

The Season for Children



This day in David's city a savior has been born to you, the Messiah and Lord. Let this be a sign to you: in a manger you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes.
(Luke 2: 11-12)

Dear Mission Friends:
As we enter the season of Advent, we are reminded that God chose to send us His Son as the Baby Jesus, a pure, innocent, completely dependent infant. And the Christ Child Himself grew up to perceive and to teach the specialness of children and their essential role in a loving, peaceful world. *"Whoever welcomes this little child on my account welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes him who sent me; for the least one among you is the greatest."* (Luke 9:48)



Fr. Kieran with some happy and appreciative students from Our Lady of Grace School.

Nobody understands or lives by these words of Jesus more than a missionary. Fr. Kieran Healy, O.P, is one such missionary. From 1994 to 2004, Fr. Kieran served at our mission in Kisumu, Kenya, a country—like so many in Africa today—rampant with abject poverty, devastating diseases, political instability and corruption, and the resulting climate of continuous violence, pillage, and rapes. According to Fr. Kieran, though, while the missionary is at first shocked, overwhelmed, and deeply saddened by the suffering of those he has been sent to minister, he is soon inspired by their goodness and generosity.

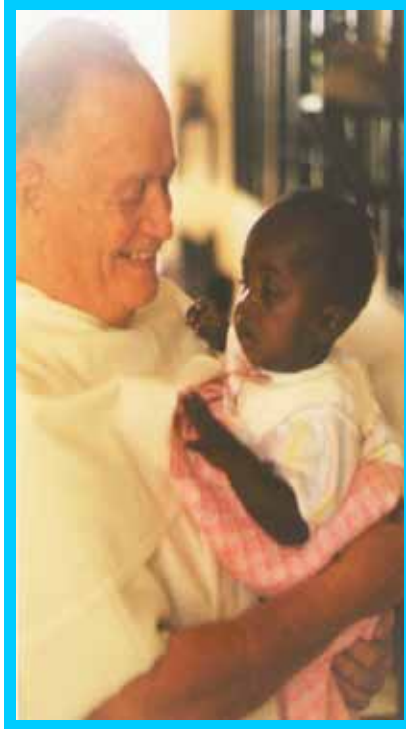
"I have found that the Eucharist is the best setting to reveal God's remarkable presence in the soul of each person present. The missionary experience further expands that revelation as it identifies and strengthens the spark of God's presence in the soul of every human being who happens to come his way, each with his or her own unique set of needs and gifts."

However, rather than focusing on himself, Fr. Kieran offers his own idea of an exemplary missionary: Fr. Lewis Shea, O.P., who served in Africa for 57 years until his death this past February at St. Catherine of Siena Hospital in Kisumu.

According to Fr. Kieran, Fr. “Lewie” was “ingenious...in his accounting methods” and instrumental in maintaining the financial health of the Dominican communities in which he served. Employees also benefitted as he taught them how to invest: They “would leave a portion of their salaries with him and he would combine their savings to get the best interest rates. When they wanted to use some of their savings, he would have them borrow from themselves and pay interest to their own account.” True to his trusting personality, however, he carried his own money around in a black garbage bag!

But while Fr. Lewie’s expertise was in finance, Fr. Kieran recalls that “he was primarily a preacher. He loved to tell stories of his many and varied adventures, and would interweave them with a strongly-based sacramental theology and a moral sensitivity that was both practical and compassionate.

Fr. Lewis Shea, O.P.



Always cheerful, kind, and generous, he had an intense interest in the individual person and approached everyone with kindness and understanding... We came to call him our ‘drug pusher’ because he obtained and dispensed a spectrum of affordable vitamin pills for the countless who had AIDS and other life-threatening illnesses.

He even developed the popular ‘Lewis Elixir,’ a combination of honey, aloe vera, vinegar, and garlic, which often seemed to help people get better and be able to return to work.” As with all great missionaries, “he reflected the spirit of the land and the people,” and, perhaps more importantly, “ordinary people were of the utmost importance to him.”

Fr. Kieran believes that the missionary, more than any other servant of God, “is allowed, through travel and circumstance, to experience a fuller spectrum of human aspiration and longing.” And to the well-deserved joy of the missionary, a big slice of that spectrum includes the least among us—children—for which all of us who care about the future of our world should be thankful.

Fr. Kieran returned to Kenya this past July to catch up with his beloved colleagues, friends, and former students, now practicing priests. His main task, though, was to report to us on the status of the mission’s current projects, most of which, by the way, focus on the area’s children, particularly those who have been orphaned.

In Nairobi one Sunday, after Mass at St. Catherine of Siena Church, which is still housed under a temporary palm shelter, he set out with Fr. David Adeletta to visit several of the Dominican ministries in the area. They began with Our Lady Queen Parish, housed in a



Students posing proudly in front of their school in Kisumu.

The legendary Sr. Louisa Raddlmeyer preparing her bakery's bread for market.



tent and also awaiting funds for a permanent church. Then they braved the Thika, one of Kenya's most dangerous roads, where tragic car accidents are commonplace, thankfully arriving at a compound administered by the Dominican Sisters from Zimbabwe. After a tour of the Sisters' new grammar school, the two priests stopped at their farm to visit Sr. Louisa Raddlmeyer, O.P., well known for giving up a desirable university teaching position to work among the needy, primarily youth, of the area. She reminded Fr. Kieran that ten years prior he had put her in touch with a donor whose funds she used to provide schooling for child soldiers whose plight is otherwise heart-rending.

Recently Sr. Louisa helped thirty young men finish high school and return to the Sudan, where diplomas are rare. And she has trained young women to sew school uniforms and sell them in Sudan to help support their families. During our visit Sister called in a group of

children learning to make "solar lights" out of pin lights and old baby bottles, which would provide several hours of light in the numerous villages without electricity. Then she showed us her new bakery which sells bread to the villagers, providing funds to feed her students.

Continuing their journey, the priests visited another community of Dominican Sisters who, besides several other ministries, run a hospital, busy and full even on this Sunday evening. Fr. Kieran explains how people here live

" on the margin of life where death is always so very close. Malaria takes a baby every month in many villages, and AIDS takes many of the youth."

The Sisters invited them to stay for a dinner of ugali (corn polenta) and sikumu wiki (sautéed kale), two of Fr. Kieran's favorites, before they headed back home via the perilous and now pitch black Thika road.

After a few days in Nairobi, Fr. Kieran travelled to Kisumu, noting numerous make-shift refugee tents in the highlands, the lingering result of the 2008 post-election violence. Fr. Martin Martiny, O.P., director of the various ministries on the Dominican compound in Kisumu, took Fr. Kieran to see the changes made to Our Lady of Grace Grammar School since he was last there. The tireless Fr. Martiny had built the school when the tribal clashes kept their students from safely leaving the compound. New additions include a science lab,



Sick, abandoned, or orphaned children in downtown Kisumu-- all-too-common sights which our various ministries there are striving to eliminate.

Our Lady of Grace students at recess, mugging for the camera.



“Let the little children come to me. Do not shut them off. The reign of God belongs to such as these.”

(Luke 18: 16-17)

as well as three Dominican Sisters who serve as the principal, the nurse, and a teacher. The community also offers classes in sewing and carpentry, and ministers to the special educational and medical needs of a group of teenage orphans.

Fr. Kieran is eager to point out that *“some of the greatest achievements of our missionary efforts have been carried out by our Lay Dominicans,”* achievements, I might add, also focused primarily on children. Peter Paul Nsamba took over his struggling family farm in Uganda after his father died, turned it around, and used the profits to develop a foundation that pays high school fees for 165 orphans. Joseph Wachera opened a phone/fax/email business in Nairobi and, with his profits, set up a center to provide lunch for the area’s seriously malnourished children. Besides training cooks to feed the 900 children, utilizing produce from their new vegetable garden, the center also houses a library, a computer room, a classroom where English and sewing are taught, meeting and event

rooms, and a medical examination room offering weekly malaria screening.

Fr. Kieran recalls an evening many years ago when, while he was watering the garden, a young voice called out to him from the road, *“Will you send me to school?”* Father bought clothes and shoes for the thirteen-year-old boy, an orphan who tended cattle, and was able to enroll him into the third grade. A few years later he graduated from eighth grade, an impossible dream fulfilled. Father says, *“It is only through the kindness of our friends of the Dominican Mission Foundation that such things are possible. You make the sacrifice and we have all the fun of passing on your kindness to the people we meet along the Gospel path. What an honor it is to share the generous mystery of God’s love and be witness to His presence in every human heart!”*

May each of you be blessed with the purity and love of the Baby Jesus and all children this Christmas Season.

Lesley Warnshuis



This month we have Christmas Mass cards available, in addition to our standard Mass cards for condolence, recovery, birthday, anniversary, and special intentions.

If you would like a card sent in your name, please return the donation envelope indicating your Mass request, the type of card you’d like sent, and the recipient’s name and address.