



ENCOUNTER

Catholic laity on mission – everywhere

August 2019

Welcome to Encounter!

Who is called to mission? Sometimes the Holy Spirit prompts us to leave home and serve overseas. Sometimes we are prompted to serve the homeless in our neighborhood. Or just hold a people – the immigrants on the southern border – in our hearts, our prayers, our charity. Sometimes the Holy Spirit lights a fire within us. We feel recommissioned. We are disciples. We are called to make disciples among ALL people and to share the love of Christ with everyone. All of us are called to mission – lay, religious, and ordained. We are called to mission in our neighborhoods, across our country, even around the world. We are young and old, homemakers and business leaders, students and professionals. In the words of Pope Francis, “I am a mission.” Hear the whisper of the Holy Spirit in Gabe’s story of mission. Hear the call to action for the Extraordinary Missionary Month. Share with others what moves you.

Taken by the Vow to Serve

By: Julie Bourbon

“The Holy Spirit is a jolly joker,” said Gabe Hurrish with a laugh. “He loves to make fun of you.”

Hurrish was speaking by phone from South Sudan, the world’s youngest nation, where he is working as a Maryknoll Lay Missioner for Solidarity with South Sudan. He’s taught English, math, professional studies, Christian religious education and served as an assistant to the principal at the Solidarity Teacher Training College in Yambio, his current assignment.

This isn’t Hurrish’s first time in the region. In fact, 30 years ago, he was on mission in the north of Sudan but was ill-prepared for the challenge.

“There was a crisis every day. Disasters. We were working with refugees and it was a very difficult situation,” he recalled of that time, when the country was destabilized by a military coup. “We were running healthcare. We had shortages of money, logistical problems, staffing issues, drought, then rains.”

He vowed never to return but has since found out that God often has other plans for us.



Now 61, Hurrish had what he calls “a very good Catholic upbringing” in Wisconsin, where he preferred sports to church. After college at the University of Dayton, he joined the Peace Corps and headed to Kenya.

“I kind of found myself there,” said Hurrish, who has also been on mission in Ethiopia, Indonesia, Somalia, South Africa, Italy, Hong Kong, and Peru, among other places, always carrying the Bible his mother gave him before leaving for Kenya. It is his constant companion. “I loved the people. I loved the poor. I loved the way of life.”

“A lot of people ask me, do you have to go to Africa to help the poor? No, but I feel that call, so here I am.”

He also loved his great uncle Alex, a Franciscan Third Order Regular (TOR) priest who spent more than two decades on mission in India, then another decade in Brazil.

“I remember as a child, he’d come home and tell me stories, and I was just fascinated. In those days, you only came home every 10 years or so,” Hurrish recalled. “I wanted to sell everything I owned and go be with Fr. Alex.”

When his uncle was missioned back to the States, the two developed a special closeness. Fr. Alex was nearly 99 when he died, and although Hurrish missed the funeral, he made it to his uncle’s community about two weeks later. There, the provincial and some of the other priests presented Hurrish with Fr. Alex’s missionary cross, which would traditionally have been buried with him.



“The provincial said Fr. Alex would want it to be on mission,” Hurrish said. Battered and fragile now, the cross is with him in South Sudan. “I feel my uncle’s spirit is there, praying for me. He was a very good missionary and I hope I can be like him someday.”

Sister Joan Mumaw, IHM, president and CAO of Friends in Solidarity, Inc. — a partner organization to Solidarity with South Sudan — has known Hurrish for about four years and dismisses the notion that he isn’t already a “very good missionary.”

“He’s tremendously committed and has a big heart for people” she said, listing writing and organizing as among his many talents. “He’s just a very well rounded, flexible, generous person, the kind that makes for a very good missionary. Gabe is willing to take on new challenges when there’s a need.”

Hurrish will be taking on a new challenge later this summer, when he is reassigned to Juba to serve the executive director of Solidarity as project coordinator, collecting data, writing reports, and supporting fundraising efforts for all of Solidarity’s projects in South Sudan. Those include a health program that trains midwives and nurses in Wau; a nation-wide pastoral program to train priests, sisters, brothers, lay

people, and bishops; an agricultural program to work with farmers in Riimenze; and a presence in the north in Malakal, in a camp for internally displaced persons.



When asked what he thinks makes a person a good missionary, Hurrish is thoughtful.

“I’d say the number one thing is just to put your life in the hands of God, and it’s not easy. You have to be very calm and open and at peace with yourself and with what God is asking you to do,” he said. “We North Americans especially really want to be in control, and it’s hard for us to let go. That’s what religious have done all through history, though. They’ve just listened to that little voice. And it’s not easy because you’re asked to sacrifice quite a bit.”

And how does he explain his own calling to serve in Africa?

“A lot of people ask me, do you have to go to Africa to help the poor? No, but I feel that call, so here I am,” said the man who swore he wouldn’t return. “I never took vows, but it seems the vows have taken me.”



Article by Julie Bourbon,
ENCOUNTER Editor



Now Is the Day of Salvation: The Urgency of the Extraordinary Missionary Month

If you have not heard, Pope Francis has called for an Extraordinary Missionary Month for October 2019. If you have heard, what are you going to do about it?

Now is the time. The stakes are high.

What is the context, the environment, that we find ourselves in today? We can step back and look at the planet, what Pope Francis has called “our common home,” and see what is happening to the climate, ecosystems, and all types of life forms. We could narrow our focus to globalization – the systems of exchange of goods, culture, information – that is happening around the globe. A third context is the Catholic Church – still very much a missionary Church – all over the world, including in the United States. Narrower still is the political din, the noise which drowns out substantial, meaningful, civic conversation or debate.

Amid these overlapping contexts, many of us find ourselves broken or bruised, struggling to make it through the day, searching for some reprieve, some basis for hope.

Then there are the trials and tribulations of the American Church, which is still suffering from the sexual abuse scandal and the complicity of our bishops. Are we blessed to live in neighborhoods of peace? Our most immediate contexts – family and work – have their own share of joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties.

Amid these overlapping contexts, many of us find ourselves broken or bruised, struggling to make it through the day, searching for some reprieve, some basis for hope.

Pope Francis famously said, “I am a sinner.” Most of us readily agree with that statement; we are aware of what we “have done or failed to do.” There is more to sin,

though, than personal agency. Sin has a ripple effect. It infects, taints, colors, the environment. If sloth is one of the deadly sins that we struggle against, the ever-present smart phone makes any chair a coach to potato in. This is the social dimension of sin. Weeds and wheat grow together – in our own hearts, in our relationships, in our many contexts, and even in our social media habits.

For me, this gives clarity. The sins I struggle with – from racism to gluttony – are like quicksand. The more I struggle against them, on my own, the worse they become. I need a savior – a teacher, a guide, a friend – who can pull me out, and up, and forward. Oh, happy fault. As I acknowledge my sinful condition, I know, in my bones, my need for Jesus. He, and he alone, can save me. He, and he alone, can satisfy the deepest desires of my heart. He, and he alone, can give me the peace that is beyond understanding.

As a Church, we face the same struggles with sin. We can easily get caught up in the rush from one program to another, searching for the retreat, or religious education program, or the adult formation program, or devotion, that will satisfy our holy longing. What we need is mission.

As I acknowledge my sinful condition, I know, in my bones, my need for Jesus. He, and he alone, can save me.

We come together at Mass to be fed by Word and Sacrament – bread for the journey – but a journey to where? We are being sent, “As the Father has sent me, so now I send you” (John 20:21) into our families, our neighborhoods, our jobs, our city, our country, and our world. We are sent to be a witness to the saving love of God we have encountered in the person of Jesus through the very same Church that so often hurts us, or disappoints us, or just frustrates us.

This is why we need an extraordinary missionary month so we can remember that we are baptized and sent to become the love we have received by giving that love to others. Jesus is faithful. As long as we keep our eyes fixed on him, we will survive the trials and tribulations of life even as we move beyond ourselves, step outside of our comfort zones, cross some type of border, and risk a personal encounter with a complete stranger. It is only in Jesus that we will come to see ourselves, and others, as beloved children of God and we will meet one another as human beings, “neither Jew or Greek, free or slave, male or female.” We are not to persuade, sell, conquer or use the other person, or be used by them. They are not a problem that needs to be fixed and we are not saviors. We are just people – disciples and friends of Jesus – who want to inhabit the same space as others and be with them in our joint efforts to advance the common good.

USCMA has resources to encourage individuals and

communities to make October an extraordinary missionary month. [You can access them on our website.](#)

Today, each one of us needs to take a moment to consider how we will help make October 2019 an extraordinary missionary month. Gather with others. Pray. Tell the stories of mission. Consider the cry for mission within your own neighborhood, city, country or continent. Discern – where and how is the Lord calling you to serve as missionary? Give the love you have received by giving your time, talent, and treasure to mission.

The din will fade, the fog will clear, and we will see, and be with, Jesus through others. Mission opens the door to solidarity; it stretches a community to go beyond itself; it feeds our soul. Now is the time. Now is the day of salvation.

Article by Don McCrabb,
USCMA Executive Director

USCMA Happenings

- **Telling My Mission Story** | September 10, 2019 at 2 pm ET. Join Kelli Nelson and Don McCrabb as they lead this webinar and help people give voice to their mission experience and frame their mission story for a wide variety of audiences. There is no cost for the webinar, but you must [register here](#).
- **RECONCILIATION** | September 11, 2019 at 2 pm ET. This is the first of a four-part webinar series that will explore the nature, scope, theology, spirituality, and pastoral practice of reconciliation. There is no cost to register. Register at <https://bit.ly/2UdTo2Q>. The series will continue on the following dates at 2 pm ET: September 18, September 25, and October 2, 2019.
- **USCMA Online Membership Meeting** | September 19, 2019 at 2 pm ET. This is the annual online membership meeting that reviews the “state of the association” and outlines future directions. Sr. Nancy Schramm, OFM, the new President, will give a Presidential Address. Register at <https://bit.ly/2L211ZR>.
- **Extended Workshop for Returned Missioners** | September 17—26, 2019. Attend this workshop hosted by From Mission to Mission in St. Louis, MO. [Apply now by clicking here](#). Visit their [website](#) for more information.
- **Maryknoll Contemplative Retreat** | September 20-22, 2019. Join Maryknoll in a contemplative retreat, at Maryknoll Mission Center in Ossining, NY. Online registration is available on their [website](#).
- **Books for Review** | USCMA receives complimentary books about missiology, theology, and spirituality for review. Our feature book this month is *The Tao of Asian American Belonging — A Yinist Spirituality* by *Young Lee Hertig*. For this book or a current listing, [email](#) Nichole Petty, the 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 form 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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