

Realizing a Dream: Vincentian Lay Ministry Started in Ethiopia



"I ask the Lord to teach us all to fly, gracefully and smoothly, higher than ever before, so that the Company can really be free for God and free for the poor. That was St. Vincent's dream..."ⁱ



It is important to dream because with God's grace, dreams become realities. One of the dreams of Vincentians and Daughters of Charity in the US has been "to explore collaboration with an existing Vincentian Family organization to support opportunities for young adults to become engaged in service with the Daughters internationally". By exploring a program begun in Ireland by Vincentian Father Michael McCullagh and through collaboration with the Eastern Province of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity of Ethiopia, this dream became a reality on July 27, 2005, when the first three Vincentian Lay Missionaries - Kate Linden, Gina Pernini, and Lauren Reiss - left for Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with Sister Mary Beth Kubera.

Originally, the volunteers were to serve as teachers at in a school in Addis Ababa. But, the needs in Bahir Dar in the north were great; so after a few days of orientation to the Daughter ministries of urban development and education, the volunteers flew to Bahir Dar to teach English

and to do teacher development at Blessed Ghebre Michael School. They were warmly welcomed by the local community there: Sisters Ayelech, Alemitu, and Terfatu and Seminary Sister Tsehay. These Sisters became mentors, friends, and strong supports during the three weeks of prayer, community, and service.

Each day began with personal and communal prayer and ended with reflection on readings highlighting the Vincentian charism. "Service is, in itself, very good, but without prayer and without people to share the experience with, it doesn't mean much," said St. John University college sophomore Lauren Reiss. "Prayer and community strengthened and enriched this ministry immensely. My prayer by itself, with the community, and at mass gave me the strength to serve with love and to find Christ in the poor."

The volunteers spent their morning hours in the classroom teaching English to students in grades four through eight. By using art, music, writing, reading, reciting, and role-playing, the students relaxed and were able to speak English more confidently. The teachers were as eager as the students to learn both English and new teaching strategies. "I saw a staff that truly love their work and are willing to make personal sacrifices in order to improve their professional skills," remarked 24-year-old ACE graduate Kate Linden. "I saw companionship. These are pillars of support that keep the school standing."

Companionship was important for the volunteers. Nightly they played cards, talked, laughed, shared, and sang. The Sisters - both in Bahir and Addis - were a tremendous gift to them. "From these Sisters, I learned daily-ness," said Gina

Pernini, 27-year-old teacher. "They taught me to do what I can with what I have, to be joyful, to be devoted, to laugh, and to pray."

After experiencing some of Ethiopia's natural beauty in the Blue Nile Falls and the City of Gonder, the three VLM returned to the states on August 21. Sister Mary Beth went to Jimma to explore possible ministry sites there and then



(Photo: Vincentian Missionaries Kate Linden, Gina Pernini and Lauren Reiss [standing] pose with Sisters Terfatu, Ayelech, Alemitu and Tsehay after enjoying an evening of prayer and recreation.)

back to Addis Ababa. "The real treasures of Ethiopia are its people," she said, "and the Sisters here know that."

Her excitement has led to the growth of the project, and to me joining her in setting up a second site for 2007 (You were probably wondering how I fit in to all this 😊). I visited with the Vincentians and Daughters in Ethiopia in November of 2005, and we sent missionaries again in 2006! Two groups of five missionaries were in Jimma and Bahir Dar in 2007, with Christy Leming, VLM of 2006, as the first lay coordinator (in Bahir Dar). In 2008, we hope to have three sites, with a new one in Bonga (in the Kaffa region.)

Fr. Aidan

This could be your dream, too!
Interested?

Are you:

- 21 or over?
- willing and able to tutor English with teenagers?
- Physically and psychologically healthy?
- Spiritually alive and hungry?
- On fire to serve the poor?
- Willing to
 - Live in community
 - Sacrifice for your companions?
 - Pray for your companions?
 - Learn from those you serve?
 - Love those you serve?
 - Love those you live with?
- Ready for the experience of a **LIFETIME?**

Then you're ready for to be a short-term (summer) Vincentian Lay Missionary!

When: mid-June to mid-July

Where: Ethiopia

Cost: \$1000.00 (need-based scholarships are available)

Value: INCALCULABLE!

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ⁱ Rev. Robert P. Maloney, C.M., former Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission.