

FORMATION PANEL FULL REPORT

Compiled from notes and recordings

Moderator Dr. Antoinette Mensah: It's taken me three years to get used to being a doctor. I normally just go by Antoinette. I know that I'm a product of mission, just from the impact that the SMA fathers had on my father, which then impacted our family. I'm also by training, or education; training and development is part of the core of who I am. My degree is in human resources management with a focus on training and development, so for me it makes sense to be a part of this panel and the task force on formation.

I want to remind us of the mission of USCMA. The USCMA is a community of faith leaders, engaged in networking, formation, and advocacy for what? For God's mission. As we continue in our discussions remember that we're not just any group discussing forming, networking, and advocacy, but we are a group committed to sharing our faith as we do God's work.

I'm delighted to have as our panelists today. To my immediate left, we have Sharon Newell. Sharon is an educator by profession, but a passionate member of the St. Mary Cathedral for Haiti Committee. Then, next to her, we have to have one man on the panel. He's more than a token. He's Deacon Matt Dulka, he's the associate director of mission formation programs for Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. I had the privilege of being engaged with Matt in 2016 when we wanted to do some formation for deacons on the issue of mission and what that looked like, so he came down on a Saturday morning, and they had a Saturday morning of engaging. And last but not least, from our Archdiocese of Milwaukee, we have Susan Mc Neil who is the director of the department of Catholic Social Responsibility, the office of lay ministry formation, and the office for synod implementation for the Archdiocese, so she's busy. Busy. But she just told me that her start in ministry came from the mission office, one of my predecessors.

Our task is to talk about formation, and talk about it in light of mission and doing God's work. There are several questions, but I'm going to ask them just to each share a little about who they are, where they come from, what they do, and then we'll go int

Sharon: I'm Sharon Newell, as she said, and I'm the other half of Jeff, who talked about our parish twinning program of the America in Haiti and Latin American. We have been going for over twenty years with our sister parish in Lafayette [Indiana] and our sister parish in Pendue, Haiti. Leading groups every year that we've been able to go. We haven't been able to go since covid and the unrest. I sent Jeff the first year, since I was teaching, and I told him I thought this might be something good for him to do, and he came back and took me the next year, and we've been going every year since. The thing that we've been blessed with is that we've also could include our child Kyle with that, and that created his profession as he went to school, graduated, worked in South Africa for six years, worked in non-profits and now works for Aspen Institute on international development for start businesses for his profession and also then also doing it for free

I went to Purdue University and taught there in the Early Childhood Program, I worked in the laboratory research school with 3-5 year olds with preschool and college students doing their practicums, we did hands on learning and showing them how to be teachers to young children, and also using other children for research in the field.

We always thought, we were married --Jeff and I have been married 46 years, yay! High school sweethearts. We always felt called from the very beginning that mission, or giving back, was important to us, and so as a child, my mom raised me and my four sisters, so five girls. She raised us on a waitress salary, and I don't know who she did it but I learned mostly about forming a young person from her, and so we involved our young children in that Every time we did any kinds of ministry work at the church, or out in the community,

whether we did things for Haiti, or for Legal Aid or Habitat for Humanity, United Way and multiple other things, we always took our kids with us. **We always felt formation started in the home. When we were blessed to be able to go outside the United States in our Haiti mission, then that grew even more.**

Deacon Matt Dulka: As Antoinette mentioned, the Maryknoll Fathers and brothers is unique, in that it comes out of the US Church founded almost 110 years ago to engage the US Church in mission. So the very first apostolate, before they began sending people to China, was mission education. Mission education was a huge component and continues today to be a huge component of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. I've been with them for 25 years, so I've had the opportunity to see how it's shifted over the time.

When I first began, it was very much the idea that mission education was providing information so that people would donate to the missions, or maybe go, volunteer in the missions, but mainly give to the missions. It was providing the stories and the narratives to backup the mission appeals, basically.

As Jim was saying yesterday , *Evangelii Gaudium* was really the game changer for us, because with it came the notion that you can't be a missionary without being a disciple or a disciple without being a missionary.

And so our whole understanding shifted from the propaganda notion of mission education to mission formation, **which is how do you form missionary disciples? And that's about taking people and accompanying them on that encounter, usually to the margins, to the periphery and to the border. And it involves not only geographic mission border crossing, but also situational border crossing. We began to develop programs, immersion trips and resources to help prepare people for a more integral notion of what mission education was, and that's what mission formation is.**

I'm part of a team. We have mission educators/promoters in Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Texas and New York. What we do is provide formation programs. Either we'll come to people; we call that embedded. We'll provide programs like we do with you. Or we'll host them at one of our webinar facilities. It could be a workshop, it could be a webinar, or it could be a whole week of intensive mission education, of how to become a more integral mission disciple.

Our target audience is as we've been listening and seeing the trend of the church is young adult Hispanic leaders and then also the front-line parish and diocesan ministers; catechists, DREs, deacons and so forth. But the real emphasis on young adults and Hispanics as being the future of the church. How do we form them to be missionary disciples? All these different situations... that's what we're doing and what we're involved in now. The formation programs, the immersion experiences, which had kind of a hard pause there with covid, switched to some digital webinars and so forth, but we're back at it again—and then providing resources, a weekly reflection guides for missionary disciples, resources for educators and Maryknoll magazine and of course as Jim mentioned, Orbis Books.

Susan: My name is Susan McNeil. I work here at the archdiocese in a couple different offices. Originally from right outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As part of my role, I help form primarily laity but also some Marians who are missionary discipleship in ministry. So I'm always thinking about it and **the whole construct that I use is that the church is in need of missionary disciples who are happy, healthy, holy and competent. So I'm always worried about the 3HC, happy, healthy, holy and competent.**

Part of the whole reason I'm in ministry with the World Mission Office, which gave me an amazing opportunity to travel and experience another culture and reflect on "who I am." I was not Catholic at the time, and that [was] the impetus for me to step into the church. I'm excited to be here today... and look forward to sharing my thoughts.

Antoinette: Wow. The things you learn when you start to talk and listen to each other. There are several questions that I gave them in advance. But then we've had a couple days, a day and a half almost, of interesting dialogue, so a couple questions came to my head. Hopefully I'm not throwing them too much.

One of the things that **I wanted to touch on is that formation impacts all of us, regardless of our role in ministry or in life.** Before you answer that, also answer the question, **"Is formation the same as education?" and if not, how do those things, formation, education or both, impact us regardless of our role in life.** You started off with speaking about the children. Can you respond?

Sharon: I think education is extremely important. We were given the opportunity in our diocese to have [unclear] ecclesial lay minister courses up at St. Joseph college and so um, Jeff graduated from there and I was able to audit some courses and we've had some good formation for continuing education through our parish and the diocese. I do think that the learning Catholic faith at a deeper level as an adult is extremely important.

But I also think that because of my education, and the way we teach at Purdue is that it's hands on learning through action and active engagement. I feel like formation for me, I even learned more when we went to Haiti by that active engagement. Because the first thing people say is "what are we going to do while we're there? I don't have a skill." **We always emphasize the importance of building relationships. And that being the key, whether we do anything else or not.**

I remember very specifically one time when we were climbing up to one of the satellite chapels and I was having a really hard time. I had developed a migraine, I was almost sick to my stomach, having to stop often. We finally got up there and all of a sudden they brought chairs out for us. I thought, "Where did these chairs come from?" and I had to sit down. And one of the leaders of the church said, "Like Jesus, they're bringing the Good News to us up here in the mountains." I thought to myself I had tears in my eyes, and I literally started crying and feeling kind of awful. And I thought to myself, "I'm nobody." Why would he say that, why would he think that? At first, I felt almost embarrassed.

What it taught me, the formation that I was getting was that it was important just being there, just being with people, showing that we cared enough to climb that mountain to be there.

Another instance that comes to mind is when we got stuck between two rivers. One was too high to cross and we went back, and the other was too high and so the only place for us to spend the night was in one of the chapels and all of a sudden out of nowhere, we don't see any houses, or anything, all of a sudden come these people bring us hot cocoa and blankets, things from the community, knowing that these were things they would have been using that night, I'm thinking again, "where are these things come from?" but it shows their hospitality and the joy that they had for us just being there. **So it didn't take us very long to learn that it's more about what we can learn from going on mission that what we can ever possibly give.**

Just by being there and knowing their name. Jeff always talks about remembering people's name and saying their name out loud. I think that initial part is very important but also the hands on learning that we get from just being there, or just doing mission. And teaching kids at a young age that they can give back. Even though I was at a public school, I took my pictures from Haiti, and I did it during the houses around the world topic, and showed them the houses people lived in and had them collect (not clear) and little hairbrushes and soap and shampoo and things like that [which] we were going to take that year as Christmas gifts when the children got their report cards, and I had my children participate in that, and that was the only thing they got for Christmas, and it was unexpected. We had to literally open their hands and put it in their hands, close their hand, because they weren't used to receiving. So we can start it at a really early age, and tell families to think about mission at a very early age.

[unclear – go based on passion]

Maryknoll deacon – Like many people in this country, my education was a very reductive, top-down learning method, where education was where you learned what you needed to learn and then you went and applied it or didn't apply it. I think in many ways, *Joy of the Gospel/Evangelii Gaudium* kind of flipped it; it's methodology is inductive, with *See, Judge, Act* where you have to really kind of approach it in a whole different kind of way.

What it hits at is the difference between formation and education. **Formation is about accompaniment, and encounter and mutual transformation, much like what you're saying.** The old notion of mission is that you're taking Jesus in a suitcase to deliver, it's actually that the ground's already holy and what happens in through the encounter, and if you're willing, there's this mutual transformation. That's what formation is. It's much more integral.

I think education may be a component. It's important. Facts are important. There is objective reality, but the formation piece is, for me, more a sense of integration and transformation.

Susan: I couldn't agree more that education is simply a component, I shouldn't say simply, **but that any missionary activity in the church or ministry always has to begin with our own relationship to Jesus Christ and our own journey of discipleship.** *There's that maxim that you cannot give what you do not have, and so in order for us to be able to encounter another, we have to be in touch with ourselves as a loved child of God, created in his image, who is also a profound sinner in need of redemption. Once we understand that about ourselves and continue to grow in that relationship, then we can come along side another and learn their story of what it means to be a loved child of God.*

So the education piece is important. Remember, I just shared that little construct of happy, healthy, holy and competent. **We need people to be competent in ministries and missionary activity, but it always has to start that relationship with Christ first.**

Antoinette: All of you have touched on Encounters that led you on your journey, and so when you think about the formation that you personally have received, how have you addressed challenges to being fully engaged in mission? How have you addressed challenges to the status quo? And how has that impacted the way you approach or consult around formation?

Sharon: For us it's easy to tell our story, and reflect our passion, with multiple groups, restaurants and whoever wants to listen and to get our message out there and get people involved.

Our challenge, and this has been said many times, is with even our home pastor. When we have someone new, to explain to them that the our twinning program isn't just a ministry that they put by the wayside if we die or leave or something, that this was a commitment to humans, and a human body of people and our church made a commitment that is supposed to be forever. Obviously, everyone comes with their gifts and talents and ideas of what they want to do as a pastor, and I totally understand that, but we can take that away from you. We can take that pressure from being pastor, if they just trust us, let us, and listen to us and see our acts and hear to our background, know that we're doing things within the church and that it is ok.

They're just hindering us by saying everything has to go through me first, I need to see everything. We used to have a Haiti website, and now we're not allowed to put anything on it without his approval first. We used to do a huge fundraiser with Purdue University Show Choir and dinner. He had to see all the songs that were going to be sung in the church because they were in the sanctuary and they couldn't do anything but the religious songs. There were no songs... We'd been doing it for fifteen years, and this was the sixteenth year the pastor wasn't going to let us do it and created some real challenges for us. It's getting that extra training out there to pastors to know that we know that you have your own missions and other things that you're being asked to do by your own bishop, but let us, trust us that we can take some of that and run with it on our own. That is our biggest challenge.

Matt: The thing for me, as a white male with a title in the church and some relative economic security in my life, my blind spot has been privilege. I think the most formative events in my life from a ministry standpoint have been through encounters with people in the margins, from the privileged moments that I've had overseas, in terms of the communities I've been in, in terms of learning what joy is, learning what trust is, and learning what faith is, and then here in the United States, working with homeless, with people in the LGBTQ community and so forth, and with having daughters, in terms of what it means to be a woman in this culture and this society. Through the humbling of those encounters I think that's where I've been formed and a lot of my transformation has come.

Susan: There are so many different avenues I could take that question. So, as I look at my own life and people who've been instrumental in my own formation, dialing back to a theme picked up earlier, the people who've been most formative for me are the people who live with joy and have a vision of where we're heading to. One of my goals in formation and in forming people... I feel like I have one foot in this world of trying to live as a missionary disciple myself and form other people as missionary disciples, and then there's also the theological formation piece. **But we have to have to have leaders and visionaries who lead with joy, and lead with love of the church, recognizing that all of us have our own limitations of our own experience or lack thereof, the privilege that we enjoy in our lives and areas of lack of privilege in the sense that those crosses can also become a wellspring for the church.**

One of the things we work really hard at here in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, and we're gaining some traction after a couple years, is trying to help people discern their charisms and their gifts, so that we can help them tap into **"what is it that the Lord want you to do, in this place and time?"** recognizing that we can't do and be everything for everybody. One of the challenges I think in today's world, you might know, any pastor, any deacon, any staff member, any person involved in mission, it's the lack of time and resources. **How do we help people ask that question, live out their giftedness and their joy so that they're doing what they love, and attract other people, which then attracts the resources.**

There was a priest I was talking to at my table, Fr. Thomas, was talking about having a chance encounter on an airplane when he wanted to be able to sleep. But he started engaging a gentleman in conversation who wasn't even Catholic, but at the end of the conversation, after he woke up, handed him \$500 just because his own witness story was so transformative that it caused him to do a pivot.

Antoinette: A lot more questions, many of which you will be wrestling with at your tables because time is almost up. But **I think that one of the key things is that formation starts with the encounter, and the joyful encounter opens the gateway for learning, for developing and for being mission.** There's one last question which we probably won't be able to answer, a question for everybody. How or what is the connection between formation, networking, and advocacy?

You can't answer that (to the panel), but you can, (to the tables). Thank you for listening. We hope that we have stirred the pot so you can have some great dialogue at your tables.

Resources

[Haiti Ministry - St. Mary Cathedral and St. Ann Church Pastorate - Lafayette, Indiana \(saintmarycathedral.org\)](http://saintmarycathedral.org) – Sharon Newell

[Deacon Community - Presenters \(maryknoll.us\)](http://maryknoll.us) – Deacon Matt Dulka

[Susan L. McNeil, M.Div. \(archmil.org\)](http://archmil.org)