



January 2023

ENCOUNTER
Catholics on Mission – Everywhere

Following the Missionary Rule

The Missionary Benedictine Congregation of St. Ottilien has been sending men throughout the globe since its founding in Germany in the late 19th century. With a charism that includes education, healthcare, hunger relief/the environment, and evangelization, they've been sharing the light of faith and the joy of the Gospel — their motto is “Lumen Caecis” or “Light to the Blind” – for almost 150 years.

Founded in Bavaria in 1886, the congregation emphasized mission work in foreign countries and had spread to Tanzania by 1887. By 1938, more than 400 men were following the Rule of Benedict.

Recently, Bro. Tobias Dammert spoke from his office at the Benedictine Mission House, part of Christ the King Priory in Schuyler, Nebraska. He arrived there — a dependent house of the Abbey of Muensterschwarzach in Lower Franconia — from southern Germany in December 1974.

Br. Tobias' hope “as a young guy” had been to be a missionary in Africa; instead, he was sent to Nebraska to be a cook and housekeeper at the mission house. “I always joke around and say, ‘Where in Africa is Schuyler, Nebraska?’”

If Africa was not to be — except for a seven-week mission trip in the mid-1980s — he found another mission.

“When I arrived, on a very cold and snowy day, they had already a cook,” he recalled with a laugh. Bro. Tobias ended up in the mission office and ultimately in “friend raising” work; he took over fundraising efforts in 1994.

Monks from Muensterschwarzach Abbey first came to Schuyler in 1935, just before the start of World War II. Their purpose was to get financial support from Germans living in New York and the Midwest for their monastery back home; Germany was in an economic crisis, with worse yet to come.

“Of course, as you can imagine, with the war, Germany could not support missionaries,” said Bro. Tobias, who just celebrated his 40th anniversary of U.S. citizenship.

The bishop of Omaha invited the men to settle there. In 1979, they built a new monastery and office, which became a priory in 1985. The site's formal name is Benedictine Mission House - Christ the King Priory. It is one of two houses in the U.S. that



Top: Bro. Tobias Dammert working hard at his desk in Schuyler, Nebraska.

Middle: Students at the Peramiho Trade School in Songea, Tanzania.

Bottom: St. Benedict Center Retreat and Conference Center in Schuyler, Nebraska.

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belong to their congregation, the other being St. Paul's Abbey in Newton, New Jersey, which is now a dependent house of the Abbey of Waegwan in South Korea.

Their mission of healthcare includes hospitals, clinics and dispensaries in Tanzania, the Philippines, and South Korea. In Tanzania, the mission of education encompasses grades K through university level, as well as monasteries and seminaries. Hunger relief and the environment go hand in hand, and the congregation has an emergency fund to help communities in times of drought or famine. The missionary work of evangelization includes pastoral care and training communities to lead themselves.

"We always came as missionaries in the hope to give over the place to the native people" said Bro. Tobias. "All our monasteries in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Togo and South Africa have indigenous leaders. We are also represented in Venezuela and Columbia"

Just across the road from the monastery and mission office in Schuyler, the Saint Benedict Center offers 160 beautiful, peaceful acres for programs and retreats. The lakefront site includes an outdoor Stations of the Cross and a labyrinth. In such a peaceful place, Bro. Tobias has found, in the last eight years, another way to serve.

"One of my greatest joys, next to raising funds and correspondence, is to be available for spiritual direction, for those who need a companion in the spiritual journey," he said. "I enjoy listening to the people and trying to find what God has in mind for that particular person. And I learn from the people how God is working."

Bro. Tobias feels a natural connection between mission work and spiritual direction, as it is by encountering the other, through mission, that one engages in dialogue about the spiritual life. "I see it goes together," he said.

For him, it all comes back to the Rule of Benedict — and "Light to the Blind" — to which he has dedicated his ministry

"It challenges us to a life of prayer and work, and also to be available to the people and to teach them the balance of prayer and work, so that in all things, God be glorified," he said. "There are many, many ways an individual can apply this to his or her life.

For more information, visit www.missionmonks.org

Article by Julie Bourbon, ENCOUNTER Editor



Middle: The Eye clinic in Tororo, Uganda, is supported by the Benedictine Mission House in Schuyler, Nebraska.

Bottom: African monks of Mvimwa Benedictine Abbey in Sumbawanga, Tanzania, prepare a field for planting bananas.

NEW FOR 2023!

SHARE YOUR MISSION EVENTS

Mission leaders, and their communities and networks, offer an incredible array of formation programs, advocacy efforts, and networking opportunities. USCMA can promote these opportunities through ENCOUNTER and the USCMA website.

Send the details including dates, locations and links to Don McCrabb at dmccrabb@uscatholicmission.org.

***USCMA is a community
of faith leaders engaged in
networking, formation, and advocacy
for God's mission.***

Happenings



Fr. Dinh Anh Nhue Nguyen,
OFM Conv.,

General Secretary of the
Pontifical Missionary Union

World Mission Day Messages – Ad Gentes Continues

Thursday, January 26, 2023
11 AM Eastern Time

We are pleased that Fr. Dinh Anh Nhue Nguyen, OFM Conv, General Secretary of the Pontifical Missionary Union, will join us for this webinar to explore the anticipated 2023 World Mission Day Message that the Holy Father has issued on the Epiphany of the Lord the last two years. Read more and register via Zoom at <https://bit.ly/MissionMessages2023>

MARYKNOLL BOOK CLUB

**Black Elk: Colonialism and
Lakota Catholicism**

Four Thursdays
January 26, February 2, 9, 16, 2023
7 PM Eastern Time

Reflect and discuss via Zoom with author Damian Costello, PhD, vice-postulator for Black Elk's cause for canonization in the Catholic Church. The virtual book club promises to be a wonderful opportunity to acquire a better understanding and appreciation of the deep faith and rich spirituality of our Native American indigenous brothers and sisters. Register at <https://bit.ly/Black-Elk-book-club>

SUBMIT YOUR EVENT

Send the details by **January 15th** to Don McCrabb at dmccrabb@uscatholicmission.org. We'll post on our website and as spaces allows in ENCOUNTER.

Claiming Leadership for Mission

By Don McCrabb
Executive Director, United States Catholic Mission Association

2022 – A Year to Remember

Many of us write a Christmas letter to share with family and friends the highlights of the past year. In a similar way, I offer this chronicle of USCMA for the Year of Our Lord 2022.

In April, the board affirmed the significant role USCMA plays in the life of the Church in service to “God’s mission.” It wrote a new mission statement and began a two-year restructuring process. These basic facts do not capture the historic significance of these events. The board exercised its leadership after months of consultation and trusting in God’s Spirit and the continual call to mission, boldly claiming leadership in the name of all mission leaders.

USCMA is a community of faith leaders engaged in networking, formation, and advocacy for God’s mission. Using this description, and prescription, for USCMA, we can recall the many ways USCMA leads mission.

Networking

USCMA is one of the four Catholic organizations that founded the Catholic Cares Coalition in 2021. In the name of USCMA, I served as convener for 2022 and led its efforts to promote vaccine acceptance and equity by giving out \$175,000 in grants to local agencies. The goal was to reach underserved Latino and African American populations in seven cities in the U.S. The coalition was recognized for its work by the Catholic Development Council and received its Nonprofit of the Year Award. There is a clear value to having a coalition that amplifies the many ways “Catholics Care,” and USCMA will continue to be a part of this coalition in 2023.

On behalf of USCMA, I attended the Texas Mission Conference, the Association of United States Catholic Priests conference, and the Parish Twinning Programs of the Americas Conference. During a trip to Rome, I met with the mission faculty at the Pontifical Gregorian University and met with Father Dinh Anh Nhue Nguyen, OFM Conv., the Secretary General of the Pontifical Missionary Union. In September, NETWORK Lobby welcomed USCMA into its suite of offices. I am an active member of the Catholic Executive Director Network and moderated a panel on building effective coalitions at its December in-service. Don Bosco Christo Rey students work at the national office.

USCMA maintains and seeks to develop relationships with the USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis as well as the Pontifical Mission Societies of the United States, Catholic Relief Services, and the Catholic Volunteer Network. USCMA enjoys a close working relationship with From Mission to Mission and the Parish Twinning Programs of the Americas.

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Mission driven affinity groups are beginning to emerge in USCMA. These groups come together around a shared concern or responsibility, such as mission in Haiti or responsibility for the summer mission appeal.

Formation

The convention was the major formation event in 2022, bringing together the prophetic call for missionaries to name and claim the many ways they are called to lead. Crucial to that leadership is reading the “signs of the times” so missionary communities can be the Joy of the Gospel wherever they are and for whomever they encounter. In a similar way, USCMA needs to name and claim its role within the Church in service to God’s mission; the convention mobilized a tremendous amount of energy for the restructuring process.

USCMA also offered three webinars on interculturality featuring Fr. Tony Gittins, CSSp. Other webinars covered mission trips in Brazil, Hunter Farrell’s new book on “redeeming” the short-term mission trip, and a special Pentecost gathering. We held several webinars on mission in Haiti during this time of crisis and a series of Town Hall Meetings on restructuring USCMA.

The Appeal of Mission program was designed by USCMA for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and helps prepare mission leaders for their summer mission appeals. Another formation program, Mission and Conflict, was designed for the Lay Mission Helpers. I consulted with the U.S. Spiritans on their efforts to welcome, orient, and engage Spiritans from other countries. USCMA supports the work and efforts of the Third Wave of Mission and hosts its website.

Advocacy

USCMA tells the story of mission through ENCOUNTER, its monthly newsletter. Through it, we learned about Mission Brazil, Brother Dennis Lee’s mission in Kenya, and the service of the Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters, and met the new leaders for the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Maryknoll Sisters, and the Missionaries of Saint Columban. Other leaders we met were Marilyn Santos, from the USCCB, and Fr. John Paul Herman, SVD, the new editor of Sedos. In October, we were introduced to the amazing mission Our Lady Queen of Peace (Arlington, Virginia) has in Haiti.

As a thought leader in the Church, USCMA reflects on Church life through the lens of mission. Fr. James Kroeger, MM, reflected on Easter and mission. Janice England explored the unity of global mission. Wesley Cocozello considered the significance of the 2022 convention. Other pieces looked at mission and “a people,” conscience, Mary as the Mother of Mission, mission and the Eucharistic Revival, and new directions for mission emerging through the USCMA Town Hall Meetings and the national convention.

Welcome 2023

As we give thanks for the many blessings of 2022, we are excited to welcome the possibilities for 2023. USCMA received a grant from the Catholic Communications Campaign to begin a podcast that reflects on the Sunday readings through the insights – and experiences – of mission. The Task Groups are hard at work developing new directions for programs, services, and member engagement.

We look forward to renewing the current members, welcoming back former members, and building new relationships with new members – leaders, all, serving God’s mission.



Stay in Touch!

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You build bridges of global solidarity by supporting USCMA. Donate at uscatholicmission.org.