

# Stories of Modern-Day Christ-Bearers



Christopher News Notes

**F**ATHER JAMES KELLER, M.M., CHOSE “THE CHRISTOPHERS” AS THE NAME OF OUR ORGANIZATION BECAUSE IT COMES FROM THE GREEK TERM “CHRISTOPHOROS,” WHICH MEANS “CHRIST-BEARERS.” That’s why we’ve always been committed to emphasizing what one person can do, with God’s help, to create a better world through faith and action.

While the media often focuses on the dark side of humanity, The Christophers believe that by highlighting individuals who reflect our motto, “It’s better to light one candle than to

curse the darkness,” we can inspire others to bring God’s love, mercy, and truth to those around them. That’s why we’re sharing some stories of modern-day Christophers in this News Note. We hope they inspire you to respond to God’s call in your own unique way.

## Answering God’s Call

American doctor Tom Catena is the only physician serving over half a million people in Sudan’s Nuba Mountains, where the Sudanese government regularly bombs its own people in an attempt to put down a rebellion.

Foxholes surround Dr. Catena’s Mother of Mercy Hospital so that he, his staff, and patients can take cover from the bombings. In an online video accompanying the *New York Times* story about him, viewers get to see the hospital, where many patients are civilians, including women and children, whom he treats for severe bombing injuries in an off-the-grid facility with no electricity, running water, or even an x-ray machine.

When Dr. Catena is asked about the John 3:30 wristband he wears, he says, “He is greater than I. So He must increase. I must decrease. ‘He’ being God, of course. It’s a reminder to us that we have to humble ourselves.” Dr. Catena credits his Catholic faith with inspiring him to continue his work, saying, “I’ve been given benefits from the day I was born—a loving family, a great education. So I see it as an obligation, as a Christian and as a human being, to help.”

One Nuban man compares him to Jesus Christ, saying, “Jesus healed the sick, made the blind see and helped the lame walk, and that is what Dr. Tom does every day.”

## From Suffering to Hope

Sarah Jane Donohue was born a healthy baby on June 5, 2005. Five days later, she was shaken violently by an aide worker and suffered a traumatic brain injury (TBI) that destroyed 60 percent of the rear cortex of her brain. Doctors told Sarah Jane’s father, Patrick, that she would never be able to do

much of anything, not even walk or talk. But he refused to accept that prognosis.

Recalling the realization he had about the role God was calling him to play in advocating for his daughter, Patrick said, “She was less than two weeks old, and they were trying to get an IV into her. They’re poking, trying to find the vein. Her mouth was wide open, she had tears coming down her face, but she couldn’t [vocally] cry because of the brain injury. I’ll never forget looking at her and saying, ‘It’s my job to be the voice for her.’”

In doing research to advocate for Sarah Jane, Patrick found that much was lacking in the treatment of children with traumatic brain injuries. For instance, there was no plan of standardized care, so he began an initiative to develop a seamless, standardized, evidence-based system of care that’s universally accessible for millions of American families.

In addition, Patrick saw the need children with TBIs have for an education in an environment uniquely suited for them, so he joined with leading experts in the field of brain injury and rehabilitation to launch the International Academy of Hope, or iHope, the first and only school for kids with brain injuries and brain-based disorders in New York City. iHope brings dedicated and compassionate doctors, therapists, and teachers together with families facing unique challenges to build a community of support and friendship where students can learn and grow at their own pace.

Sharing his vision for the future, Patrick said, “My intention is to replicate this school model that we’ve created here in New York City in other cities around the country, around the world...My philosophy is pretty simple: things work out best for those who make the best of the way things work out.”

## A Gold Medal Role Model

“It is an honor. It is something I don’t take lightly. I try to be a good role model.” So says six-time Olympic medalist (five gold, one silver) Katie Ledecky about being an inspiration to children and teens after once again breaking world swimming records at the 2016 Rio Olympics. Anyone who

*“Each and every day is given to you by Almighty God to use for His glory, for the service of others, as well as for the benefit of your own immortal soul. What you do with each day rests entirely with you. Remember, it’s your day. Make the most of it. Fill every day with prayers, words and deeds which will enrich the lives of others as well as your own, and you will be blessed for time and eternity.”*

—Father James Keller, M.M.,  
the founder of *The Christophers*

has watched Ledecky in the pool knows that she tends to dominate her races because she puts in a great deal of preparation and hard work. At the same time, Ledecky remains a model of class and grace, always acting respectful toward opponents and supportive of teammates.

One of the things that keeps Ledecky grounded is her Catholic faith. A graduate of both Little Flower School and Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart in Bethesda, Maryland, she praises both institutions for providing her with an “academically rigorous” and “faith-filled education.”

She told *Catholic News Service*, “My Catholic schools challenged me, they broadened my perspective and they allowed me to use my mind in ways that take me beyond just thinking about swim practices, swim meets and sports.”

In addition, the 19-year-old told the *National Catholic Register*, “[My faith] is a big part of who I am and how I’ve made it here...I think the beauty of Catholicism is its consistency through both successes and difficulties. I’ve counted on my faith to give me strength through both training and competition—but also in school, with my family and everyday life.”

In visits to her alma maters after the 2016 Olympics, Ledecky was told by several students that that they hope to be Olympians like her some day. Both personally and professionally, these young people couldn’t ask for a better role model.

## Taking to the Streets

Ordained in 2016 as a priest of the Archdiocese of Monterrey, Mexico, 34-year-old Father Jose Luis Guerra has a special mission to convert gang members to what he calls his “Gang of Christ.” Father Guerra told *Catholic News Service*, “It’s risky work...However, there is an impressive openness on the part of these young men when a priest goes out and listens to them at a street corner.”

Father Guerra has succeeded in recruiting gang members to become missionaries in this border city that is one of Mexico’s wealthiest metropolises, but where gangs also thrive by recruiting poor young men from broken homes and marginalized neighborhoods. Reporting for *Reuters* on Father Guerra’s work, Daniel Becerril writes, “Becoming a missionary means renouncing not necessarily the gang but acts that Guerra says devalue people as human beings: theft, assault, insult and, in some cases, murder.”

Candidates for missionary work spend time in retreat, and then seven weeks at missionary school, before returning to the streets to evangelize other gang members. When they return, a ceremony is performed in a public square where Father Guerra explains their responsibilities and then presents the kneeling subjects with a Bible. Before they begin their mission, Father Guerra informs all the rival gangs that this person is no longer an enemy but part of his “Gang of Christ.”

Talking about his approach to reaching gang members, Father Guerra says, “You have to know

the heart of the disciples to win more disciples for Jesus Christ. This is a maxim for my outreach...Go out and reach the hearts of these young people.”

## In Search of the Face of Jesus

When first responder John Fawley heard a “Christopher Closeup” interview with Dr. Kevin Hunt of MANU, a group that leads medical mission trips to Northern Uganda, he decided to volunteer. Prior to the trip, he had concerns about venturing to Africa due to negative press about violence and instability in countries of the region, yet Fawley felt called to respond to the words of a priest friend, who said to him, “Go find the face of Jesus.”

In Uganda, Fawley employed his skills as a first responder to assist doctors in treating patients. In an interview he gave to “Christopher Closeup” after the trip, Fawley said he saw the face of Jesus in missionaries he worked with and people he treated. And his own burden was actually lightened through service to others.

Fawley said he was experiencing neck pain before the trip and brought medication to treat the pain. But while in Uganda, he stopped taking the medication because he became so absorbed in helping others that he completely forgot about his own ailment.

Offering a bit of advice to those seeking a similar transformative experience, Fawley said, “Pope Francis said we’ve got to leave our safe port once in a while. And you don’t have to travel the world. You can do this next door with an elderly person, with somebody in your family, somebody who needs help in the neighborhood. Mother Teresa said we’ve all got our own Calcutta right by us if you just look.”

  
**“It’s better to light one candle  
than to curse the darkness.”**

A non-profit, founded in 1945 by Father James Keller, M.M., The Christophers encourages people to change the world for the better. Donations are tax-deductible. News Notes are published 10 times a year. Single copies are free.

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