



ENCOUNTER

Catholic laity on mission – everywhere

October 2019

Welcome to Encounter!

Rather than simply making a donation or standing up for people, mission beckons us to accompany people in their joys and sorrows — especially those who are outcast, forgotten, or in need. How exactly do we do that as lay people? Journey to Haiti with an attorney and a teacher from Indiana, learning about solidarity and the importance of relationships. Hear Sr. Nancy Schramm, president of USCMA, address the current state of the world. She calls us to bold action by walking with those not like us and responding to the evolving needs of the global community.

Walking the Walk in Haiti: On Mission with Jeff and Sharon Newell

If being a missionary is about building relationships, then the members of the Newell family — Jeffrey, Sharon and their son Kyle — have been doing just that, not only with the people of Haiti they've been visiting annually since the year 2000, but with each other. Mission may be the perfect expression of their faith and desire for connection.

Jeff and Sharon's parish, the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception in Lafayette, Indiana, is a member of the Parish Twinning Program of the Americas. It was a 1999 visit from Fr. Ronel Chareleus — then-pastor of St. Joseph Church in Pendus, Haiti, about 120 miles from Port Au Prince — that sealed the deal for the Newells.

Sharon was on the parish council as the first trip was being planned; Fr. Bob Klemme was their pastor at the time. As a teacher, she couldn't get away from school, but she encouraged Jeff, a graduate of the diocese's ecclesiastical lay ministry program and an attorney in his day job, to go. Remembering that initial visit nearly 20 years ago, Jeff said he'd never seen such stark poverty.

That first night in Haiti, amid rolling blackouts, a



woman from another U.S. parish told Jeff something unexpected: on a mission trip there four years prior, she'd received a frantic call from her teenage daughter back home in Indiana, upset about the accidental death of a friend from school. As it turned out, it was Jeff's older son, Justin, who had died suddenly. Jeff then learned that another woman in the group was the aunt of one of Justin's closest friends. He'd never met either woman before.

“Within the first 24 hours, two people told me they knew my son, who nobody even mentioned anymore,”

said Jeff, still marveling at the connection that had been made. “This was God telling me this is where you’re meant to be.”

There have been many other powerful moments in Jeff’s nearly two-dozen visits to Haiti, which usually take place at Christmas and in March, around the Feast of St. Joseph.

“That’s when it sunk in, that you’re building relationships, even when you don’t know you are.”

There was the deaf-mute man Jeff met in town as they were passing out rosaries. He looked for him a year later with no luck, but encountered the same man on the mountain path the following year.

“I know I saw a spark of recognition in his face, and he saw it in mine,” Jeff recalled. The man ran back to his home and returned, waving the rosary. “That’s when it sunk in, that you’re building relationships, even when you don’t know you are.”



Jeff learned a humbling lesson to that end on another trip. As they arrived at the church rectory, a man he’d met the year before helped with their luggage and greeted Jeff by name. Embarrassed that he couldn’t recall his name, Jeff had to ask.

The man replied, in essence, I remember your name, why don’t you remember mine?

“He didn’t want anything other than the respect and dignity of being remembered,” Jeff said, then asked rhetorically, “Do you know the janitor’s name in your building? Pay attention to people. It costs you nothing,

just a little additional concentration. That drove it home.”

Ultimately, while the American parishioners do help with material needs — having built a dispensary, four new chapels, three new schools, a rectory, a radio station and a branch of Fonkoze, which provides microloans to the ultra-poor in Haiti — their presence is what really matters.

“It’s not just about what you bring materially or financially. It’s letting people know that we’re all the same, we’re all one,” said Sharon. “We’re just meant to walk that walk with people.

“Their ability to trust in God to get them through is remarkable,” she said. “It’s increased my faith.”

In a very special way, Sharon and Jeff have been able to walk with Haitians who have lost children — sometimes multiple children, Sharon said, often to starvation. “Their ability to trust in God to get them through is remarkable,” she said. “It’s increased my faith.”

Although this year’s Christmas visit is in question, due to the current political and social upheaval in Haiti, Jeff and Sharon will continue to be missionaries, whether to Haiti or in their own community.

“We are called to all four corners of the earth to be missionaries to everybody. It doesn’t mean you have to go to a foreign country. What about a neighbor who’s shut in and needs groceries? What about a neighbor who has lost a child?” Jeff said. “You can be a missionary at home. You’re called to be a missionary wherever you are. Your missionary switch has to be on all the time.”

Article by Julie Bourbon,
ENCOUNTER Editor



For more about Jeff and Sharon Newell’s mission journey, look for his book, [Open Your Eyes: Life Lessons Learned in Haiti](#)

Mission – Essential and Required



Sr. Nancy Schramm, OSF, USCMA President, addressed the members on September 19, 2019. This is an excerpt; her address is available at usatholicmission.org/2019-membership-meeting.

To successfully fulfill one's mission, a critical sense of the present reality must be part of the journey. What has been in your mind and heart lately? What are you struggling to understand and deal with as you seek to contribute to a better world, one where the Gospel values can be readily perceived and lived so that God's love for everyone can be felt and shared? Is it:

Our current political scene both nationally and internationally?

The continued allegations and condemnations due to the sexual abuse cases?

Our seeming incapacity to attract and walk with today's youth within the Church?

The denial of climate change and its effect on our common home? Especially the suffering of so many people due to the hurricanes and earthquakes and other natural disasters.

The pain of separation of migrant families who are forced to flee from their homes because of violence and oppression? The list goes on and on...

But as Gospel people, as missionary disciples, we are called to respond to these realities that weigh on our hearts. They call us to change our thinking, to build relationships with others and to act.

In our time, new understandings of missionary discipleship are emerging. Orbis books recently published *Go Forth Toward a Community of Missionary Disciples* with selected writings of Pope Francis, which really spoke to me and I believe are important for USCMA. "...in the hundreds of speeches, messages, homilies, and interviews the pope has given in the six years since his election, the missionary reform of the church emerges again and again as the great integrating theme of his papacy." (p. xiv) "What [Pope Francis] most wants from everyone in the church to know is that mission is an essential and required part of Christian identity. It is not

optional. But more than an obligation, it is the transcendent path of life, hope and joy for our wounded and broken world. Mission is mercy, tenderness, compassion, peace, solidarity, and care for others in imitation of the infinite love of God." (p. xv)



The last section of our Preamble for the USCMA Bylaws continues to inspire me: "Mindful of the rich diversity of gifts and talents among all the members, and toward enhancing effectiveness of the various ministries in which they are engaged, the association fosters collaboration with all persons of good will who share its commitment in service to human promotion, justice and peace, in the context of cross-cultural evangelization."

Here is one of the most important keys for the association to live its mission. We are USCMA. We are mission. We are the people who must commit to the service of human promotion, justice and peace according to God's plan for our world. At times our mission may seem beyond our capability, with so many difficulties to overcome. At times I am discouraged just thinking about the enormity of today's challenges in comparison to the people who are available to meet the challenge. But the Lord reminds me that where two or more are gathered in God's name, God is also present.

***"Mission is mercy, tenderness,
compassion, peace, solidarity,
and care for others in imitation
of the infinite love of God."***

This reflection leads us then to where we want to go. What is ours to do and who will do it? As a board and as your president, we have been thinking about this, knowing full-well that God has entrusted this moment in history to us. It was not a coincidence that leadership duties have been passed on to us during these times, and if we trust in Divine Providence and the wisdom and graces that only God can give, we will be instruments of God's hands.

Let's go down the path to a continued commitment to mission! Let us not lose sight of who we are and why we are!

Let us go down the path as a prophetic community with courage to confront our reality and call it for what it is. To make Gospel choices as individuals and

organizations whether they be popular or not.

Let us go down the path having a preferential option for the poor, directing our energies and time and talents to standing with those who need us most.

Let us go down the path of finding new partners, especially in the youth of today who have so much

desire and willingness to contribute, who often are discouraged by not finding where to channel their deepest desires.

Let us go down the path of mutuality, inclusivity and new attitudes of dialogue and collaboration, allowing God's Spirit – and not fears – to guide us.

Written by Nancy Schramm, OSF
USCMA President



Mission Profile

St. Philomena Nursery and Primary School Kampala, Uganda



St. Philomena Nursery and Primary School is seeking Mission Partnerships and is open to Short-term Mission Trips. For more information on their work and current needs, click [here](#).

USCMA Happenings

- **Weekend Workshop for Returned Missioners** | October 10-13, 2019. Hosted by From Mission to Mission in Philadelphia, PA. [Apply now by clicking here](#). Visit their [website](#) for more information.
- **Maryknoll Lay Missioners Discernment Retreat** | October 11-13, 2019. Join Maryknoll Lay Missioners in Los Altos, California to discern if global mission is right for you. To register for this retreat or for additional information, email retreats@mkmlm.org or call Karen at 914-467-8857.
- **El Salvador Immersion Program** | January 31-February 8, 2020. Join Maryknoll for a mission immersion trip and enter into the lives of the people of El Salvador. Learn how Maryknoll lay missioners are building peace, opportunity and hope in Salvadoran communities. For additional information or to register, visit <https://mkmlm.org/trips-el-salvador/>. Apply by October 31, 2019.
- **Books for Review** | USCMA receives complimentary books about missiology, theology, and spirituality for review. Our feature book this month is *Catholicity & Emerging Personhood: A Contemporary Theological Anthropology* by **Daniel P Horan, OFM**. 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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