News

Bob Cunningham receives his mission cross from Marj Humphrey, Maryknoll Lay Missioners' d

Bob Cunningham receives his mission cross from Marj Humphrey, Maryknoll Lay Missioners' director of missions, at the Queen of Apostles Chapel in Ossining, N.Y., Dec. 11, 2021. (CNS photo/Pat Norberto, courtesy Maryknoll Lay Missioners)



by Catholic News Service

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Thirteen new Maryknoll lay missioners were officially sent into mission Dec. 11 to minister in six countries around the world: Bolivia, Brazil, El Salvador, Kenya, Tanzania and the U.S.-Mexico border.

During a "sending ceremony" at the Queen of Apostles Chapel on the Maryknoll campus in Ossining, Robert Ellsberg, publisher of Orbis Books, encouraged them to follow what Pope Francis calls "journey faith."

In this journey faith, he said, "we find God along the way, in history, in the twists and turns of experience, in our unexpected encounters and relationships with others."

"In this model, we don't have all the answers in advance. We learn and grow along the way," he continued. "Stumbling, doubts and uncertainty are all part of the journey. It can be risky, but it is dynamic — it is open to conversion and learning new things. It is open to the surprising promptings of the Holy Spirit."

Ellsberg added that journey faith demands "a continuous willingness to go beyond ourselves, to move beyond our certainties, our comfort zones, our familiar shores and harbors, to cast our nets into the deep waters, to go where the spirit is calling us."

"The bold declaration, 'Here I am! Send me!' is not just something to say the day you arrived at Maryknoll, or today in this sending ceremony. It is something to be renewed and repeated over and over," he said.

Ellsberg's remarks came during the liturgy marking the the new missioners' completion of an eight-week orientation and formation program. This program prepared them for cross-cultural ministries in the countries where they will serve.

The sending ceremony included the new missioners being "called forth" for their three-and-a-half-year ministry commitments in their respective mission regions in both English and the local language of their region.

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The missioners also received their mission crosses and expressed their commitment "to witness the good news of Jesus Christ, in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are marginalized and oppressed."

They committed themselves "to care for the earth, our common home, and to respond in service to help create a more just and compassionate world."

Their "readiness to bring the love of Jesus to others will not begin on the day you arrive in your mission assignment, and it will not end on the day you return," Ellsberg said. "It began from the day you first said, 'Here I am! Send me!'"

The ceremony was "not about sending you on mission," he said. "but recognizing and blessing the mission that you are, your identity as those who are sealed and branded by God's mission of light, love and solidarity."

"For those of us witnessing and blessing you in this sending ceremony, it is an opportunity to renew our own mission, our own sense of purpose and reason for being in this world," Ellsberg added. "We remember the occasions in our own lives when we heard a voice call, 'Whom shall I send?' and the ways we responded by

declaring, 'Here I am! Send me.' And we renew that declaration today."

The "class of 2021" is Maryknoll's largest lay missioner class since 2005, according to a Dec. 13 news release.

They come from 10 different states and include single and married people and one religious sister. They will depart around New Year for their respective mission sites, where they will receive extensive in-country language training and cultural orientation before they begin their ministry assignments.

Since 1975, more than 700 Maryknoll lay missioners have been sent into mission "to work with those at the margins for a more just, compassionate and sustainable world in Africa, Asia and the Americas," the release said.

"Today they continue to serve in nine countries in a wide range of ministries that include health care and health promotion, education and leadership development, justice and peace, faith formation and pastoral care, and sustainable development," it added.