

Fisch-ing Lines

by Deacon Howard Fischer



As you may know, my son Greg and his wife Kim, along with their three children, are Maryknoll Lay Missioners. For more than four years they have been serving the poor and marginalized in São Paulo, Brazil. They are one of several families among the 58 lay people that Maryknoll has serving in mission around the world. Greg works with the Scalabrini fathers (an Italian order of priests) to help immigrants and refugees transition to Brazil through services in social assistance, professional and language courses, and employment. Kim facilitates courses in Restorative Justice at a men's prison and at a youth center. Her work strives to make the themes of forgiveness, non-violence, and reconstructing relationships come alive for those participating in the 12-week course.

If you are not familiar, Maryknoll Lay Missioners is an American Catholic organization inspired by the mission of Jesus to live and work with poor communities in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, responding to basic needs and helping to create a more just and compassionate world. Maryknoll also has separate branches of missionary priests and nuns. To learn more about Maryknoll and how you can help with prayers or donations, visit www.mkmlm.org.

My personal connection with Maryknoll goes back more nearly 20 years when I was fortunate to become friends with Dr. Susan Nagele. Susan is a physician from Urbana, IL, who has been serving in Africa since 1984. At one point in her ministry she was the only doctor for more than 30,000 displaced persons in two camps. A few years ago the American Medical Association recognized Susan with their special Medal of Valor Award for her work in Sudan, Tanzania and her current home of Kenya. I recently received an email from Susan which also contained her newsletter. I would like to share a few excerpts from the newsletter that I hope will open our minds and hearts to the difficulties faced by our sisters and brothers in other parts of the world:

“The Kenyan doctors were on strike from December 5th, 2016 for 100 days. The government told the people to go to our mission facilities for health care and we worked very hard to do the work of the government. The numbers of patients have finally decreased but the cost of food is sky rocketing. The drought has meant the crops have failed and there is less food. There is no butter available in Mombasa for a month.”

“Recently a 60 year old woman with diabetes and high blood pressure told me she can no longer afford to buy greens to eat. She only eats green grams and ugali (stiff porridge). She never eats meat. She wanted to stop her high blood pressure medicine because she came to the clinic with \$1 and the drugs cost \$7 for six weeks. In another location the people are boiling water and stones all day long just to calm their thoughts since they only have food to eat once a day. The women walk around trying to sell brooms and the men offer to pay them 50 shillings (= 50 US cents) if they will sleep with them. In desperation they agree, even though they know they can get sick with HIV/AIDS.”

“Lastly, in Bamba the parish priest begged the owner of Mombasa Cement Company to assist with water for people. The owner agreed and sends his big tankers filled with water around every day. The water is supposed to be free but the drivers charge the women money to fill up their jerry cans. If they can't pay money they can sleep with the driver to get their water. Kenya is classified as experiencing drought. So we are better off than South Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and Somalia where there is famine for the first time in seven years...all because of corruption and war.”

May you and I provide greater support to organizations such as Catholic Relief Services, Maryknoll and Catholic Charities that provide critical assistance to those in desperate need. I also ask that you remember Dr. Susan, Greg, and Kim, together with all of the Maryknollers, in your prayers. May each and every one of us make the love and compassion of the Risen Lord a tangible experience in the lives of others. If you wish to contact me, please leave a note in the Parish Office or send an email to deaconhwf99@yahoo.com.