



ENCOUNTER

Catholic laity on mission – everywhere

July 2020

Welcome to Encounter!

Mission invites us to appreciate diverse cultures in reaching out and accompanying others who are not like us. Gregory Mitchell from St. Bryce Missions works with pregnant women in Costa Rica, and Fr. Bernard Kayimbw Mbay from the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM) serves as a missionary pastor to the US in North Carolina. Who knows where the Holy Spirit will take you when your heart is open to being sent? What will God have you do in your lifetime? Even if you do not end up leaving your geographic location, you may find yourself stepping into uncharted waters, breaking down barriers to connect deeper with the marginalized in your own neighborhood. Especially now, when people are distanced and isolated from one another during the pandemic, and the nation is so divided, we need to strive to be people who cross borders and engage our hurting brothers and sisters.

Going on Mission with the Holy Spirit, and a Good Heart

As a young man, Gregory Mitchell thought about becoming a Franciscan priest or joining a missionary order. But that wasn't until after his conversion, which happened during a high school CYO trip to Saltillo, Mexico.

“Before that, I was kind of apathetic about my faith. I think I was going to be a good pagan at that age, but God caught me,” says Gregory, with a laugh.

He grew up in Mississippi and went to Catholic school, but says, “I was kind of a black sheep. It’s funny, because I’m the one who really got converted and became a missionary.”

Now 50, Gregory has spent much of his adult life on mission—in Africa, Myanmar, Costa Rica, and now in Los Angeles, where he has been raising money and supplies since the pandemic began to minister to the city’s large homeless population.



For 10 years he lived in Costa Rica and ran St. Bryce Missions, building nine chapels and doing medical outreach and evangelization to the Cabécar people, an indigenous tribe there. With his family, a priest, and other volunteers who came for weeks or months at a time, they established St. Francis Emmaus Center, a 7,000 square foot maternity hostel that opened in 2013 and serves more than 400 women and children each year.

While volunteer nurses and doulas provided care at the maternity hostel, Gregory and the other male volunteers would go into the jungle to evangelize, which included preparing members of the tribe for baptism and



developing a catechism for the island’s indigenous men and women.

“My form of evangelism is humble and missiology based,” he says of those years in Costa Rica. “I didn’t try to change their culture. I believe Christ is there to uplift what’s good in their culture. It was quite humbling. I just did it mostly through naivete and a good heart and the Holy Spirit.”

Although Gregory didn’t typically assist at the maternity hostel, that doesn’t mean he never delivered a baby—or two, in fact! But more typically, he drove the ambulance, cooked, and prepared a lot of baby bottles. He feels it changed him and made him more deeply aware of the kind of man he aspired to be.

“I learned how to be very sensitive,” he says. “It may sound funny, but when you’ve got 10 pregnant women you’re cooking for, you get to see the sensitivities and struggles of what women go through.

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In 2018, St. Bryce Missions turned the maternity hostel over to the diocese and Gregory and his family returned to the United States. He took a year-long sabbatical, and then the pandemic began, curtailing his travel plans, which included missionary work in England and Myanmar, a place he’d already visited to prepare for mission.

For now, he’s in Los Angeles, working among the homeless—something he’d done in New Orleans at one time—as well as putting together a new missionary venture that includes using sacred art and theological presentations to evangelize to people in the developed world.

“There are the pagans in the jungle and the modern

pagans in society who are agnostic,” Gregory says.

One of his partners in this new work is a philosophy professor, Melissa Beth, a Secular Carmelite.

Melissa was on a spiritual pilgrimage in India, discerning whether she was called to religious life, when she had a profound prayer experience that sent her in another direction.

“Gregory does the work he sees that needs to be done ... bringing the compassion of Christ, as well as food and water, to men and women experiencing homelessness during the pandemic.”

“At the last minute, the Lord spoke to me and said I was being called to a new evangelization,” she says. “Then I met Greg and said, ‘this is what it’s all about.’”

The two, along with a third partner who is a sacred artist, had hoped to be evangelizing in England by now and still plan to get there, when travel restrictions are eased.

Meantime, Gregory does the work he sees that needs to be done. And for now, that includes bringing the compassion of Christ, as well as food and water, to men and women experiencing homelessness during the pandemic.

“While I’m here, I’ll look for the good I can do rather than just being idle,” he says. “The way I look at it, I’m a missionary. Wherever I go, I can have an apostolate and do something.”

For more information about St. Bryce Missions, visit <https://www.stbryce.org/>.



Article by Julie Bourbon,
ENCOUNTER Editor



Racism and Human Dignity

By Father Bernard Kayimbw Mbay, CICM

“The joy and pain of being a missionary” was the first testimonial experience I ever heard from a missionary when I entered our missionary religious order, the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM).

The confrere who shared that experience was a Congolese missionary in the Dominican Republic. He was referring to the joy he experienced in his missionary life and the mistakes and awkward moments it took him to immerse in the culture of his missionary country. Before that, all I knew about missionaries were the wonderful memories I had of Belgian missionaries who evangelized my home country, the Democratic Republic of Congo. As I was growing up, I saw Belgian missionaries immerse themselves in the African culture: they shared people’s joy, ate their food, danced traditional rhythms, learned proverbs. But they also experienced the pain when, for instance, people struggled under the 32 years of oppression, corruption, and dictatorship of the former president Mobutu. Since that time, I realized that being a missionary will always have that empathetic mix of feelings: the joy and the pain of the people you are sent to are also the joy and pain of the missionary.

When it was announced I was going to be sent as a missionary to the United States, I was excited and joyful. I had heard about the “American dream” magic but also about the cowboy movies that left room for the fear of the unknown. When I met the real American people, I did not experience anything but hospitality, love, and affection; it is my continual honeymoon. I enjoy the

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American traditions, way of life, and holidays. In Texas, I always participated in the fourth of July parade, and I heard many people saying: “I love a patriotic priest.” I am fascinated by American achievements in the history of humanity. Part of our missionary creed is the time that we take to appreciate, learn, and immerse in the culture, embrace the flag, love the people we are sent to.

“The pain of a missionary is everything that hurts the sacred image of God in each person...”

Reflecting on my joys and pains of being a missionary to America, I can only say that every country has its best things and its problems. As missionaries, we are commissioned to bring good tidings, but at the same time, we are the conscience of our society. That is why the joy and pain of the people are also the joys and pains of the missionary. We, CICM, have had missionaries martyred in Guatemala; others in China during the Boxer Rebellion; still others were expelled from the Dominican Republic for being the voice of the voiceless. The pain of a missionary is everything that hurts the sacred image of God in each person, just like God’s indignation when Cain killed his own brother, Abel (Genesis 4:10).

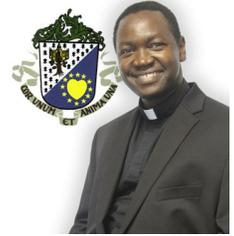
Looking back at the history of the United States, I can tell that African Americans are living in a society that was not designed for them, and racism is the problem. As I hear it said, slavery is America’s original sin, and there has not been a proper healing for both the wounded and the guilty.

When hate, anger, and hostility turn into oppression, dehumanization, squeezing the economic breath, and mistreatment of a category of people just because of their skin color, that is racism. Racism is evil because it attacks the inherent dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God.

It is often said that those who harm others must prepare themselves psychologically. They must see their victims as dangerous, good-for-nothing, not human. They have to strip them of their humanity and God-likeness, make them equal to the devil so they can have the gratification of killing them, for if they see them as a brother, mother, son or loved ones, it will be difficult to kill them. That is why racism is a sin.

For the racism pandemic, we pray that the church will be a hospital, and God the physician.

Fr. Bernard Kayimbw Mbay, CICM was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He joined the CICM –Missionburst community in 2006 and attended school of Theology in Cameroon. He was sent as a missionary to the US in 2010. Fr. Bernard learned English and Spanish in 2011 and was ordained to the priesthood in August 2013 and appointed as parochial vicar in Castroville, Texas. He is now serving as Pastor of Maria Reina de las Americas and Saint Therese of the Child Jesus in Mount Olive and Beulaville, North Carolina.



Mission Profile

Sanjeevani Social Service Centre

Madhya Pradesh, India



Sanjeevani Centre is a poor medical mission seeking Mission Partnerships. For additional information on their work and current needs, click [here](#).

USCMA Happenings

- **Accompaniment and Solidarity** | Join USCMA every other Thursday at noon ET to accompany each other through this difficult time and be in solidarity with all the missions we support around the world. Visit the [USCMA website](#) for the registration link, upcoming agenda, and more!
- **Occasional Papers** | **Let Us Cross to the Other Side.** Bishop Jim Schuerman, Episcopal Advisor to USCMA, reflects on how mission spirituality calls us to cross borders in order to encounter and accompany others. Read the article [here](#).
- **Books for Review** | USCMA receives complimentary books about missiology, theology, and spirituality for review. Our feature book for July is *Let Justice Be Done: Writings from American Abolitionists 1688 - 1865* by **Kerry Walters**. For this book or a current listing, [email](#) Nichole Petty, 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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