Masses with visiting Burmese priests over the years.

Mary, who has been missing singing in the choir during quarantine, said she prays for the children and the sisters in Honduras, especially now.



“We support the mission with our prayers, our involvement, our engagement with people on the front lines,” she said. “Mission means going out, being involved.” The mission group remains in close contact with the sisters in Honduras during the pandemic, although the annual visit this spring was cancelled.

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“We haven’t had any word that anyone has gotten the virus so far,” said Chris. “The girls haven’t been going out at all, and the sisters only leave to get groceries. Thank God everybody is still well.”

The mission group is holding its meetings via zoom right now and plans to restart fundraising efforts as soon as it is able, said Chris. “We trust in God and wait to see what the ‘new normal’ will be after the pandemic.”

For more information, visit <https://stmatts.org/social-service-outreach>.

Article by Julie Bourbon,
ENCOUNTER Editor

Mary's Presence, As Developed by Experience in Mission

By Kip Stander, SM



I am a Marianist (Society of Mary), and so I draw grace and encouragement in my life and in my ministry from Mary, the Mother of Jesus. A phrase from the wedding at Cana that I carry in my heart is “and the mother of Jesus was there” (John 2:1). Her presence to me was broadened and deepened when I experienced the faith, inspiration, and nourishment the people of India and Kenya, both places where I have served, receive from her.

It is notable to me that the Cathedral Basilica in Nairobi, Kenya, is dedicated to the Holy Family. This name affirms the centrality of the family as the home of the heart and selfless care in day-to-day life in Africa. As I participated in a Holy Week Stations of the Cross in a Nairobi slum, I was reminded of the faithful women

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followers of Jesus in the Gospels. They not only attended to his needs, but also suffered with Jesus during his passion and death. Jesus meeting his sorrowful mother and Mary standing at the foot of the cross has a new depth of feeling and reality for me since I stood with others in the community in the places where mothers’ sons were killed by violence. The same presence in grief was part of the prayer at the burial of children of single mothers.

My experience of Mary was broadened in India, as the cultural and social celebrations there are quite varied, with Marian shrines found throughout the country. They are popular destinations for pilgrimages. Yet, right in

Bengaluru (Bangalore) was one of my most eye-opening gifts. St. Mary’s Basilica in Bengaluru was consecrated September 8, 1882. Each year, the city celebrates St. Mary’s Feast with day-long festivities that include speeches and a parade with chariots. Christians, Muslims, and Hindus are all participants in honoring Mary on this day—a witness to the inspiration and love Mary calls forth from human hearts. Life in India has many tensions and many groups in active struggle with one another, but Mary’s Feast expresses a unity of experience of the people of God.

The designation of Mary that has spoken to me over the years of my Marianist life is Mary as mother and model. My growth in appreciation of Mary is not limited to my time in mission, but the experience of Mary as mother was deeply enriched by my ministry in Kenya. I saw the care and willingness to endure suffering of mothers who toiled to eke out a living for their families. This added dimensions and depth to my perception of the person of Mary as a compassionate, sorrowful, and faith-filled mother.

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My experience of ministry in India affirmed Mary as a model of faithful discipleship in all circumstances. She was a vibrant member of a diverse community, attentive

to the movement of the Holy Spirit, placing her trust in God's promise of the fullness of life for all God's people.

The experience of ministry in Kenya and India remains a gift and a challenge for me to live the depth and the breadth of our one life in Christ. Mary is my mother and model in faithfully following in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus and proclaiming the goodness, the Good News, of God with my life.

Kip Stander, SM is a Marianist priest, originally from Northern Kentucky, currently serving as the University Chaplain at the University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio. He ministered with his Brothers in Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Cincinnati, as well as in Nairobi, Kenya and Bengaluru, India. Before going to India in 2011, he served for 8 years at St. Mary's University in San Antonio Texas with the University Ministry team there. Two thoughts that inspire and challenge him are:



- "See all, and see all with compassion." (Thomas Merton)
- "God will not be outdone in generosity and love."



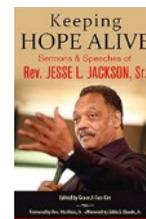
What Death Row Can Teach Missionaries

Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson

- the story of author Stevenson's journey to fight for justice for wrongfully convicted Walter McMillian - was reviewed by Dr. Don McCrabb, USCMA Executive Director. [Click here](#) to access the book review online.

USCMA Happenings

- **Pentecost Novena** | Our good friend, Dan Schutte, SJ, has written a Novena to the Holy Spirit in preparation for, and the celebration of, Pentecost. He is giving it to us for our use. May our prayers rise like incense and bathe the world with the Holy Spirit. To access Dan's work, click [here](#).
- **Accompaniment and Solidarity** | Join USCMA on Thursdays at noon ET to remember one another, accompany each other through this difficult time, and be in solidarity with all the missions we support around the world. Visit the [USCMA website](#) for the new registration link, upcoming talking points, and more!
- **Books for Review** | USCMA receives complimentary books about missiology, theology, and spirituality for review. Our feature book is *Keeping Hope Alive by Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Sr.* For this book or a current listing, [email](#) Nichole Petty, USCMA Office Manager.



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United States Catholic Mission Association
415 Michigan Ave., NE 20017
202-832-3112
www.uscatholicmission.org

