

# Champions of Faith

Last night my wife and I watched a Netflix original movie entitled the **Virgin River**. In a scene from the movie, Mel and Jack, the female and male protagonists in the movie, discuss Kierkegaard and the nature of human existence. They are wrestling with the meaning of their relationship in the face of anxiety about death, post-traumatic stress from war-time experiences, the loss of a loved one and at the same time, falling in love. They are trying to understand why their lives are inexorably interlinked with each other and that they cannot escape an existential choice they are facing about whether to choose each other as partners on their life journey. Kierkegaard spoke about the existential choices that determine the meaning of our life. Those who make a heroic choice are known as Knights of Faith

We can find in this movie an analogy to our present existential situation that we face in the era of the Coronavirus pandemic. All of us on the earth are now subject, in some degree, to the fate of the Coronavirus moving from one part of the world to another and no one can avoid its possible deadly impact on our own life and that of our loved ones. Those who must confront the Coronavirus most directly, Health Care Workers and other First Responders to the pandemic, are risking their lives each day to provide essential services to those in need. Each of these workers is a "Champion of Faith" who puts his or her trust in something larger than their personal needs, desires or even their own life. It is choice based upon Faith in some larger principle active in their lives that transcends any personal benefit or reward. We are in the most sacred period of the year for those who practice the Jewish and Christian faiths. The Jewish Passover represents the struggle that the Jewish people faced over the centuries to preserve their identity in the face of human bondage, antisemitism, and pogroms.

We realize that the Stations of the Cross commemorated in many Christian churches during Holy Week are not just a ritual to commemorate the passion of Jesus but a living reality today for all those who have experienced hatred, attacks upon their human dignity and physical assaults leading to their death.

We have learned that many, if not most of the Coronavirus victims facing the end of their life, do so often in isolation without benefit of family or friends to accompany them on this final journey. This bears resemblance to the final journey of Jesus as he faced death of the cross. Most of his followers had abandoned him and he cried out for his Father to “take this cup from me, yet not my will but thine be done.” (Luke 22:4) We all know that the suffering and death associated with the Coronavirus pandemic is not limited to one area of the world, one socioeconomic group or one faith community.

This reality was brought home to us recently through our contacts with men and women serving the poor and marginalized people of Kenya

Recently, Marita and I were in conversation with a group of Maryknoll Lay Missioners working among the poorest families living in informal settlements outside the city of Mombasa, Kenya. The Coronavirus Pandemic is just now reaching Kenya and it will have the most impact on those living in these settlements. These Maryknoll Lay Missioners, **Rich Tarro**, **Kathy Flatoff**, and **Mike Garr** could have left Kenya given the impending threat of a spreading Coronavirus throughout this country, but they have decided to remain with the people they are serving. Here is their statement and request for help.

*We, the Maryknoll Lay Missioners in Mombasa, Kenya, serve the neediest and most vulnerable families in our area. Many of these families live in single room dwellings, sharing bathrooms within their densely populated settlements. Other families live in informal settlements (slums) and share a pit toilet with several other families. Basic hygiene is substandard. In some areas there is no running water and garbage, even sewage, is evident along the roads and alleys.*

*With the current lockdown in Kenya, their livelihoods are severely impacted. We are asking for your help in supporting the vulnerable families and children that we serve in Mombasa. We need money to provide them with the ability to meet their basic needs so they can survive the current pandemic. We would like to provide them with a small weekly stipend to allow them to buy food and pay for basic expenses such as rent and water. We would also like to provide them with bars of soap and encourage them to wash their hands frequently to slow the spread of the virus.*

*The peak of the Coronavirus has not yet occurred in Kenya. Most experts seem to think the peak is still two to three weeks away. This not only means the worst is yet to come, but also that the*

*need to support these families, who have nothing, may stretch for several months. We ask for your financial support to help these most needy and vulnerable families survive the pandemic. Without outside support to enable them to buy food and sanitizing items like soap, it is unclear how they will survive. Please consider helping us.*

We have worked closely on the ground with these Maryknoll Lay Missioners, other Christian and Muslim leaders and indigenous religious leaders in our “Paths to Peace Kenya” Interfaith project which has been sponsored and funded by Global Ministries University since 2012. GMU has reached out to the diverse faith communities in this troubled area of Kenya and established an interfaith network of educators with whom we communicate on a regular basis to foster communication, cooperation and cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue.

All the funds donated for the work of these Maryknoll Lay Missioners will go directly to Maryknoll, New York where the administration of the Maryknoll Lay Missioners is located. GMU will not be an intermediary for these funds. At this moment of the Coronavirus pandemic we in Global Ministries University feel this is a concrete way to express our solidarity with those most in need. Please indicate that your contribution is meant specifically for the ministries of Rich Tarro, Kathy Flatoff, and Mike Garr.

Address:

Maryknoll Lay Missioners  
P.O. Box 307  
Maryknoll, NY 10545

Let us all be “Champions of Faith” and join those who are serving others in a heroic way by contributing to their mission of compassion among those most in need in Kenya during the Coronavirus pandemic. May the Passover and Easter season bring you and your family a deeper awareness of your tangible connection to those most vulnerable to the Coronavirus and an opportunity to help them survive this pandemic.

*~President Gerald Grudzen*