**Mission Appeal in Chicago August 1 and 2, 2020 (18th Sunday in Ordinary Time)**

**Matthew 14:13-21**

**By Damian Kabot, Lay Mission-Helpers Association**

**ENGLISH**

Each year, the Archdiocese of Chicago invites missionary groups to share their stories and seek financial support from the faithful through the nationwide Mission Cooperative Plan. This year, due to the coronavirus pandemic these personal visits from missionaries to parishes are not possible. However, the Mission Office generously decided to conduct the mission appeal through video, audio and written presentations.

The Lay Mission-Helpers Association is honored to share our story with you. We are a Roman Catholic lay missionary organization. In other words, we send lay people to work in the mission field.

The last several months have not been easy on any one around the world. The pandemic which struck every single country and community impacted the whole world. Hundreds of thousands have died, millions have been sick. The economic impact will be felt for months.

In the United States, on top of the pandemic, the issues of the systemic racism and continuous injustices towards people of color have boiled over.

We have been through a lot, and it is not over yet.

One might think that this is not the time to do mission appeals because we have enough problems ourselves.

It is a natural reaction. After all, even the disciples of Jesus in today’s Gospel feel the same way!

They, too, face a difficult situation: the crowd that follows Jesus is not leaving. It is getting dark. The disciples ask Jesus to send the people away, so they can find provisions and shelter for themselves.

Their solution seems so natural, so human.

In the face of an overwhelming need we might be tempted, like the apostles, to dismiss the people who are tired, hungry and in need of help, just like ourselves. It is so easy to tell others to fend for themselves.

But Jesus does not think like they do. Instead of sending the people away, he asks the disciples to feed the crowd. They object by pointing out that they have only 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish which is most likely not even enough to feed their small group.

Jesus asks the disciples to place what they have in his hands and a miracle happens.

The lesson from today’s Gospel is for us too: look at what you have and share what you have to alleviate the suffering of others. In the face of an overwhelming need a Christian cannot just dismiss the people, ignore them, or wait for someone else to do something, or just let them fend for themselves.

This is what the mission appeal is about: sharing with others, helping others to alleviate their suffering, and loving others to the point of sacrifice. It is easy to share from our abundance, but it is indeed a sacrifice to share from our scarcity.

The Lay Mission-Helpers Association needs your help today, or rather the poor and the marginalized whom Lay Mission-Helpers serve need your help.

We were founded in Los Angeles by Msgr. Anthony Brouwers in 1955. Msgr. Brouwers went to the Marian Congress in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1954. It was a transformative event in his life. The bishops, priests and nuns in Africa shared with him their frustrations and challenges of serving the needs of the people in the areas for which they had no training, like pulling teeth, delivering babies or teaching science in high schools. When Msgr. Brouwers returned to Los Angeles, he was inspired to establish the Lay Mission-Helpers Association for the purpose of recruiting, training, sending and supporting Catholic professionals who are trained to do all those things for which the clergy and religious have no training.

In the last 65 years, the Lay Mission-Helpers Association has sent over 750 singles, married couples and families who served in 36 countries, offering together over 2,500 years of service.

Currently, we serve in Uganda, Ghana, and Papua New Guinea in the areas of project management, computer science, education, finance, healthcare, and administration.

We go where we are needed and when invited. We serve for at least three years, sharing our skills and faith with our brothers and sisters.

You can be a part of this. You can give education to children and teens that will help them escape the cycle of poverty. You can give children a life-saving healthcare. You can give families access to services that will meet their immediate needs and uphold their dignity.

You can help by joining us. If you are a lay person and feel a call to mission, look us up online at [www.laymissonhelpers.org](http://www.laymissonhelpers.org) and let’s start a conversation.

You can help by praying. We need your prayers! Pray for those whom we serve and pray for us.

Finally, you can help by donating today. No matter the size of the gift, every little bit helps. And when given with faith, miracles can happen.

Five loaves of bread and two fish were not enough even for the apostles, and yet, it was enough to satisfy over 5,000 people. There were 12 baskets of leftovers!

You and us, together, can accomplish great things in the lives of people in Uganda, Ghana, and Papua New Guinea. There will be much left-over blessing as God is never outdone in generosity!

Thank you for your support today. May God bless you abundantly and keep you and your loved ones safe as you share what you have with those who have even less.

Thank you.