



ENCOUNTER

Catholic laity on mission – everywhere

September 2019

Welcome to Encounter!

What does mission mean to you? The word is thrown around a lot but carries several different connotations, depending on whom you ask. For some, mission is less urgent – and unrelated – to our full plate. For others, it is too daunting to even approach. No matter what it looks like – or will look like – in your life, we are still called to mission in whatever way we can, whether as a lay person volunteering overseas, a diocesan bishop serving locally, or the plethora of avenues in between. Let Jao’s experience open up a conversation with those around you. Where is the Holy Spirit leading you? What do you think your bishop, or pastor, would say about Mission and the Bishops? The Extraordinary Missionary Month is next month. Come, let us act now.

The Call Is the Journey

By: Julie Bourbon

Jhoanna “Jao” Resari was looking for a job after graduating from college in Manila, in her home country of the Philippines.

“Something meaningful,” she said. “Not just any job.” She prayed for clear direction because, she said, she didn’t know what direction she was going in.

“By coincidence or maybe divine providence, I went to a church where they were promoting lay missionaries,” she recalled, but was told she needed three years of work experience before she would be considered for a missionary program.

Disappointed but undaunted, she found work as a graphic artist and continued to volunteer in her spare time. Feeling that perhaps she was being drawn to become a religious sister, Resari inquired with the Carmelite missionaries and went on a retreat, but that didn’t seem to be the path for her, either.

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“It was a commitment I was not ready for at the time,” she said.

Three years passed and Resari inquired again about missionary work. This time, she was accepted and in 2005 was sent to Taiwan along with four others to become Columban Lay Missionaries.

“When you go on mission, it feels like you’re very much unqualified; still, you go where God is leading you,” she said with disarming frankness about beginning her new life. Again, she prayed for direction and found that working with those suffering from or affected by HIV/AIDS was calling her. “It’s a very difficult ministry for a

beginner,” Resari admitted in retrospect.

She spent the next six years working with experts in local HIV/AIDS shelters — caring for patients, visiting them in prisons and hospitals, and ensuring that the children who were left behind when their parents became sick or imprisoned found homes through adoption.

“After that, after having lived with and gotten to know the reality of people affected by HIV/AIDS — as well as the discrimination, poverty, drug addiction, especially its impact on children and families — I felt like I needed to do something more,” Resari said.

So she moved to the Hsinchu Diocese, where Bishop John Lee was very supportive of her desire to continue this ministry. There, in 2011, the diocese opened an office that focuses on education and outreach on HIV awareness, the Agape Centre for HIV Education and Outreach Ministry, the first and only diocesan center in Taiwan for this ministry.



Three years later, Resari was elected as a member of the leadership team for the Columban Lay Missionaries throughout the world, located in Hong Kong. There, she also continues to engage in part-time HIV/AIDS ministry.

“Throughout her nine years in Taiwan, Jao helped to slowly break down people’s prejudice towards people living with HIV and AIDS,” said Columban Father Peter O’Neill, who worked with Resari in Taiwan for about nine years. “Her deep faith in a God who has a preferential option for the poor inspires her to live in solidarity with the marginalized and to see the face of Christ in every person living with HIV and AIDS.”

Resari explained that Columban Lay Missionaries work in cross-cultural mission and respond to the needs of

the local church in the country to which they are sent. Missionaries sign on for three-year agreements; after two such agreements, they can continue for a three- to six-year agreement with the Missionary Society of St Columban.



Their ministries include works promoting and advocating for justice, peace, care for the environment and interfaith dialogue; work with the marginalized, poor, indigenous, migrants, and refugees, and victims of human trafficking; prison ministries; pastoral work in parishes; building up Christian communities; and programs for women and youth. Currently, there are 44 Columban Lay Missionaries around the world in 11 countries: the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, on the U.S.-Mexico border, Pakistan, Myanmar, Ireland, Britain, Fiji, and Hong Kong.

For the last year, Resari has been on sabbatical, studying in a program for pastoral studies at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, and just recently beginning the Hesburgh Sabbatical Program there.

“I’ve learned a lot from meeting and journeying with people while on mission,” she said. “I see how, regardless of our many differences — be it in faith, culture, race, or circumstance — God is present in each of us.”

What’s next for Resari? Whatever it is, it will be defined by mission.

“When I arrived in Taiwan, what I discovered was that saying yes to the call meant embarking on this journey in faith,” Resari said. “It was taking me out of my own boundaries to respond to God’s mission, wherever that may lead.”

Article by Julie Bourbon,
ENCOUNTER Editor

If you are interested in finding out more about the Columban Lay Missionaries, go to their website <https://www.columbanlaymissionariesireland.com/> or email them at cmireland@gmail.com.

Mission and the Bishops

In the wake of ongoing scandals within the hierarchy of the American Catholic Church, including the handling of the sex abuse crisis and revelations of financial improprieties in some dioceses, the U.S. bishops are facing a crisis of credibility. Responding to their call to mission — heard as a personal request from our Lord Jesus in the depths of their souls — may be the cure.

A diocesan bishop must “teach, sanctify, and govern” his church. How is he called to mission? All Christians, by virtue of their baptism, are called and sent. Ordination presumes and builds upon baptism; it does not replace it. Each bishop receives from the Risen Lord what the apostles heard from Jesus, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). Just before he ascended into heaven, Jesus said “you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) underscores their mission “to all nations.” Therefore, every bishop is to have “solicitude” for the whole church (*Apostolorum Successores*).

Bishops could recognize, call forth, and celebrate the missionary impulse already present in the faithful — lay, religious, and ordained.

The bishops, like all of us, need to purify our “narrative” of mission. First, missionaries may be lay, religious, or ordained who serve in their neighborhood, across their country, or around the world. For some, mission is the focus of their existence, whereas others weave mission into their spiritual, professional, and family lives. While there are still lone priests going off to exotic places, or small bands of sisters in jungles teaching the faith, those are just a few of the many stories of mission today. Second, missionaries are not saviors, know-it-alls, or cheap labor; they are neighbors who dwell among a people, making their “joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties” their own.

Bishops could recognize, call forth, and celebrate the missionary impulse already present in the faithful—lay, religious, and ordained. Some bishops, to celebrate Extraordinary Missionary Month (October 2019), have



scheduled a special Mass to bring together the local church around mission. What would it be like if, annually, local bishops convened all the missionaries living within the diocese for prayer, witness, and discernment, just as they do with catechists and teachers?

Each bishop could also invite his priests to reflect on their own call to mission and how mission, as one dimension of the parish, engages and revitalizes the faithful. Studies have shown that engaging the faithful in meaningful activity that reaches beyond the immediate needs of the church strengthens Catholic identity, encourages leadership, and promotes generosity.

Moreover, in his pastoral planning with his priests, the bishop could help the faithful “notice” the refugee, the migrant, the immigrant who is coming into the diocese and encourage them to reach out in a spirit of hospitality, welcome, and solicitude. The leaders of the diocese could also identify and discern those who are on the periphery of their society—the forgotten and marginalized people who need the mercy of God. How can the local church “dwell” among the drug addicts, the prostitutes, the homeless, the gang members in their own neighborhoods?

Finally, the bishop could prayerfully discern to “dwell” among the people—as a human being, a witness to the love of God poured out in the person of Jesus, freed of the prestige and pressure of his office.

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Mission calls each of us beyond ourselves, outside of our comfort zone, to cross some type of border, to risk a personal encounter with a stranger, all in the name of Jesus.

Pope Francis, in *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium, 2013)*, envisions the renewal of the church through mission. Mission is the framework, the lens through which all pastoral practice and plans must be seen. This will not be easy, nor will it happen quickly, but mission is the fundamental nature of the church; unless we are intentionally missionary, we will no longer be church. It will be challenging for us because of the “principalities and powers” we face. The polarization of partisan politics has infected the faithful; too many of our sisters and brothers in the faith judge Catholicism not by the demands of mission but by their politics.

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The promise of mission is the promise of intimacy with the Lord. It is in and through mission that we will know that the Lord is with us always, “until the end of the age.” Mission teaches the faithful through witness, sanctifies through encounter, and governs through accompaniment. Mission may be one way for the bishops to revitalize their episcopacy and see the promise of the Lord “in the land of the living.”

Article by Don McCrabb,
USCMA Executive Director

USCMA Happenings

- **RECONCILIATION** | September 18, 2019 at 2 pm ET. This is the second of a four-part webinar series exploring the nature, scope, theology, spirituality, and pastoral practice of reconciliation. There is no cost to register. Register at <https://bit.ly/2UdTo2O>. The series will continue on the following dates at 2 pm ET: 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/2L2l1ZR>.
- **Extended Workshop for Returned Missioners** | September 17-26, 2019. 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 ***Becoming New: Finding God Within Us and in Creation***. 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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