

Extraordinary Missionary Month: October

Highlighted Missionaries



Below are brief, inspirational stories of missionaries highlighted for 2019 World Mission Sunday. Both of these missionaries have connections to our archdiocese and have been supported by the Center for Mission Mustard Seed Fund. This fund aids missionaries by providing grants to individuals and families in mission.

Maria Montello: Phnom Penh, Cambodia



Maria, currently a Maryknoll Lay Missioner, got the mission “bug” after having spent time with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps teaching math to students with disabilities. In 2011, after graduating with an MA in Neurophilosophy from Georgia State University, Maria joined Maryknoll and is now teaching philosophy at the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

Maria remembers one of her greatest challenges, and greatest thrills, seeing her class accept a boy named Tung. Tung was Vietnamese and the Cambodian relationship with Vietnam and Vietnamese was turbulent. Tung was “hard-working, smart and kind. I tried to get them to empathize with Tung, but it didn’t work.” Maria said it was hard for her to watch how Tung was ignored. Unbeknownst to Maria, Tung had been slowly winning over students. At the end of the semester, the class had a party where students were eagerly eating spring rolls that had mysteriously appeared. Through Facebook, Maria saw Tung teaching Khmer students how to make these delicious Vietnamese spring rolls in their dormitory. Tung had been accepted!



It was a wonderful transformation for Tung and his class. “I nearly cried,” stated Maria. “Changing ideas requires changing hearts. A professor cannot change hearts. She can only bring hearts together and wait for the magic.”

Diane Yonga: Damongo, Northern Ghana



Diane was born and raised on a farm in Detroit Lakes, MN and moved to the Twin Cities, worshipping at the St. Paul Cathedral. She met her husband, from Cameroon, at college and learned much about Africa and his country: dance, food, customs, etc. Diane had often desired a missionary life. Once her “youngest son started college, my dreams of moving to Africa was ignited.” And then one day, as she was praying she “distinctly heard God say to me, ‘now is the time.’”

Through research she discovered the Lay Mission Helpers Association, she applied and was accepted. Diane joined others for a 4-month formation and training before arriving in Damongo, Ghana for a three year period. Diane is now teaching Food and Nutrition to teens at a girl’s boarding school, St. Anne’s Senior High School.

Diane marvels at the joy and happiness children exhibit, even those who “have nothing material.” And she often sees children walking along the road alone, even as young as three years old. But they are taken care of by older children and are very happy with lots of smiles. Her exposure to a new culture has been enlightening for her.

“I think God brought me here to change me, not to change them. Sending me to Ghana, I am becoming the person God created me to be. I just have to get over the girls calling me ‘Granny.’”