

United States Catholic Mission Association

Mission Cohorts

People Who Have Served in Mission in Some Way

To state the obvious, mission has changed dramatically since December 7, 1965 when the Catholic Bishops of the World, in communion with the Holy Father, issued the Vatican II decree, *Ad Gentes*, on the Mission Activities of the Church.

There are two ways to think about the people in mission - in a narrow or broad sense. USCMA views mission broadly. Roger Schroeder provided a working definition: “mission is proclaiming, serving, and witnessing to God’s reign of love, salvation, and justice.” Consider all the different ways the faithful “proclaim, serve and witness.” The root of this list is in Julie Lupien’s talk at the 2016 USCMA Conference and was expanded based on numerous conversations with board members and others. This list is meant to begin the conversation, not end it.

1. Many **believers** have supported “the missions” for years through their prayers and financial resources. They may have family or friends who were missionaries. People donate to the missions and the faithful have been very generous through World Mission Sunday.
2. Parents, teachers, families encourage and support their **youth and young adults** going on a short-term service, immersion, or mission trips during high school or college.
3. **Pastors** sponsor parish groups to go on pilgrimage, or short-term mission trips, or explore parish twinning possibilities.
4. **Parishioners** come together, inspired by Pope Francis, to consider the people living on the peripheries in their neighborhoods. Renewed efforts to reach out to the poor, the homeless, the unemployed are forming long-term relationships of accompaniment. What began as “corporal works of mercy” has evolved into mission; an intentional, long-term engagement of people on the periphery with their well-being as the primary concern.
5. People give months, even years, of **volunteer** service through Catholic volunteer programs. These volunteers, many recent college graduates, usually give a year or two of service. According to the Catholic Volunteer Network, there 20,000 people volunteer every year; over 200,000 “volunteer” alumni are in our parishes and dioceses from just the last ten years. They can really help.
6. **Bishops** lead pilgrimages or mission trips, across our country or around the world, to learn firsthand the beauty of our universal faith. Relationships are built connecting one diocese to another.
7. **Directors of Mission** organize a variety of mission experiences for the faithful – some are service related, others cross cultural boundaries, and still others provide medical care to the poor.
8. Catholic **doctors and nurses** from Catholic hospitals are extending the healing ministry of Jesus through medical missions, partnerships, and clinics.
9. There are a growing number of **mission sites** – both domestic and foreign – that understand the unique opportunities, challenges, and necessary limitations of short-term mission experiences. These mission sites are the life-giving bridge between peoples and cultures.
10. Pride of place goes to those who give a **life-time** to mission as a religious sister, brother, or priest. They forged the paths we travel today, opened the door for short-term missions and volunteer service, and established mission sites all over the world. They have so much to teach us about building relationships across cultures, the many faces of justice and peace, the beauty of inculturation, the freshness of the Gospel proclaimed in a different language, new possibilities for prayer and worship, and the challenge of reconciliation. Jesus gave his life for us; these women and men give their lives back to Jesus through mission.

The Church in the United States of America was, itself, a “mission” up until the early 1900’s. According to Catholic Extension, there are 90 mission dioceses within the United States of America – and its territories. Nevertheless, there was tremendous growth in mission in the first half of the 20th century as the Church came into its own – especially in large cities such as New York, Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles. The religious communities that grew due to this growth sent missionaries – sisters, priests, brothers – to missions all over the world. After World War II, in 1949, some of these communities came together and formed what is now the United States Catholic Mission Association.

These same religious communities, which provided the leadership and financial support for mission, are now declining in number. At the same time, the third wave of globalization is opening new possibilities for mission among the laity even as it raises fundamental questions about culture, national borders, economics, and human rights.

The USCMA Board of Directors affirmed a mission statement for the association – that we aspire to be a national alliance of organizations and individuals dedicated to world mission, both foreign and domestic. In his book, *Navigating the New Evangelization*, Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap., believes this new era of evangelization is the responsibility of the laity. The question before us is how can we engage the laity in the mission of the Church – moving away from a focus on building up the Body of Christ in our neighborhood and dioceses to stretching out as the Body of Christ to the poor and to the peripheries – anywhere in the world. How do those steeped in mission – primarily the religious communities – animate new generations of Catholic missionaries?

Even as I put the final touches on this “concept paper,” I read an article in the CARA Report (Summer 2017) on international sisters living, working, and serving in the United States. Are they another missionary cohort? It seems to me, there are three fundamental questions:

- 1) Who is doing mission today – in or from the United States of America?
- 2) How can USCMA connect with every Catholic organization involved in mission?
- 3) How can USCMA animate new generations of missionaries – growing each mission cohort?

Feedback is encouraged and welcomed!

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