



ENCOUNTER

Catholic laity on mission – everywhere

January 2019

Welcome to Encounter!

We are all His disciples, spread throughout the world. We need to be culturally sensitive, ecumenically aware, skilled at inter-religious dialogue, and passionate about the possibility and promise of a common witness. We, as the Catholic Church, must recognize that the Gospel precedes all of us, in mission; Jesus is the past, present and the future.

Happy New Year! USCMA dedicates 2019 to Reconciliation. Join us!



Opening Up the Doors of Faith

It wasn't until she was in at least her third career that Ann Bollheimer, a lifelong Catholic, felt her faith life really open up.

Now the pastoral associate at St. Michael Church and Ss. Peter & Paul Church in Fort Loramie, Ohio, where she has served in various ministerial capacities for almost 19 years, Ann was raised about 15 miles from the parish and settled there after she married. Photography was her first career, she said, followed by motherhood.

She had been a stay-at-home mom for about five years when she became involved in church ministry.

"I was the coordinator of youth ministry for about a year and a half and just felt like I needed to know more," Ann

said. She went through a certification process but ultimately quit the position to take part in a two-year lay pastoral ministry program through the Athenaeum of Ohio in Cincinnati. It wasn't a master's program but it did include theology courses and a practicum, as well as a 100-hour service project; she chose to go to Appalachia with a neighboring youth group for her service.

Still, it wasn't enough.

"The trip to Appalachia was not a great experience for me. We worked on patios and painted houses but really were not engaged with the people," she recalled. "I felt there was something missing. I didn't know what it was supposed to be, but it wasn't what I thought it was going to be."

That sense of “something missing” stayed with her, even after she accepted the pastoral associate position in 2003. The parish was finishing up a four-year renewal program that included studying the four pillars of the catechism.

“The year that we focused on the third pillar of the catechism, Life in Christ, and on living your faith, brought a lot of attention,” Ann said. “People were calling and saying ‘Well, what do we do?’ We were being called to engage in social justice, but we really didn’t have parish programs.”

Some parishioners, she remembered, volunteered at a food pantry in another town. They started a St. Vincent de Paul Society, and Ann reached out to Mike Gable, a Maryknoll lay missionary who serves as the director of the Mission Office of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. It was 2008.

“Five people came to speak on Catholic Social Teaching, on immigration, the environment, global solidarity (mission), and faithful citizenship that sparked for me—oh my goodness, this is what we’re missing in parish life,” she exclaimed. “It opened up a lot of doors.”

That fall, Gable invited Ann to spend two weeks with CRISPAZ, Christians for Peace in El Salvador, and a twinning parish in Honduras. Before I said yes, “I just kept pushing and asking, what are we going to do? I didn’t want to go there to build houses. Because our patio at home needed work,” she joked. “I just couldn’t understand.”

It took coming back to Ohio for the truth of mission to sink in for her.

“It’s not so much doing in El Salvador but coming home and advocating for people in El Salvador and Honduras and people living in poverty in your own neighborhood. It’s helping people to live in mission right where you are,” she said. It was a revelation for her. “That was life-changing. That’s when my Catholic faith opened up. This is what it means to be Catholic! That was when I was engaged and really felt my faith come alive.”

Ann is now in her eighth year on the CRISPAZ board of directors and travels to Latin America every fall.

Her clustered parish has a sister parish relationship in the small town of San Cristóbal. Parishioners at St. Michael Church and Ss. Peter & Paul Church are assisting the Salvadorans with English studies through the donation of 10 laptop computers and the Rosetta Stone language program. They’re also supporting up to 16 adult learners to become catechetical leaders

via the online catechist program at the University of Dayton and the Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation (VLCFF).



Members of the community in San Cristóbal visit Ohio every other year, staying in the homes of parishioners and speaking at the parish about their lives in El Salvador. The learning goes both ways.

Ann’s passion for mission and for the program is total, said Deacon Paul Timmerman. The two have known each other for about 10 years.

“Her commitment is to her faith and to mission work,” he said “She lives it in her daily life. I guess you would say she’s a person who walks her faith. She not only talks her faith, she walks it. She’s one of the people that if you watch her, you can see Scripture come alive.”

The experience of being in community with her sisters and brothers in El Salvador took Ann years to begin to understand and continues to evolve.

“Something happens when you engage with a stranger, share a meal, share a smile. Something happens to the people who go to El Salvador and come back, and the same with those who come here. There’s a bond that will always be there,” she said. “There’s a trust, a vulnerability that has anchored my faith, to say, this is faith, this is the Catholic Church in a fuller dimension.”

Article by Julie Bourbon,
ENCOUNTER Editor

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Mission, Ecumenism, and Christian Unity

I reached out to four missiologists to see if they could pen an article on mission and ecumenism in honor of the week for Christian Unity, January 18–25. Nope, they were too busy—doing mission!

One, however, suggested an article by Christian Brother Jeffrey Gross called "A Century of Hope and Transformation: Mission and Unity is Catholic Perspective."* I cannot do the article justice. There is too much rich information in it that it would take a master's thesis just to tease out all the nuances and implications.

But here are his powerful concluding thoughts with my comments added afterward.

"Edinburgh in 1910 spoke of Christians finally coming to imagine a global, universal church articulated then by Bishop Charles Gore, and asserted by Karl Rahner in a historic 1979 address."

We often talk about the third wave of mission, which is mission's attempt to understand and navigate the third wave of globalization, the establishment of independent countries, and the elimination of empires. Gross reminds us that missiologists have been wrestling with these questions for some time and discerned the development of a "global" church as early as 1910.

"Living into this evolutionary, inculturated, post-Eurocentric vision will be the mission challenge for all Christians in a post-colonial, pluralistic globalized world."

Missionaries are called to see things from multiple perspectives; they cannot rely on a Eurocentric or Western perspective. How much of our religious imagination is influenced by where we are raised? When Jesus was born in a manger, was it hot or cold, humid or arid? If we are from countries above the equator, we think of Jesus being

born in winter; it was cold, the Holy Family had to struggle to stay warm. For those from countries below the equator, perhaps it was dry, hot, needing ventilation and the shooing away of flies.

"Ecumenical formation for common witness and common understanding, and harvesting the dialogue results in pastorally accessible forms will be a continuing opportunity and challenge. Attention is needed especially to cross cultural contexts, to understand the ecumenical situation and the heritage of relationships or tensions, even—or possibly especially—for those from Asia, Africa and Latin American ministering in North Atlantic contexts."

Over the past century, the Catholic Church has recognized that most of the world has heard the Gospel; mission is done by most, if not all, Christian churches; and that historically, all Christian churches, including the Catholic Church, have been unfair to each other. These dynamics have played out in various cultures. The Catholic Church is now committed to understanding culture, the history of ecumenism within that culture, the need for dialogue, and efforts to promote common witness.

"It will be important to reach out to the most difficult fellow Christians and ecumenical formation in the most difficult Catholic contexts. For Catholics it will be especially important to develop leaders with an ecumenical and missionary spirituality, among the bishops and curial leadership."

Many of the Christian churches have agreed to play nice with each other. Some have not. Consequently, the Catholic Church needs leaders—especially bishops—with both an ecumenical and missionary spirituality.

"Continuing attention needs to be given to include mission, cross-cultural and ecumenical training for catechists, clergy and pastoral workers, even as inter-religious formation continues in importance."

All those involved in Christian formation—from catechists to bishops—need formation themselves in mission, cross-cultural education, ecumenical formation, and formation in inter-religious dialogue. This need is greater today than ever before with the rise of identity politics and ideological tribalism. Identity politics means I define myself, and others, in one mutually exclusive way. If I am pro-life, that position defines who I am and determines the goodness, or badness, of everyone else. I bond with others who view the world the same way, thus forming an ideological tribe. Dialogue is not possible between and among those of different ideologies.

Jesus Christ was sent by the Father, in and with the power of the Spirit, to save humanity. As missionaries, we have been sent to give witness to this Good News through the integrity of our lives, the compassion of our service, and the power of our words. To do that well, in this day and age, we need to be culturally sensitive, ecumenically aware, skilled at inter-religious dialogue, and passionate about the possibility and promise of a common witness.

USCMA Happenings

- **Transformed in Mission** | Texas Mission Council Conference. February 1-3, 2019. The cost for the weekend is only \$150 and includes room, meals, and registration. Please see the attached flyer or register online at txmissioncouncil.org.
- **Witnesses to the Faith: A Catholic Pilgrimage in a Changing China** | US-China Catholic Association is sponsoring an immersion trip to China, guided by renowned Catholic scholar Dr. Anthony Clark. Few spots left. Apply by February 1st by visiting their website.
- **Mission Goals 2019** | USCMA 1st webinar of 2019! A panel will facilitate the webinar to identify key insights from the 2018 conference, explore six key themes of mission, discuss preparations for the Extra-Ordinary Month and Reconciliation materials. Available to all USCMA members. Register [here](#).
- **From Hope to Healing** | Julie Larkin, founder and director of Girl Talk, will give a talk centered around “The Girl Talk Encounter.” Hosted by Catholic Information Center on February 7th, 2019 from 6—9pm. For more information, check out their [website](#) and register now.
- **El Salvador Immersion Trip** on March 20-26th, 2019. Maryknoll Mission Service invites parish ministers and deacons to El Salvador to celebrate the first official Feast Day of Saint Oscar Romero. Contact Deacon Kevin McCarthy at kmccarthy@maryknoll.org. [Apply now](#) on their website.
- **Books for Review** | USCMA receives complimentary books about missiology, theology, and spirituality for review. Our feature book this month is *Open to God, Open to the World* by Pope Francis. For this book or a current listing, [email](#) Nichole Petty, USCMA Office Manager.

The United States Catholic Mission Association is a national alliance of individuals and organizations committed to the mission Jesus entrusted to his Church. Through its members and services USCMA animates missionaries, prepares them for mission, accompanies them through mission, and forms them for leadership. ENCOUNTER is made possible in part, by a grant from [Catholic Communication Campaign](#). You build bridges of global solidarity by supporting USCMA. Donate at uscatholicmission.org. Copyright 2019.



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Missionaries would do well to add ecumenical awareness to their preparation to reach out to, engage with, and serve others through mission trips, projects, and partnerships. This is one very practical way that Catholic missionaries can live out the Spirit of the week for Christian Unity.

*Gross' article can be found in *A Century of Catholic Mission - Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present*, edited by Stephen B. Bevans, SVD, Volume 15 of the Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series.

Article by Don McCrabb,

USCMA Executive Director

