

The Good News

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Missing Peter

By The Reverend Margaret Schwarzer, Interim Priest

After being at St. Mary's for a little more than a month, it is very clear to me that Peter—and the lovely Abbie—are deeply loved and appreciated by St. Mary's. It has been a privilege to hear of the celebrations unfolding on Pentecost, to have a delicious lunch with Peter during his last week, and to chat with Abbie while she packed up the rectory as I unpacked my things and settled into Peter's office.

Peter and I have been friendly, if slightly remote, colleagues since I arrived in our Diocese ten years ago. I first met Peter when I crossed the threshold of St. Mary's and found him standing outside the Chapter Room as he was welcoming those of us who were part of a Province working group into the serene formality of that space. Like most of his priestly peers, I know Peter as a witty man of generous heart.

Peter's thoughtful gesture on my first day as Interim Priest at St. Mary's will be the memory I will savor the most. I had arrived on a Monday morning and was working in the office with Denise while Peter was packing up the last of his belongings and recovering from the Festivities of Pentecost. When he learned that I would be leaving at one that afternoon, he came back at 12:30 and chatted with me. As I moved toward the outside door, he reached into his pocket and pulled out his own St. Mary's keys. "Here", he said, "You'll need these." He flipped to the proper key and gave me the bunch—with the lovely brass "St. Mary's" tag—and, together, he and I locked the door.

We didn't have to state the obvious; he was locking it for the last time, as I was locking it for the first time. I have thought more than once about the deep grace of that gesture: his easygoing "good bye", his kindness in helping the new priest get started, and his love of the place. What a gracious soul. Godspeed Peter.

A Thank You from Peter and Abbie

I hope to get personal "thank you notes" out to everyone, if that's possible. I am overwhelmed by the graciousness you all extended to us over the past month.

It all began with lunch with Gwen Buehrens and her gift to us. Rabbi Weiss' and The Reverend Chris Chase's sermons on the two preceding Sundays meant so much! During our final week we were invited out by several parishioners to memorable meals surrounded by friendship. The Sunday evening celebration at the Williamsons with our youth was a great party and follow up to Babson night. On Wednesday, Dean Huh surprised me with a visit from Luis Tiant in Framingham as he recounted his trip to Cuba and his career with the Sox.

On Pentecost Sunday when I walked into church before the service, I was moved by the floral arrangement Liz Visvis made and Beth Gardner gave. The whole day was surrounded by flowers! And then when the service began, I couldn't believe all the Red Sox hats. Pentecost, baptisms and Holy Eucharist would have been enough. But then there was the reception and bountiful tables of birthday cakes and food arranged by Peggy Scott and Kitty Smith and the Women of Saint Mary's. All of the wonderful retirement cards and well wishes, plus the gifts from the Sunday School and the stained glass piece with the fragments from the Katrina storm and Red Sox banner were a terrific send off.

By one o'clock I had almost forgotten there was more to come. The evening at Lucille Rossignol and Paul LaViolette's was unforgettable. The jazz trio arranged by Bruce Houston, the food, the music provided by Kirsten and the choir, and all of you being together to wish us well was overwhelming. To see so many friends from the past: Mary Kilmon, Steve Oles, the Chases, Ulbrichs and others was wonderful.

I joked a few weeks ago during church when so many kind words were spoken about our time together that it felt like I was attending my own funeral. Well, during the celebration it felt like I had gone to heaven. I can't tell you how deeply moved we have been by the whole experience. Our years with you have been great, but the last day was truly out of this world. To: Lucille, the Wardens and Vestry, Kirsten and Denise, Gwen and Margaret Schwarzer, and all of you, my heartfelt gratitude for all you did to make this happen.

A Medical Mission Trip to Tanzania

Editor: Ann Wessel from St. Mary's traveled to Tanzania on a medical mission trip from June 5-17, 2009.

The purpose of our trip was to visit programs supported by Jubilee Ministry, Diocese of Massachusetts, to provide technology and training to hospitals and to establish relationships with hospitals leading to volunteer opportunities for medical personnel. Jubilee Ministry's mission is to support programs in East Africa that care for people who suffer from the effects of the AIDS epidemic and related medical and social challenges.

Our group stayed in Korogwe near the diocesan headquarters for the Diocese of Tanga. The diocesan grounds include a beautiful cathedral as well as the home of Bishop Baji (where we had dinner one evening), a school, a small hospital run by the diocese and fields of corn.

We visited the Old Folk's Home at St. Francis, Tanga, where there are approximately 40 elderly residents who have no family to care for them. Several were given prayer shawls knitted by women from Grace Church, North Attleboro. Funds raised by Trinity Parish, Melrose have been sent to purchase mattresses, forks, spoons and to repair the water system.

We also visited the orphanage in Mgombezi, where approximately 40 children who lost parents to HIV/AIDS receive funds from Jubilee Ministry to help with health care, medications and transportation, uniforms and supplies for school. Father Joel Makame and the children prepared welcome signs for each of us, and the choir sang songs welcoming us. We brought Obama t-shirts for some of the children. (Every place we went, we weren't just from America – we were from Obama Land!)

Bishop Baji accompanied us the day we went to Kizara, a remote village in the mountains. Many of the residents gathered on the steps of the 125-year-old Anglican church to greet us. As we saw throughout our travels, the homes are built of sticks and mud, often with thatched roofs. Cows, chickens and goats wander everywhere. Women and children spend significant time each day gathering water and wood for fuel. We discovered that the dispensary/healthcare facility, being funded in part by All Saints Parish, Brookline, is not completed, but considerable progress has been made. The facility will have an outpatient clinic as well as separate rooms for adult, pediatric and maternity beds. It will replace a one-room outpatient clinic and a maternity/birthing room. The next big challenge for this project is funding solar panels to provide electricity and find a source of water.

We spent several days at two hospitals, Teule Hospital in Muheza and St. Raphael's in Korogwe. The hospitals are very different than those in this country. They have open wards with many beds and mosquito netting hanging from the ceiling. The family often provides bedding and food for the patient. Mothers share the beds with their children. Staffing is minimal. Laboratory equipment, medications and other supplies are very limited and frequently unavailable.

St. Raphael's is a small hospital on the diocesan grounds. It has pediatric, maternity and adult wards. The operating room we saw was clean but had open windows (no screens). Power outages are a way of life in Africa, so flashlights were available.

Teule Hospital is a larger hospital of about 300 beds (although a "bed" in Africa may have two or three patients in it) that receives funding from both the government and the diocese. We spent time rounding with the medical staff, and two of the physicians from the mission team provided equipment and training to the staff on newborn resuscitation and reading EKGs.

I am a pediatric dietitian and spent most of my time in the pediatric ward. At least half of the children were admitted for malaria. Many of the children and mothers are HIV positive, and tuberculosis and bacterial infections (diarrhea) from unclean water are common. Food insecurity is a significant problem. Most families rely on subsistence farming and eat mainly a maize porridge occasionally supplemented with egg or milk if they have chickens or cows, so malnutrition is also a common problem. Formula and vitamins needed to treat malnutrition were unavailable. The only children in the hospital who are given milk are those admitted for malnutrition; the others receive porridge and sometimes beans. The cycle of life and death is very different in Africa, as demonstrated by premature twins (about 29 weeks' gestation) who were born our last day at Teule. Although some babies this size may survive, this mom clearly expected her infants to die. The babies were resting side-by-side in a wooden box covered with a blanket, and the nurse was trying to convince the mother to pump breast milk since the only other feeding option was cow milk. This was obviously quite different than the neonatal intensive care units in this country.

We completed our medical work, and several of the group then spent a few days in northern Tanzania. The animals of the Serengeti were wonderful, but the lasting memories will be of the people we met and the many possibilities for making a difference in their lives. —Ann Wessel

Parish Meeting on Microfinance in El Salvador on Wednesday, July 8 at 7:00 PM in the Parish Hall

A number of people have expressed interest in supporting microfinance initiatives as part of our outreach efforts. To support this, we have invited Noah Bullock to visit St. Mary's. Noah recently completed a three-year stint as an Episcopal missionary in El Salvador where he led church efforts in community and economic development in the eastern part of El Salvador. This included overseeing the launch of the Diocese's first microfinance program. All interested church members are invited to attend.

Share Who You Are and What You Have

Editor: The following article is adapted from a homily recently delivered by Noah Bullock.

El Salvador is a small country with a lot to give. I am reminded of this again in reading the parable of the mustard seed. When I hear the question, "to what can we compare the kingdom of heaven," I cannot help but hear the voices of El Salvador's martyrs who so often spoke of "the kingdom of heaven" in terms of a project to bring about a more humane world. This terminology reminds us that although we may not understand the holy mystery of germination, the work of sowing and caring for the seed is ours to do. The kingdom of heaven seen through this lens quickly moves from passive germination to an empowered and bold mission to reach out and create a better world in God's image. This work, the project of the kingdom of heaven, is the mission given to the church in Pentecost.

Recently I was speaking with a very close North American friend, whom I met in El Salvador, about the topic of how we do mission in the church. She told me that she could identify three models of mission. The first is linked to the traditional evangelization: this is the old mission model that is about converting "them." In the colonial period this model was practiced in the conversion of the "savage races." The modern form of the "them model" is not as nearly as harsh: it is about building them schools, giving them food and medicine. The second model is the "me" model, with its roots in pilgrimages to holy sites in search of vocation and meaning. The third model is the "us" model, in which mission is something we do together in communion. It is a more complicated model because it requires more than giving and receiving; it is about accompaniment, transforming and being transformed.

El Salvador is a particularly inspiring country for mission because the Salvadoran church's struggle to define mission has been the driving force behind so much of its recent and tragic history. For centuries the church's mission in much of Latin America had been aligned with the interests and power of the landed elite. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, this began to change as people questioned this mission and asked how the modern church reflected the life of Christ. From this discussion emerged a new option for the church, the preferential option for the poor. The expression of this new option reached a pinnacle in El Salvador with the ascension of Oscar Anulfo Romero to the Bishopric of San Salvador.

For those who are not familiar with the name Monseñor Romero, he was a man of humble roots who was appointed Archbishop during the political and social turmoil in the mid-nineteen seventies. He was appointed under the presumption that he would be moderate at a time when social unrest, violence and repression were tearing through most of Central America. After the murder of one his closest colleagues, Father Rotillio Grande, Romero underwent a rapid conversion and became a powerful voice in defense of peace, human rights and the poor. He became the voice of the voiceless. He is remembered by the people today as a prophet and martyr, the patron saint of the Americas. In the Anglican Communion he is remembered as a modern martyr, and his statue stands beside Martin Luther's above the great west door of Westminster Abbey.

Romero was very clear on mission, "The mission of the church," he said, "is to identify itself with the poor... only this way will the church find Salvation." Famously he said before his death, "If they come to kill me, my voice will be resurrected in the Salvadoran people." Indeed, today we live that resurrection. In the last two decades the call to defend human rights and eradicate poverty has received an unprecedented response, not only in El Salvador, but across the globe. In the Episcopal Church there is new enthusiasm for this work, and even children are being taught the millennium challenge goals. It would seem that we are enjoying a new clarity about our modern Christian mission. Terms like sustainable development, public health and primary education are on the tip of every mission committee's tongue. Amidst the clarity and enthusiasm, however, there is a great deal of confusion about the church's specific mission model. How do we seek these goals? Will this mission be about them, me, or us?

In a homily about a month before his murder, at the time when the conflict between the ruling military regime and the multitudes of social, religious, and political movements was about to grow into civil war, Romero joyfully proclaimed, "This will be our best Lent to work for social justice and love the poor." He offered the Christian perspective that, "Social justice is not just a law that orders distribution; rather, an internal attitude with Christ, that in being rich we become poor to share our hearts with the poor." Speaking to power Romero said, "I hope that this call does not harden the hearts of the oligarchs, rather that it moves them to conversion. Share who you are and what you have."

Romero's call to mission is not just to give to the poor a "them" model; it is rather to join them; it is about us together, accompaniment. He calls us to move beyond the charitable distribution of resources and challenges us to give ourselves to one another to become new. In our new age of poverty eradication, development and mission, will it be possible to achieve our goals if our strategies are limited to the designation of more funding to aid the sick and the poor? Or must we go further? "Share who you are and what you have."

In our time, as in Romero's, this is a very dangerous proposition, because it requires us to change, and we are always fearful of change. Romero concluded his homily addressing this fear and its subsequent violence, "Do not continue failing us with violence against those of us who are to achieve a more just distribution of power and wealth in this country." Then he pauses and his voice changes, "I am speaking in the first person," he says "because I received a warning that I am in the list of those who are going to be eliminated next week, but let it be known that nobody can kill the voice of justice now."

A month after giving this homily a single silenced bullet pierced Romero's heart while celebrating the Eucharist at the chapel in the hospital for terminal cancer patients where he lived. The call for justice often bears a great price. Romero preached once that persecution is something necessary for the church because the truth is always persecuted. "When the church is fulfilling its true duty," he said, "it will always be persecuted." We are one holy, catholic, apostolic and persecuted church.

In mission let us not forget Romero's call. Let this be our best Pentecost to go out and share not only what we have, but also who we are. We will not be afraid to change, and we will not let our hearts harden to this call, rather, we will move to transform our hearts, our communities and the world beyond. We will not fear that in telling the truth and acting for justice we will be persecuted, because in communion together, nobody can kill the voice of justice now!

—Noah Bullock

Editor: Tim Green