

In So Many Words

By Kim Balkovec

Rich and Varied Gifts of the Laity



Earlier this year, two Columban Fathers—an Irish farmer by way of decades of mission in Pakistan and an Iowa farmer by way of decades of mission in Korea—and I visited three Columban benefactors on their farm. I was just two months on the job in my lay role as a member of the benefactor relations team when we went to visit the farm, but I knew it was a mission of gratitude that must take place.

Merriam-Webster online defines laity as the people of a religion who are not priests, ministers, etc. Not being of the clergy, our work as lay persons is not always clearly delineated. Working with Columban missionary priests who have dedicated their lives to multifaceted work with justice and peace groups, differently abled people, abused women and children, tribal people, Muslim communities and organic farmers, I constantly seek to answer the open-ended question of how to best enrich mission. I believe my prayers help. I donate the vegetables and herbs I grow in the St. Columban Community Garden to those in our community who may experience food insecurity. I strive to meet as many benefactors as I can to express our gratitude for everything they do, and whenever possible, introduce them to the Columban missionaries in whose work they are partners.

Gifts that may be brought to bear in the enhancement of mission are as rich and varied as the individuals comprised by the laity. Overlaying and coloring the capacities and talents of the laity are local culture and customs, geography, political climate, and economic or educational standing in society. As the world changes, the church changes and so does the role of the laity. Perhaps the only universal definition of the role of laity is that we do what we can.

All Catholics have the opportunity to fulfill their Baptismal responsibility for sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. As laypersons we may deepen our commitments through prayer, personal sacrifices and gifts for the missions and for missionaries. We can reach out to others less blessed. We can share the Gospel with everyone. We can encourage others to consider their roles as partners in mission by virtue of their Baptism, and express our gratitude to everyone who answers the call in whatever way they are able.

My service as a member of the laity has connected me to my brothers and sisters around the world and blessed me in ways I could not have imagined.

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