

Gerard Thomas Straub

Gerard Thomas Straub is an award-winning author and filmmaker. One of his ten books, *The Sun & Moon Over Assisi*, was named the Best Spirituality Hardcover Book of the Year by the Catholic Press Association in 2001. A revised, updated edition of the book was published in September 2015 in both hardcover and paperback by Tau Publishing. His book *The Loneliness and Longing of Saint Francis* was published in the summer of 2014 by Twenty-Third Publications; Robert Ellsberg called it a “beautiful gem of a book.” The Catholic Press Association awarded *The Loneliness and Longing of Saint Francis* third place under the Prayer and Spirituality category in the 2015 Excellence in Publishing Awards. His book, *Hidden in the Rubble*, published by Orbis Books in 2010 (with a second printing in 2011), is based on his experience in Haiti during the aftermath of the horrific earthquake that killed over 300,000 people. Tom Roberts of the National Catholic Reporter said of the book: “Gerry Straub is a story-teller with a camera. In an era when news has become so atomized and fast-paced it is almost impossible to get a sense of the whole, Straub engages two great risks. He takes us to see what much of the world would rather ignore, and he does it slowly and reflectively. The risks pay off here in a kind of meditation on Haiti that is simultaneously brutally frank and filled with the hope of religious imagination.”

Gerry’s latest book, *Reading Thomas Merton and Longing for God in Haiti*, was published in the Fall of 2022. Two prominent Trappist monks wrote glowing recommendations for the book; one (Br. Paul) was a novice under the direction on Merton.

“The power of contemplation and action to beacon hope for our world’s dark journeys shines out in Gerry Straub’s fascinating tale of his adventures in Haiti as the founder of the Santa Chiara Children Center. Merton would have been avid to read the story of this married, secular Franciscan who gave up a New York media career to serve the poor. Gerry’s witness in this book would have mentored Merton on how faith in action can triumph in hiding over despair and violence.”

Fr. Gueric Heckel, OCSO
Director of St. Francis Retreat Center at Mepkin Abbey, South Carolina.

“Merton would be pleased and humbled to know he accompanied Gerry Straub into the most appalling circumstances of Haiti, and to afford motivation throughout such hopeless daily experiences encountered here with bald honesty and raw faith.”

Br. Paul Quenon, OCSO
Abbey of Gethsemani

Gerry’s book *Thoughts of a Blind Beggar*, published by Orbis Books in the fall of 2007, offers a series of poetic meditations on the importance of prayer and compassion. His photo/essay book on global poverty, *When Did I See You Hungry?*, published in 2002, features photographs taken in India, Kenya, Brazil, Jamaica, Italy, Canada, the Philippines and Mexico. Gerry’s striking black & white photography from the book was exhibited in the art gallery attached to the Cathedral of the

Assumption in Louisville, Kentucky, and published in *The New York Times*, *The National Catholic Reporter* and *Sojourners* magazine.

Gerry has written essays, poems, and reflections which were included in five published books. "Falling Silent" was published in *Bridges to Contemplative Living with Thomas Merton: Advent and Christmas*, which was edited by Jonathan Montaldo & Robert G. Toth and published by Ave Maria Press in 2010. "A Hollywood Option for the Poor" was published in *The Preferential Option for the Poor beyond Theology*, which was edited by Daniel G. Groody, CSC and Gustavo Gutiérrez, OP and published by University of Notre Dame Press in 2014. "What We Are" will be published in *Messengers of Hope: Reflections in Honor of Thomas Merton*, which was edited by Jonathan Montaldo and Gray Henry which will be published by Fons Vitae Press in 2015. Gerry's poem, "I Hand It All to You," was published in *A Maryknoll Book of Poetry: Beauty, Truth, and Goodness from Around the World*, which was published by Orbis Books in 2014. Three short reflections were published in *A Maryknoll Book of Inspiration: Readings for Every Day of the Year*, which was published by Orbis Books in 2010.

Before becoming an author, Mr. Straub also had a long and distinguished career as a network television producer in New York and Hollywood; he produced dramatic television series that have aired on CBS, NBC, and ABC, including the wildly popular *General Hospital*. He was the executive producer of *The Doctors*, a long-running soap opera on NBC which was taped at Rockefeller Center in New York and featured a young Alec Baldwin. He was the supervising producer of *Capitol*, which was taped at CBS Television City in Hollywood. After leaving network television Gerry wrote and directed twenty-four documentary films, most of which explored global and domestic poverty.

Gerry, who is a Secular Franciscan, is the Founder and President of Pax et Bonum Communications a 501(c)3 nonprofit, charitable organization whose primary purpose is to produce films that foster compassion for those who suffer from hunger and injustice while inspiring genuine and respectful fraternity among all people regardless of faith or lack of faith. The films are all written and directed by Gerry. Gerry's book *Hidden in the Rubble* inspired his most powerful film to date, *Mud Pies & Kites*, which was released by Pax et Bonum Communications in July of 2012. To make the epic film, Gerry made nine trips to Haiti, one of which came immediately after the earthquake as he thoroughly documented the unimaginable carnage and devastation. During six of his trips, Gerry lived in a massive slum without running water or electricity (and with rats). One viewer wrote: "This film is more than just a documentary; it is a journey to the soul of each of us." In 2012 the ministry released *We Anoint Their Wounds*, which is set in Kenya; the film documents the noble and heroic work Jesuit Refugee Service is doing as they serve refugees living isolated lives in a remote, massive refugee camp in the desert of northern Kenya and refugees living marginalized lives in the bleak, lonely shadows of Nairobi. In 2013, his ministry produced *Wings of Love*, which features Catholic Charities' work with the homeless and chronically poor of Los Angeles. In January 2014, *The Smiles of a Sick Child* was released; this poignant film features the heroic work of an American doctor caring for chronically ill and impoverished children of Lima, Peru. In February 2014, Gerry traveled to Honduras to

begin a film featuring the Medical Missionaries of Mary, an order of nuns, many of whom are doctors and nurses; the film, titled *Rooted in Love*, was released in September 2014.

Gerry was the founder and former president of The San Damiano Foundation (from 2001-2010), where he produced fourteen films, including: *When Did I See You Hungry?*, which explores the Christian response to global poverty and is narrated by Martin Sheen; *Embracing the Leper*, which describes the heroic work of a Secular Franciscan who brings aid to the lepers and the poor of the Amazon region of Brazil; *Holy Pictures*, a meditation on the importance of stillness and silence in the spiritual life; *Rescue Me*, on the plight of the homeless in the Skid Row section of Los Angeles and featuring a song performed by Bono and the Irish rock band U2; *Endless Exodus*, on the plight of the undocumented migrants from Central America and Mexico; *Room at the Inn*, which revisits the St. Francis Inn in Philadelphia; *Where Love Is*, which focuses on the heroic work of the Capuchin Soup Kitchen in Detroit; *The Narrow Path*, a film on peace and nonviolence featuring the Jesuit priest, author and peace activist Fr. John Dear; and *The Fragrant Spirit*, an epic, gut-wrenching film set in the horrific poverty and intense suffering of the war-torn East African country of Uganda. The mission of Pax et Bonum Communication has now shifted to publishing books focused on spirituality, prayer, poverty, interfaith dialogue, social justice, peace, and nonviolence.

Before forming his two nonprofit corporations, Gerry produced, wrote, and directed three best-selling documentary films for Family Theater Productions in Hollywood that aired on many PBS television stations, including *We Have a Table for Four Ready*, which tells the poignant story of a soup kitchen run by Franciscan friars in Philadelphia, and *Room Enough for Joy*, which featured a L'Arche community in Tacoma, Washington that cares for mentally and physically disabled people. The worldwide L'Arche communities were founded by Jean Vanier.

Between 2003 and 2014, Gerry gave over 250 multi-media presentations titled "Poverty and Prayer" at churches, high schools, and colleges across the United States, as well as in Canada, France, Italy, and Hungary. His work on behalf of the poor has earned Gerry honorary doctorate degrees from three Catholic universities. His ministry has been written about in *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, as well as numerous Christian publications including the National Catholic Reporter and *Sojourners* magazine; Gerry has been featured in stories which have aired on *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly* (PBS), *Life & Times* (KCET-TV, the PBS station in Los Angeles), and *News Conference* (KNBC-TV News in Los Angeles).

"Mr. Straub's presentation was the best that I have seen in my twenty-eight years at Aquinas. Heart-wrenching and hopeful, his film clips and stories commanded the full attention of everyone in the auditorium. What we witnessed was a clear example of what it means to live the gospel. His life and his work raise our awareness of the plight of the poor and remind us of our Christian responsibility to respond. Mr. Straub changes lives—the lives of the poor he serves and the lives of audiences inspired to do the same."

Pat Connelly

Teacher

Aquinas Institute (high school)

Rochester, New York

Everyone was moved from tears to action by Gerry Straub's "Poverty and Prayer" presentation at our diocesan catechetical conference. Absolutely engaging. Gerry presents the gospel message to "love our neighbor" as only few are doing. After seeing this presentation, you will be forever changed. An absolutely critical social justice message for our youth today. If your high school students only see one presentation this year, it must be this one.

*Deacon Chuck Glynn, Ed.D.
Diocese of Victoria in Texas*

"I found the presentation of Gerry Straub's conversion and subsequent work riveting. His words and photos were 'mind-blowing' in the sense that my attention and my inner spirit were tremendously moved. It reminded me of my work in Mexico and Bolivia and how those experiences changed me and challenged me to always take the part of the powerless. And finally, his person renewed my hope!"

*Fr. Gregg Petri, OFM
Associate Pastor
St. Mary's Church
Bloomington, Illinois*

"Gerry's films and his presentation enthralled our 1100 high school boys, kept them riveted for 90 minutes, and then galvanized them into action. Our service program has been transformed by the experience. It's the best assembly I have witnessed in 33 years at this high school."

*Stephen P. Crawford
Campus Minister
Bishop Hendricken High School
Warwick, Rhode Island*

In May 2015, Gerry stopped filming the poor and elected to go live among the poor. He put down his camera and began caring for abandoned and abused children in a slum in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He founded and still operates the Santa Chiara Children's Center. Most of the children living in the home were rescued from the largest and most dangerous slum in Haiti, where the rats outnumber the people by 10 to 1. After brutal assassination of the president of Haiti in his own bed in the summer of 2021, Haiti has dissolved to near-total anarchy, as barbaric gangs went on a vicious rampage of killings and kidnappings. Innocent people were beheaded or burned to death in the streets. Judges, priests, nuns, and children were among the slaughtered. Ignoring the advice of the U.S. Embassy urging all Americans to leave Haiti, Gerry Straub stayed to protect his children. Over the years, between 45 and 72 children lived at Santa Chiara ranging in age from infants to teenagers. Gerry's staff of 44 Haitians includes three doctors, six nurses, a psychologist, two social workers, and four teachers.

In the late 1990's Gerry taught four annual, month-long classes on film writing and directing at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Gerry is a former member of the Board of Regents

of the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, California. He is also a former member of the Board of Directors of Bread for the World, a Washington, D.C. nonprofit organization that lobbies Congress for the rights of the poor. In September of 2003, The University of Dayton presented Mr. Straub with the *Daniel J. Kane Religious Communications Award*, an annual award given to a person who has made “an outstanding lifetime dedication to gospel values through various forms of Media.” In October of 2011, Gerry’s film *The Faces of Poverty* was named Best Feature Documentary at the Global Wake-Up Film Festival in Chicago, which is sponsored by the United Nations Association of the United States which promotes the Millennium Development goals of the United Nations. 131 films from 20 nations were screened at the festival. *The Faces of Poverty* won in a category featuring films that did not specifically address the Millennium Development Goals. In April of 2012, the School of Communications at Illinois State University named Gerry as the recipient of their annual Documentary Voice of Conscience Award. During the award ceremony, the school screened Gerry’s film *Mud Pies & Kites*. In November of 2013, Gerry was the President of the Jury at the Faludi International Film Festival in Budapest, Hungary; the film festival is run by the Jesuits.

Gerry spends twenty days a month inside the Santa Chiara Children’s Center in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. The rest of each month, he lives on an island off the coast of Ft. Pierce, Florida. His wife is Dr. Stéphanie Jean-Louis Straub, M.D.; she is the primary doctor at the Santa Chiara Children’s Center. Steph was born and raised in Haiti and is waiting the new humanitarian visa from the United States. They were married on December 18, 2021. Gerry is the legal guardian of two Haitians boys and five Haitian girls, all of whom have his last name and live at the Santa Chiara Children’s Center.

