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# Inspired

Stories of encountering Christ in global mission

Fall 2017

*"This is the season for giving gifts and receiving them with gratitude. At the heart of Christian mission is an overflowing sense of gratitude for all that God has done for us, for all we have received."*

*By Deacon Mickey Friesen*

*Season of Gifts and Gratitude*

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# Inspired

Fall 2017

*Stories of encountering Christ in global mission*



## Season of Gifts and Gratitude

*By Deacon Mickey Friesen  
Director, Center for Mission*



Some people love surprises. They love it when someone takes the time and effort to gather folks together to honor a special birthday or

anniversary. I know how special I feel when someone surprises me with a special card or a note because he/she remembered a significant moment in my life. And then there are those moments of surprise when a person from your past calls you or finds you on Facebook and seeks to reconnect or to thank you for the ways you touched their life. These unexpected surprises of life can disarm us and open us to receiving them truly as a gift.

During the Advent season, we watch and wait and prepare for the gift of Christmas. Does it surprise us that God has prepared all creation for us so that we may have life and flourish? When we can see that everything in life is a gift, we are standing at the doorway to gratitude. What a surprise that the God of the universe so loved us that he sent his only Son, Jesus, as the gift of Himself. This gift of God is the doorway to gratitude.

We may not expect or deserve this gift, but we can receive it through

gratitude. How do you want to say thank you this Christmas for this precious gift, this unaccountable love, this surprise from God that you receive?

**This is the season for giving gifts and receiving them with gratitude. At the heart of Christian mission is an overflowing sense of gratitude for all that God has done for us, for all we have received.**

The Spirit of God continues to enter into our lives surprising the world with love. Mission means sharing the gift of Christ among our global family in faith. The Center for Mission's



This will become your gift to others. It may surprise you how generous you may become when you see that everything is a gift from God.

As Advent begins, you will be asked to help

support mission activity through the Center for Mission as our donors are our only source of funding. Your gifts make it possible for the Center for Mission to continue providing opportunities for mission encounters through prayer, education, activities and mission experiences for the archdiocese.

In this newsletter, we want to thank you for your support by sharing with you some of the gifts of faith that have occurred and gifts received in gratitude.

## 2019 Journey to India

It is never too early to begin planning for the next mission trip opportunity. Our next visit will be to the Diocese of Vijayapuram, India early spring of 2019. This is the diocese that Kathy Rennie describes in her article in this newsletter.

It will be an inspiring experience to

encounter Basic Christian Communities, an intentional program of the diocese to more closely serve the spiritual and physical needs of families in parishes. They are loosely based on the small communities of the apostles. If you are interested, contact Eric Simon 651.291.4446.



purpose is to share this gift through encounters of faith and make the good news of Jesus known to the ends of the earth.

We reach out to share our gifts and make it possible to receive gifts from others. When we are open and

receptive to God's gifts, our lives can change forever.

How might God surprise you this Advent and Christmas? What gift of Christ's presence is waiting for you to receive? How do you want to say thank you with your life?



## Sharing Gifts in India

By Kathy Rennie



*Kathy Rennie and her husband experienced the joys and gratitude of sharing and receiving gifts in the Diocese of Vijayapuram, India.*

For many years, my mother had been supporting and sponsoring a seminarian in India to enable him to complete ordination. He had become very close to our family and my mother considered him her spiritual son, thus my spiritual brother. Amazingly, he has now become the Bishop of his diocese - Bishop Sebastian Thekethecheril of the Diocese of Vijayapuram in Kerala.

This relationship developed into something beyond my imagination. Because we grew to know Fr. Sebastian so well and saw the poverty of his diocese, we started the WE SHARE program which has provided so much meaning in our lives. One element of this program is the opportunity to sponsor poor families. We were gifted with meeting the family we were supporting for the first time during one of our trips to India. This was one of the most memorable experiences of our life. The gratitude and love they showered on us was overwhelming.

*We witnessed how simply they lived and their total trust in God, yet, in their poverty, they were still happy and loving. We were determined to simplify our own lives and deepen our own trust in God. We are in much gratitude to that family.*

But the best of all was our adoption of Terese in 1985 and Annie in 1989, two orphans from the state of Kerala.

The adoption was guided by our

spiritual brother, Bishop Sebastian. We thought we were going to give two homeless babies a home. To our surprise, it was our family, with five other children, that experienced a richer joy and happiness with these two gifts. They have filled our lives with so much delight I am not sure who was the richer for our adoption, Terese and Annie or us?

My mother's gifts of support for a struggling seminarian has enabled us to provide a home for two orphans, and we are so grateful for the joy they have given our family.

*Our experience is that God truly gives back in abundance to the small gifts we give.*



## I Am So Blessed in Tanzania

By Liz Mach



*Liz Mach, from Pine City, MN, joined the Maryknoll Lay Missioners as a nurse in 1976. She is now one of the longest serving missioners for Maryknoll. Liz has*

*served primarily in Sudan and Tanzania where she currently works with HIV children and women suffering from Female Genital Mutilation.*

Missioners often speak about how much more we are given than what we give as we enter into another culture. It often sounds like a cliché but believe me, it is not. I can provide a list of times I have felt honored to receive gifts as a Maryknoll Lay Missioner working in Tanzania: the smiles on the faces of the children at Jipe Moyo - a shelter for children escaping all forms of Gender Based Violence - to the



profound thank yous I have received.

I am blessed. I have the opportunity to work with young women who have been forced into child marriage at eight years of age. I see them enter the Jipe Moyo shelter, which means Give Hope, and begin to work through their trauma, begin to trust people and to start school. Their new lives unfold before them as a flower opening. It is so rewarding to experience.

I see young women standing up against the harmful tradition of Female Genital Mutilation and say "NO!" Their strength and tenacity inspires me! They want to go to school, they want the opportunity to learn and to make healthy choices in their lives.

There are the young boys destined to live on the streets of the cities in Tanzania to avoid abuse and the consequences of a breakdown of the family system. They enter the shelter and learn at an early age about Gender Based Violence and their role in combating the injustices. They learn to live together with other young children



in a healthier way.

*But those smiles and thank yous are not just for me, but for everyone who has supported missioners through prayers and gifts of support.*

Each one of you that remembers to add a prayer for our activities strengthens me. Do you really think that I would be strong enough to be so far away from my family and friends in Minnesota if I had not been supported by your prayers?

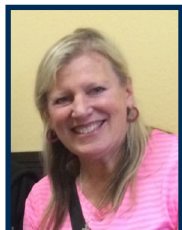
In a sense there are multiple layers of giving and receiving, your gifts are received by me to help me keep going, and I am again the recipient of gifts as I serve the children and adults of Musoma, Tanzania.



This Advent, I ask that you renew your commitment and continue to offer prayers for missionaries and folks around the world who have welcomed us into their homes and lives. And support the Center for Mission who is our voice in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. I thank you.

## Devotion in Northern Alaska

By Ann Mattson



*Ann Mattson was a delegate on the 2017 trip to the mission Diocese of Fairbanks, Alaska. Ann works at East Ridge High School in Special Ed.*

I traveled to northern Alaska in 2017 with seven other delegates through the Center for Mission. I was inspired and struck by the devotion I saw in each of the members of the Diocese of Fairbanks. It was amazing to experience the strength of many smaller Catholic communities and their passion for serving each other. So, silly as it may be, I decided to create an acrostic to describe my experiences: **DEVOTION**

**D** : Dedicated. The remote and small parishes we visited - whether they did or did not have a priest available that week, that month, or that season - chose to meet regularly at their church as a community. They shared food and fellowship, great examples of the strength of small Christian communities. Even in the larger cities like Fairbanks, pastoral ministers and volunteers seemed equally invested in the life of their church.

**E** : End of the Earth. We visited and shared with people in villages that were very remote. The only way to arrive was by bush plane. The Athabaskan community in Galena, the village we visited, survived through their own efforts: hunting and fishing. We were also privileged to see so much of the beauty of nature surrounding these villages. From our bush plane we saw the vastness and diversity of much pristine and unspoiled



landscape. The grandeur of the people and natural landscapes were humbling and overwhelming.

**V** : Vocation. As much as we bemoan the dwindling numbers of young people entering religious life, it takes a very unique individual to deal with the challenges of the northern Alaskan Diocese of Fairbanks. The extreme weather conditions, lack of a transportation infrastructure, poverty and isolation of native villages which were very far from each other were hard challenges for priests and brothers. Yet they were some of the most vibrant, humorous and approachable clergy I have ever met.

**O** : Outreach. We were all impressed with the joy and non-judgmental

approach of the volunteers at the Immaculate Conception Church Soup Kitchen. The line of people being served seemed to never end, but amazingly we were able to serve all. The director of the soup kitchen, Cindy Fields, was a demanding, loving woman who taught others by example that anyone who showed up for a meal would be fed and treated with compassion and respect. She emphasized that we were all God's children and deserved love and food.

**T** : Tenacity. No matter what the latest challenge was for a parish, the parishioners solved the issue with grace and dignity. They all seemed tremendously resourceful to the needs of the community.

**I** : Intention. One of the primary goals of the trip was to experience the difficult spiritual and financial situations within a mission diocese, in this case, the vast Alaskan frontier of our 50th state. We were all struck by how much we take for granted regarding food, shelter, medicine, household goods and even priests to grant us reconciliation and to offer sacraments.

**O** : Outdoors. This experience was so "Alaskan." While we were attending a mass in the beauty of enormous Denali State Park, one of our delegates pointed toward an open door. And there in the doorway was an enormous female moose contentedly munching on leaves of a tree. It was as if the moose was attending mass while having a snack. The priest announced that, "he had been offering RCIA to the moose but to no avail!" What a wonderful intersection of our Church and nature.

**N** : Now What? We all had many reasons to take this journey. Suffice it to say, we were all in awe of the many charitable works we saw performed, the outstanding treatment



and dignity of the native peoples, the many selfless acts of kindness extended to our group and the beautiful devotion of the church members wherever we went.

This journey to northern Alaska made us all appreciate our "easier" lives, and yet we envied the Alaskans' focus and joy of their Catholic faith. This was a renewing experience causing me to reexamine my involvement and commitment to my own parish and to ponder how I could share it best with others. It was a gift that I brought home and I am thankful for the experience through the Center for Mission.



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