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Inspired

Stories of encountering Christ in global mission

Spring 2025

"Some people give to the missions by going, others go to the missions by giving. Without both, there are no missions" St. John Paul II

The Fruit of Mission

Growing a Mission Church

A Fruitful Diocesan Partnership

Excerpts From a Missionary Gardner



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Spring 2025

Stories of encountering Christ in global mission



The Fruit of Mission

Deacon Mickey Friesen
Director



Missionary work is aptly compared to a field...a mission field. Like any garden, growing God's mission includes planting seeds of

faith, nurturing growth of the Church and harvesting Christian communities who form new disciples and leaders to go forth as Christ's witnesses. I'm reminded of a prayer attributed to St. Oscar Romero which speaks of the role we each play in growing God's mission field in the Kingdom of God:



"We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities."

We don't often get to see the fruits

of our labor because growing faith and Christian community takes time, but sometimes we do! Sometimes we get to see the blessing and taste the fruit we have labored for. As I am about to begin my 25th year as the Director of the Center for Mission I have been blessed to see the fruits of some of the missions we have prayed for and supported in planting years ago. I have seen the growth of a mission diocese in remote northern India that began with nothing more than a few missionaries, the Gospel message, and the support from people like us to plant the Church. I have heard how the ongoing work of one missionary in Cambodia, who prepared the ground of faith over many years, has born the fruit of new vocations in the Church. I have seen the fruit that comes from our parishes and Archdiocese growing partnerships of faith and solidarity with Churches in Kenya, Venezuela and Damascus. We see the fruit and witness of being Catholic together that crosses the many borders that separate us.



In this newsletter, we reflect on the growth and the fruit of mission that is happening here. We mark 25 years of the mission Diocese of Miao, India. We celebrate the 20th anniversary of our Archdiocesan partnership with the Diocese of Kitui, Kenya. And we will share the story of one missionary from the Twin Cities, Maria Montello, as she shares the fruits of her service in Cambodia for more than a decade. We give thanks for all the ways you have been part of the mission that has grown in our time.



Growing a Mission Church

Deacon Mickey Friesen
Director

Twenty years ago, I met Bishop George Pallippambal (aka PK George), the founding bishop of The Diocese of Miao, a new mission church located in the remote foothills of the Himalayan Mountains in northeastern India. Bishop PK George described his new church as very young with few resources other than the missionaries themselves living among the people and witnessing to the Gospel.

And yet, he said the church was taking root and spreading among the many tribal groups in the area. He told me how the way he read the Acts of the Apostles had changed since living in Miao. His was a mission church introducing people to Jesus Christ for the very first time. What I did not know until recently, was that Bishop PK George had planted the seed of the Gospel many years earlier when he was first Catholic missionary to introduce Jesus to these people.

Then - Fr. George accepted the invitation to go into tribal areas of Northeastern India to answer the call of the people to tell them more about the God Jesus. In 1979, he traveled through the jungles and foothills of the Himalayan Mountains to smuggle himself across the border into an area where Catholicism was banned. He never left. He stayed with the families and elders who had invited him. He proclaimed the



Gospel to them with the children being the first translators. He said it was like walking in the footsteps of the apostles. The word spread like wildfire among the villages and tribes. Being that it was not allowed for outside priests and religious to enter this area, missionary activity was carried out by the youth and lay leaders. Fr. George stayed with these young evangelists and together they announced the Gospel for the first time to those who heard it. Within

two years, over 900 people were baptized in the Church. In 2005, Diocese of Miao was inaugurated, and Bishop George was ordained their first bishop.



From that seed of the Gospel, the Church in Miao has grown today to nearly 100,000 Catholics, hundreds of catechists, youth leaders, clergy and religious vocations and 34 parishes established. The Church in Miao is still young and growing. It is also a joyful church. They continue to focus on growing and equipping young people to live, lead and give witness to their faith in the church, business and society.

A Fruitful Diocesan Partnership

Janine Ricker
Global Mission Outreach Coordinator



“A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up...Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain...” (Matthew 13:3-8).

God has indeed blessed our partnership with the Diocese of Kitui, Kenya, with “good soil.” Who could

have known that at a meeting in late 2003 a small group of 16 people from five parishes in Deanery 6 would help launch one of the longest lasting diocesan-to-diocesan global solidarity partnerships in existence? Although they attended that first partnership meeting not knowing what to expect, those 16 people, and their counterparts in Kitui, would go on to lay the groundwork for a ministry that has grown to include hundreds of people on opposite sides of the globe.

Centered around our shared faith in the Eucharist, the partnership celebrates the hope we have in Christ’s Resurrection. As Pope Francis wrote in his 2024 Papal Bull *Spes Non Confundit*, *Hope Does Not Disappoint*, “Buried with Christ in Baptism, we receive in his resurrection the gift of a new life that breaks down the walls of death, making it a passage to eternity” (no. 20). Together, Catholics in Kitui and Saint Paul and Minneapolis have entered into a 20-year journey of faith, helping one another grow closer to Christ. As we enter into this Jubilee Year, we pray that we may continue to be “pilgrims of hope,” traveling together toward life eternal.

For more information about the partnership, please contact Janine Ricker at 651-291-4504 or rickerj@archspm.org.



Exerpts from a (missionary) Gardner

Maria Montello
Maryknoll Lay Missioner



I have always thought that a teacher is much like a gardener, but a special sort of gardener. One that does not typically get to

enjoy the vibrant colors or delicious fruit produced by what she had once tended. No. A teacher moves on, or rather, her students do—to another grade, another school, another path in life.

Make no mistake: being a teacher is not a thankless job. Most students depart from my classes with quite a bit of gratitude—and fanfare. But it is rare for me to witness where my students end up and it is not often that they come back to tell me.

Until recently, I taught at the Catholic seminary in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. I am the only lay teacher. I am the only woman. Needless to say, I take seriously the opportunity to cultivate my students with various ideas they might not otherwise hear in Cambodia, e.g., servant leadership (and) the role of laity in the Church.



Somnang was a diligent student. He did not use Wikipedia or ChatGPT to write his essays. His work was thoughtful and showed maturity. He was lighthearted and naturally lifted the spirits of his fellow students. I

was hopeful about the prospects of him finding his way through what can be a difficult growing season in seminary, studies more rigorous than seminarians had ever experienced previously.

Somnang did make it, I later discovered. He was assigned to a parish along the Tonle Sap River, a community of very poor Vietnamese fishers, not unlike the community he grew up in.



Five years later, now FATHER Somnang came to my home to do Mass for lay missioners and religious brothers who have come to Maryknoll every Wednesday for Mass and dinner for decades. It was his third time doing Mass in English, he told me.

He dawned full priestly attire, sat at our humble table, and turned water to wine. I felt a flutter of satisfaction when he invited us, largely lay people, to share a reflection after he gave his homily. It was a very moving celebration.

Later at dinner he told us about his priestly activities at the parish. Interestingly, he also spoke of how he has regular meetings with the priests who were in his cohort in seminary and gathers a flock of children daily at the church to pray, eat, and do homework. He is very intentional about these things. Fr. Somnang had learned how to keep his own soil healthy so that he himself would continue to be a fruitful gardener.



Maria Montello began serving as a Maryknoll Lay Missioner in Cambodia in 2012 and began in 2018 to serve as a professor in the seminary. She is originally from the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. The Center for Mission supports her missionary efforts through the Mustard Seed Grant.



Light of the World

Across the seas, through lands
unknown,
With hearts aflame, the seeds are
sown.
A voice of hope, a hand to guide,
Christ's love embraced, none cast
aside.
Through trials deep and joy so
bright,
They walk by faith, they share His
light.
No gift too small, no soul too far,
Each life they touch—a shining star.
With humble steps and steadfast
grace,
They bring God's mercy place to
place.
A mission strong, a calling true,
To love, to serve, in all they do.