



July 2022

**ENCOUNTER**  
*Catholics on Mission – Everywhere*

## Focus on the Mission You Do Best



“It’s what they call reverse culture shock,” said Fr. Chris Saenz, speaking of returning to his hometown of Bellevue, Nebraska, after 17 years in Chile. A member of the Missionary Society of St. Columban, Fr. Chris was appointed director of the U.S region of the Columban Fathers in November 2021 for a three-year term.

“So many things have changed, you see things differently than you did before,” said Fr. Chris. “I often tell people when I came back, I didn’t come back as a native son, I came back as a missionary. I have a very different view of life and faith than before I left.”

At 54, he is the youngest member of his order in the U.S. region, which numbers just under 40 men; there are about 350 throughout the world. He was the last Columban father to be ordained in this country, in 2000.

When asked what it means to be a missionary — here or abroad — Fr. Chris said a missionary looks for the greatest need in the area he is sent to. In Chile, that meant working with the indigenous Mapuche people, serving as rector of Columban formation, and taking over an urban parish in Santiago that struggled with drugs and gangs.

In Nebraska, his responsibilities don’t just include the administrative and pastoral functions of director. Like a good missionary, he went to the bishop in Omaha to ask where he would be needed most. The answer was working with Hispanics, given the growing population and the dearth of priests fluent in Spanish.

“Some priests can speak Spanish well enough to preside at Mass, but to have a deeper conversation is something else,” he said. He



*Top: Fr. Chris Saenz, Director of U.S. region of the Columban Fathers.*

*Bottom: A confirmation ceremony of Mapuche women in the parish of Puerto Saavedra in southern Chile. Fr. Renee Rebolledo, left, who is now a bishop in Chile, performed the ceremony. Fr. Chris is on the right.*

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works as a chaplain with the Spanish Marriage Encounter program, assists at quinceaneras, acts as a counselor, and yes, presides at Masses. Prior to the pandemic, he was also visiting inmates in jails, including ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) detainees.

Fr. Chris' time in Chile shaped his view of the immigration debates that have been raging in the U.S. for years. While there is a large Hispanic community in the Omaha area, and the state leans conservative, his perspective is more nuanced, shaped also by his identity as the grandson of Mexican migrants.

“I would say I have a different view on migration and the presence of migrants here, having been in other countries and seeing the struggles of people there,” he said. “I sincerely believe most people want to stay and live in their own country and only leave it out of desperation. They just want to have a place where they can raise their family and have a happy life. I understand that now.”

He's also come to understand that with limited manpower — like all religious orders, their members are fewer and older now — the Columbans must focus their energies wisely. When the order was 167-men strong, in the 1960s, they could visit many congregations across the country for mission appeals to raise money for their ministries. But this year, five men are doing the appeals, younger priests who come from other countries to spend the summer visiting parishes.

If fundraising is one of their strengths, said Fr. Chris, then migrant ministry on the U.S.-Mexico border is another. The Columbans are in the process of moving their mission and ministry office from Washington, D.C., to El Paso-Juarez.

“You do what you do best and focus on that,” he said, “and have the biggest impact with the least amount of people.”

Fr. Chris acknowledged with a laugh that this a more mature perspective on mission work than he had when he was first ordained, when he a more “romantic” view of mission was fueling him.

“I thought about all these great things I was going to do on mission. I was going to build chapels, do this and that. But in time, it was about being available to what God wanted to do through me,” he said. “In my 20 years, I never built a chapel or any building, and there are a lot of Columbans who did. In the places I was, the things I built up were the relationships with the communities. They were more enduring and long-lasting than physical buildings.”

For more information about the Missionary Society of St. Columban, visit <https://columban.org/>.



*Top: Fr. Chris Saenz, celebrating Mass .*

*Middle: From left: Fr. Napa, from Tonga, Fr. Jovito, from the Philippines, and Fr. Chris, all Columban priests. The three were classmates and worked in Chile and Peru together.*

*Bottom: Fr. Chris dining with Sr. Mercedes, a Chilean sister with the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Boroa. The two worked together in catechetical formation of laity in southern Chile.*

*Article by Julie Bourbon,  
ENCOUNTER Editor*

## Living Bread: Mission and the Eucharistic Revival



Images via Pixabay

The U.S. Bishops launched a multi-year Eucharistic Revival June 19, 2022, on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, beginning with a diocesan year. Next year, on the same feast, the parish year begins. A key moment of the revival will be a National Eucharistic Congress July 17-21, 2024, in Indianapolis.

According to Bishops Andrew H. Cozzens, chair of the USCCB's Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, the purpose of the revival is to "renew the Church by enkindling a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist." He envisions "a movement of Catholics across the United States, healed, converted, formed, and unified by an encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist – and sent out in mission 'for the life of the world.'"

Five strategic pillars flow from this purpose and vision: 1) foster encounters with Jesus through proclamation and experiences, 2) contemplate and proclaim the Real Presence, 3) empower grassroots creativity, 4) reach the smallest "units" of church, and 5) embrace and learn from intercultural Eucharistic traditions.

The USCCB created the website [www.eucharisticrevival.org](http://www.eucharisticrevival.org) to accompany and resource faith leaders, groups of all sizes, and the faithful in and through this revival.

I believe it is vital that mission leaders fully engage their missionary communities in the Eucharistic Revival. Jesus sends us on mission (John 20:21). Mission is "proclaiming, serving, and witnessing to God's reign of love, salvation, and justice." (Schroeder, 2018). There will be no Eucharistic Revival without mission.

**Images Matter.** The first images of the Eucharistic Revival were of the monstrance raised either in a Eucharistic procession or at Benediction. I believe a better image – an image more in keeping with mission – is the reception of communion. Living bread needs

to be broken and shared. Eucharistic adoration and other devotions may feed our hunger for Jesus and deepen our experience of him in the Eucharist. It is when we "take, eat..." that we become, in the words of St. Augustine, "what we have consumed," the Body of Christ.

**Flesh First.** The bread of life discourse in the Gospel of John is essential to the Church's understanding of the Real Presence. What is frequently overlooked is how "flesh" is used in John's Gospel. Flesh, *sarx* in Greek, points to "meat as food" according to Strong's Concordance (G4561). It is used 12 times in John's Gospel. It is used twice in the Prologue (1:13 and 1:14), in the conversation with Nicodemus, seven times in the Bread of Life discourse, after the woman caught in adultery when Jesus talks about judgement (8:15), and in Jesus' final prayer at the last supper (17:2). The Word of God came to feed humanity. Jesus feeds us by giving us his body, his "flesh for the life of the world." (John 6:51)

**Living Bread.** The word "bread" shows up 16 times in the Gospel of John. Fourteen times in the Bread of Life Discourse, once at the betrayal of Judas (13:18); and after the resurrection, when Jesus cooked breakfast for some of the apostles (21:9). The Eucharist is bread. It is not just any bread. It is the bread of affliction, the unleavened bread, the bread of Passover. Still more, it is Bread from Heaven given to God's people in Exile to keep them alive in the desert. It is this bread that Jesus claims, proclaims, and exclaims as his very self, as his flesh. He is the Living Bread. He is the Bread of Life. He is the Bread of Heaven. If we take and eat this bread, we "will live forever."

**Bread for the Journey.** Jesus promises his apostles – missionary-disciples – that "I will be with you always, until the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20). Jesus sustains us for mission. Just as Elijah was commanded to "eat and drink" lest the journey be too much for

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him, we, too, find in the Eucharist both the beginning, the source, and the sustenance we need to proclaim, witness, and serve the Kingdom of God. The Eucharist is the body memory for mission.

**A Call to Witness.** Mission leaders, and the communities of mission they serve, can witness to the transforming power of the Eucharist from the poorest areas of the world; they can witness to the rich and varied beauty of peoples and cultures, and the humble, mutual, and life-giving service given and received. The missionary communities, I believe, have a wonderful opportunity, and a distinctive responsibility, to give witness to communion among many nations, the “suffering flesh of Jesus” in the poor, and the living bread of affliction, justice, and reconciliation.

This is an open invitation to mission leaders interested in exploring more deeply the connection between mission and the Eucharist. By coming together, we can learn from each other, strengthen the spiritual formation of our missionary communities, and animate mission during the Eucharistic Revival. Just email me about your interest. Once we have five people, we will gather via Zoom to explore possibilities and discern a plan of action.

By *Don McCrabb*

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*ENCOUNTER will return after summer break with the September 2022 issue which will be emailed in late August.*

## USCMA Happenings

**July 12, 2022 at 4 pm ET** (3 pm CT, 2 pm MT and 1pm PT)  
**Confronting Racism: What People of Faith Can Learn from the Experience of Haitian Asylum-Seekers at the US/MX Border**

Join the St. Columban JPE at 4pm ET, for a [webinar](#) where we will hear from Haitian asylum-seekers and the people of faith who welcome them about their experience at the US/MX border. This discussion will help unpack how the legacy of colonialism and the reality of systemic racism are driving forces of displacement in the Americas and are influencing our country's immigration policies. The webinar will be 90 minutes with time for audience Q&A. Please register for the [webinar](#) today.

**July 28, 2022 at 2 pm ET** (1 pm CT, noon MT, and 11 am PT)  
**Haiti - Redeeming the Double Debt through Integral Human Development**

[Registration](#) is requested. The New York Times did an expose on the crushing effect of Haiti's "double debt," the "reparations" demanded by France, and the loans needed to pay them. This report is an opportunity for faith leaders engaged in God's mission - especially those concerned with Haiti - to gather to learn more about this "double debt," and get an update on the political situation in Haiti today, safety, the Church, economics, and active missions. The webinar will include a discussion about what integral human development looks like now given Haiti's history, its current challenges, and a vast community of faith leaders who love Haiti and deeply desire a bright and sustainable future for her people. [Register](#) today.

**August 26-28, 2022 | 2022 PTPA National Conference**

The Parish Twinning Program of the Americas is holding its national conference in Nashville, TN. The conference begins on Friday, August 26th, at 12:30 pm and concludes on Sunday, August 28th, at noon. Featured speakers include Msgr. Raymond East, Gandy Thomas, Kim Lamberty, Bruce Compton, Chuck Dietzen, Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga, Bishop Mark Spalding, Sr. Lorraine Lauter, Don McCrabb, and Kelli Nelson. Cost is \$300 for the conference. To get more information and to register, please [visit the PTPA website](#).



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