



ENCOUNTER

Catholic laity on mission – everywhere

September 2020

Welcome to Encounter!

Antoinette Mensah has been a part of missions since birth. The missionary spirit was ever-present in Antoinette's home each summer when her uncle, a Benedictine priest, would visit from Ghana to make mission appeals. These visits were Antoinette's early introduction to what it means to be on mission. She works in missions both at home in Milwaukee and abroad through authentic solidarity. What does authentic solidarity look like to you and within your community? Even now, during the Covid-19 pandemic, a wounded economy, racial tensions, and political unrest, what is God calling you to do? You may never leave your hometown, but you may find yourself stepping into uncharted waters, and breaking down barriers, to connect deeper with the marginalized people in your own neighborhood. When striving for authentic solidarity you witness how interconnected everything is and how the Holy Spirit works through this interconnectedness. One such relationship is Economics and religion. How do these two seemingly opposite forces work together? In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis shows us and how Catholic Social Teachings guide Catholics in how they should interact in the world. Using the tools of mission, we can navigate the changing waters of our time and chart a course to global solidarity and the common good.

Born into Mission

For Antoinette Mensah, mission isn't just something she does. It's what she was born into—quite literally. In 1962 ago, when she was only five months old, she and her mother left Ghana to join her father, who was studying at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on a scholarship from the Society of African Missions (SMA).

The family settled in Milwaukee, where Antoinette's father became a public-school teacher and a permanent deacon in the Church. Through the Office for World Mission, he eventually spent three years as an instructor at Pedu Seminary in the Diocese of Cape Coast, Ghana.

She has lived life with her feet in two worlds: much of her family lives in Ghana but she was raised in the United States. For the last seven years, Antoinette has been the director of World Mission Ministries: Office for World Mission/Society for the Propagation of Faith in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. The office's goal is to build greater compassion and solidarity through education; manage a sister parish in the Dominican

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Republic; coordinate immersion trips; promote life-long missionaries; and support the archdiocese's 35 parish

twinning efforts in Chile, Ecuador, Haiti, Mexico, Uganda, and Venezuela, to name a few.

The missionary spirit of the Church was ever-present in Antoinette's home as each summer her uncle, a Benedictine priest, would visit from Ghana to make mission appeals to support a monastery he had founded. These visits turned out to be an early introduction to what it means to be on mission, both in the States and beyond.

“The mission activity of the church, through the Missionary Cooperation Plan, was sitting in my house every summer for at least a couple of weeks,” Antoinette recalls, but at the time, it didn't occur to her that she, too, would end up on mission. It was just something her family did. “I thought, Uncle Anthony is coming, he'll spend some time here and then he and Papa will travel around the state on mission appeals.”





Before she began working for the archdiocese, Antoinette worked in diversity and inclusion and also spent about 11 years at the YMCA, where she managed the international partnerships between the YMCAs in Senegal and Ghana. During those years, her connection to her Ghanaian heritage was heightened within her professional life, although her parents made sure to keep it alive when she was growing

up. Her focus on diversity and inclusion allowed her to “observe how people connected across cultures,” she says. “I marvel at the ways people can find to connect.”

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Actively involved with her parish, St. Martin de Porres, and the larger archdiocesan community, Antoinette coordinated a pilgrimage to Ghana with her father through the Office for World Mission in 2000. She was amazed at the way that faith and spirituality were “part of the lived experience” of the Ghanaian people. People seemed to openly value their faith with an enthusiasm she’s seldom seen in Milwaukee.

“We would see people walking to church, and they weren’t just walking across the street,” Antoinette remembers. “They were dressed and walking miles. And they weren’t rushing out of church after. They enjoyed and were fully present throughout the Mass.”

She came to the realization that she was seeing how truly present God could be in the lives of the faithful. “Wow, God is alive here,” she recalls thinking. “Jesus is present in the midst of the people. It just permeated everything they did.”

Robert Heger is the board chair for the Office of World Mission Ministries and has known Antoinette since they worked together at the YMCA. He praises her commitment to mission.

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“Antoinette understands the world palette in a way that I can’t begin to fathom, and she’s equally comfortable moving from one set of cultural norms to another,” he says. “She brings experience and passion for using

mission as a tool to evangelize. I look at her and see someone who lives our faith.”

Earlier this year, the archdiocese hosted the annual Lenten Pilgrimage to La Sagrada Familia, its sister parish in the Dominican Republic. A second planned pilgrimage to Ghana for the fall has been cancelled due to the pandemic. For now, World Mission Ministries is preparing to launch Virtual Mission Encounters until travel is allowed again.

But whether working internationally or in Milwaukee, Antoinette sees her office’s primary responsibility as helping people understand their baptismal call to share the “Good News” of Jesus Christ.

“We accomplish this through accompaniment and realizing that mission isn’t so much about doing as it is about being,” she says, “and asking the question, what does it look like to be in authentic solidarity?”



For more information on World Missions Ministries at <http://www.wmmchurch.org/>. For more information on YMCA at <https://www.ymca.net/>. For more information on the Archdiocese of Milwaukee at <https://www.archmil.org/archdiocese-milwaukee/home.htm>



Article by Julie Bourbon, ENCOUNTER Editor

Mission and Economics

By Fr. Séamus Finn OMI



In instituting the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development in 2016, Pope Francis stated that “in all her being and actions, the Church is called to promote the integral development of the human person

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in the light of the Gospel.” In the encyclical *Laudato Si* he would recognize that the “care of our common home” is an essential component of that mission. The creation of this dicastery under a new banner reflected the message of the Gospels, the practice of the tradition and Catholic Social Teaching, both of which are all deeply rooted in the two great commandments proclaimed by Christ himself. As the missionary works to bring the light of the Gospel to bear on the multifaceted challenges and issues that emerge in each missionary situation, the resources of this dicastery are invaluable.

In 1986, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued “[Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy](#).” In it, they proposed three questions that can still be used to guide any reflection on mission, economic justice, and the economy whether domestically or globally. What does the economy do *for* people? What does it do *to* people? And how do people *participate* in it? In the 21st century, it has become essential to add a fourth question, one that addresses the impact of the economy and economic activity on the planet.

Economies are human constructs that enable people to cooperate for the benefit of their own survival and for the development of and care for all of God’s creation. Each local and sovereign economy operates within a global financial system that exerts tremendous influence on the material well-being of people across communities everywhere and on the health and sustainability of the planet. Reflection and analysis of the structure and operating rules of each economic system, at all levels—if they are truly to serve the common good and the needs of all humanity—must be an integral part of any missionary analysis and planning that seeks to promote

and sustain integral development.

The rules governing even the smallest commercial and financial transactions have always drawn the attention of religious leaders and people of faith, who have evaluated them on the basis of their consistency with the biblical

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mandates on love of neighbor and how well they emulate the justice and compassion of God. This work of evaluation and recommendation will remain essential as the global interconnectedness of financial markets continues to deepen and exert its influence on the price, supply and demand of goods and services, down to local and regional marketplaces.

Since the Second Vatican Council, when the Church’s appreciation of the research and analysis of the developing social sciences increased, there has been a consistent call for a greater integration of the social and religious missionary activities of the Church in a way that strengthens both the spiritual and material well-being of believers. This is exemplified in the improved coordination between the work of relief and development projects and local religious leaders, such as in the fields of education, health care and agriculture, to equip their members and students with the skills and training required to promote integral sustainable development and to function and prosper in today’s world.

Finally, the publication of the encyclical, *Laudato Si*, in 2015, has awakened a new consciousness around the world about the interdependence of human survival and the health of the planet. This has expanded the horizon of reflection for today’s missionaries and introduced a new set of questions about the relationship between mission and the economy. These range from the macro questions about cosmology and the origin stories reflected in religious traditions and in different cultures and narratives, to more basic questions about the real value of land and forests, waterways and air quality, as well as revisiting accepted customs and practices on agriculture, foods, nutrition, and biodiversity.

Pope Francis refers to the Earth as “our common home” that we share with all other species of plants and animals and upon which we depend for our survival as a species. How we integrate that perspective into the creation stories that we proclaim will eventually inform how these elements are valued in planning for land or agriculture or infrastructure or building and will have long-term impacts on the health, well-being, and prosperity of communities.

Throughout his pontificate Pope Francis has also raised the broader question about the adequacy of the practices and principles of the dominant economic system for a sustainable future and whether it is fit for

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USCMA Happenings

•**Mission Alive: Writing the Story of Mission Today** | Join USCMA on October 9, 2020 at 2 pm ET for an open discussion A Webinar for Missionaries who are struggling to write a new chapter to their mission story during the Covid-19 pandemic. Panelists include Fr. Chris Saenz, Leanne Bergford, and Kelli Nelson, all members of USCMA.

•**Mission Alive Writing the Story of Mission Today – Part II.** October 23, 2020 at 2 pm ET. A follow-up session for the webinar where missionaries can accompany each other through the process of writing and sharing their new stories of mission.

•**Angels Unaware – Migrant Mission and the Parish** | October 30, 2020 at 2 pm ET. A webinar to explore how parishes have, are during the Covid-19 pandemic, and will serve the mission Jesus entrusted to the Church among our migrant sisters and brothers. Save the date.

•**Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity** | A webinar by Sr. Mary McGlone on the developmental stages people go through as they become more aware and sensitive to the needs of people from other cultures. The webinar is October 2nd, 2020 at 2 pm ET. Registration is required. There is more information on the USCMA Website.

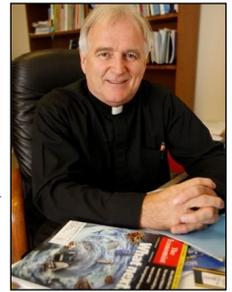
•**Solidarity with the Church of El Paso** | Join USCMA on November 7, 2020. . The 2020 Border Mass. Save the date. Live streaming of the Mass will be available. USCMA will provide the link, and resource material, so the church can accompany our sisters and brothers who are seeking a better life for their families.

•**Books for Review** | USCMA receives complimentary books about missiology, theology, and spirituality for review. Our feature book for September is *Truth Seekers: Voices of Peace and Nonviolence from Gandhi to Pope Francis* by David Cortright. For this book or a current listing, [email](mailto:airianna@uscma.org) Airianna Beitler, USCMA Communication and Publication Associate.

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](http://CatholicCommunicationCampaign.org). You build bridges of global solidarity by supporting USCMA. Donate at uscatholicmission.org. Copyright 2020.

the purpose extending the goal of inclusive integral development across all regions.

The scope and scale of the issues raised in *Laudato Sí* and in this blog call for a multidisciplinary approach that the New Dicastery must be equipped to embrace, whether in debating policy at the global and multilateral level or in searching with missionaries and leaders of all faiths for innovative answers at the regional level or in supportive planning for projects in local communities.



Rev. Séamus Finn, OMI has directed the US Oblate JPIC Office since its inception and has been active in JPIC ministry at various levels for over 25 years. He represents the Missionary Oblates on the boards of directors of a number of organizations supported by the Oblates both in the U.S. and internationally. He is a leader in faith-based socially responsible investing, and is active with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility. Séamus served in parish ministry in Brattleboro VT, Puerto Rico, Miami FL and Lowell MA.



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