



March 2022

ENCOUNTER

Catholics on Mission – Everywhere

An Active Ministry of Presence

The first two missionaries from Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters (OLVM) were sent to New Mexico in 1922, the year they were founded by Fr. John Joseph Sigstein, a Chicago priest. In 1914, during a leave of absence, Fr. Sigstein encountered overworked priests in New Mexico working in communities of great poverty, with little religious instruction for local children.

“That touched his heart and motivated him to found the community,” said Sister Beatrice “Beaty” Haines. “When he was inspired to start our community, he asked himself, ‘Why not have a group of women dedicated to the ministry of catechetics in the United States?’”

The OLVMs are also known as Victory Noll Sisters, the name that remembers Fr. John Francis Noll, who helped the early congregation to flourish. Sister Mary Jo Nelson, president of the congregation, said that the sisters were founded with a dual focus: “Religious education/faith formation and social action that helps people to put their faith into action for the needs of their community, their parish, and their families.”

While that second “strand” was not as prominent in 1922, said Sister Mary Jo, “it became more significant in the congregation as time went on and as we eventually expanded our ministries, like many congregations did.”

Their founder never wanted this congregation to own and operate institutions such as schools or hospitals, said Sister Beaty. This freed them to live the missionary values of adaptability and flexibility. Instead, their ministries took them to communities and parishes where there was a need, teaching children and adults in faith formation, directing religious education programs, working with youth, visiting homes and the sick.

This variety of ministries has always been their strength and has taken them from Indiana, where their motherhouse is located, to California, Texas – 34 states in all – even Bolivia.

“Responding to the needs and being free to do that according to our gifts,” said Sister Beaty, who ministers in social justice. “Just doing what Jesus did.”

As it did for many religious congregations and for the Church as a whole, Vatican II brought changes to the lives of the Victory Noll Sisters, but not to their missionary hearts.

“After Vatican II, we thought of ourselves as home missionaries, and we went to places nobody else wanted to go,” said Sister Lucille Martinez, vice president of the congregation. The congregation made the decision to no longer assign sisters to missions but rather to let them choose where they wanted to go.

A significant change of Vatican II was that

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From top to bottom: Sr. Teresa Aparicio-Cervantes talks with neighborhood residents at Casa de las Comunidades in Albuquerque, NM, which she founded and where she serves as pastoral minister to the immigrant community; A Victory Noll catechist teaching in California, circa 1940-50s; More recently, Sr. Margarita Morena meeting with parishioners in San Bernadino, CA.



Left to right: Sr. Betty Lorenz teaches a religious education class outside a parish in Detroit in the 1960s; Sr. Mary Lou Rowney worked with teens as director of religious education in Chicago before her retirement. Sr. Lupita Aguilar-Huanca, a native of Bolivia, served as a CNA at a retirement/rehabilitation facility in Huntington, Indiana before starting her current studies.

sisters would now be paid for their work, which meant that parishes could no longer afford to have teams of sisters working together. The Victory Nolls began venturing out alone – a challenging transition. Catechetical ministry also became more professional, with certifications and degree programs becoming the norm.

“It changed the way we went about doing ministry,” said Sister Lucille. Whereas Victory Nolls had previously been sent into catechetics whether that was their interest or talent, she said, “Now sisters could find out what they wanted to do after studying, such as liturgy, social work, and nursing. It really expanded. Sisters could use their gifts and find their niche.”

One thing didn’t change, though, said Sister Lucille: “We were always thinking, where was the need? Where were the poor?”

Today, a community that had close to 400 members at its height in the 1960s now numbers 33, with many over the age of retirement. Their leadership team has been working on plans for the future, including health care, disposition of their buildings, and transferring their land to Acres Land Trust, in perpetuity; they’ve set up a major gift program to support organizations doing the kind of work they have dedicated their lives to; and they sold their motherhouse to the county to become a ministry of services for those suffering drug addiction. The program will be an alternative to jail for those who have high need and are low risk, echoing their founder’s work on the streets of Chicago more than a century ago, ministering to alcoholics.

“It harkens back to Fr. Sigstein, and I think our sisters are very happy about this as well,” said Sister Mary Jo.

They’ve also thought and prayed quite a bit about their mission.

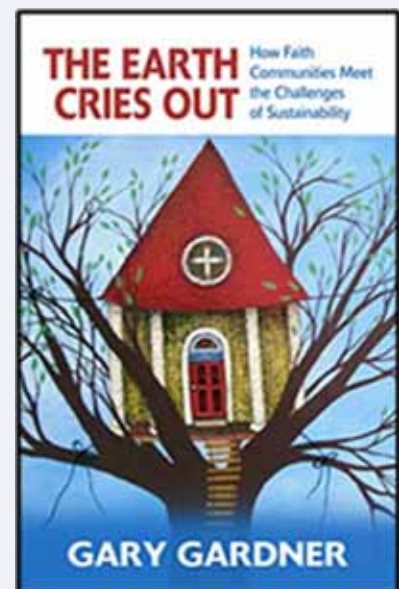
“We’ve talked about mission as being a presence and responding, no matter where you are or what you’re doing or not doing, in terms of active ministry. It is presence and prayer for the world and the needs of the world,” said Sister Mary Jo. “We hope that the things that we have done at this time in our life will help continue our mission and charism through others.”

For more information about Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters, visit their website at <https://www.olvm.org/>.

Article by Julie Bourbon, ENCOUNTER Editor

Books of Note

The Earth Cries Out – How Faith Communities Meet the Challenges of Sustainability by Gary Gardner, former Director of Research for Worldwatch Institute, and published by Orbis Books, is the featured book for March in anticipation of Earth Day. We will be happy to send it to you if you promise to review it for mission leaders. USCMA receives complimentary books about missiology, theology, and spirituality for review. To get this book, or the current listing of books for review to get the current listing of books for review, [email](mailto:nicohlepetty@uscma.org) Nichole Petty, USCMA Office Manager.



May They All Be One: From Virtue to Unity

Images in this story via Pixabay



I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they may also be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.

John 17:20-21

The rosary has been a part of my prayer off and on over my lifetime. I learned it from my mom and grandma as we huddled together at the 8 am Sunday Mass. Their devotion formed me in ways I cannot describe. The rosary itself was a Catholic “thing” that I held onto and took out from time to time. It was my companion on road trips through icy storms. It helped me push the stroller in the early morning with one of my sons. Recently, I “upgraded” my prayer and, thanks to Bishop Barron’s book on the rosary, it has become a regular part of my prayer life.



In his book, Barron encourages us to pray for faith, hope, and charity as we pray the first three Hail Marys. These, of course, are the theological virtues. In this reflection, I will explore those virtues, connect them to God’s mission, and describe “God’s vision” for the Church in the United States today and the outcomes we need to pursue.

The insight is that faith is where we begin, hope is where we are headed, and love is how we get there. All the other virtues help us love.



Much has been written about faith. When we boil it all down, it is trust in God. Our journey in faith begins with faith, and that faith is a verb. God, I trust you. Jesus, I trust you. Holy Spirit, I trust you. This is where we begin.

Hope is a deep desire for, and confident anticipation of, a future good. Faith grounds us, based on our understanding of the past that is present to us now. Hope envisions a future reality. Fr. Tony Gittins, CSSP, professor emeritus of theology and culture at Catholic Theological Union, talks not about “our vision” but our understanding or belief in “God’s vision.” What is God’s vision for our parish, our missionary community, our family, our country, our world? It is God’s vision that compels us out of the upper room and “to the ends of the earth.” Saint Peter tells us to “always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” (1 Peter 3:15).



Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches. Jesus sends us on mission. He is the love that will take us to God’s reign of love, salvation, and justice. What does love look like? Willing the good of the other for their wellbeing. We proclaim, serve, and witness to the love, salvation, and justice that God has done, is doing, and will do in the world. The Church is not the place of salvation – the world is. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:17).

There are four characteristics of the Church: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The apostolic faith can be found, to some degree, almost everywhere. The Church is also universal since it is in most, if not all, countries and, for the most part, every inch of land is under the care of a bishop. Is it holy? The communion of saints, the witness of countless holy women and men, the sheer number of Masses celebrated on any given

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day, the recognition, confession, and reconciliation for past sins and the efforts to make amends for the sins of the past, all suggest some level of holiness.

Is the Church one? No. I believe that God's vision for the Church here in the United States is unity – both within a richly diverse yet sadly fragmented church and within our country. Is it possible that we could become missionaries of unity and, in our efforts to build bridges of solidarity and mutuality within our society, become one?

There are two obstacles to unity. First, communication. We live in a society deluged by messages. We are overwhelmed by headlines and sound bites. The din, at times, is so loud that we cannot even think. As missionaries, wanting the good of our people, how can we help them regain a sense of perspective, dismiss the noise, and ponder the kernels of truth in every message? How can we help one another sort fact from fear? How can we see – and discover – reality together?

The second obstacle to unity: We need a new sense of citizenship. How can we help our people be a people who then form “We, the people” in our country? What are the duties of citizenship? How can we become a people governed more by a covenant among individuals than by laws that divide us?

These are challenging questions to be sure, but I believe Jesus sends us to be missionaries of unity through encounter, dialogue, justice, prayer, and reconciliation. We were born for this time. As John F. Kennedy said, “If not us, who? If not now, when?”

March 25 Solemnity of the Annunciation & Consecration of Humanity *particularly Ukraine and Russia* to the Immaculate Heart of Mary



Pope Francis will consecrate humanity, and the nations of Ukraine and Russia in particular, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary during the 24 Hours for the Lord penitential service, which begins at 5:00pm in Rome. The consecration is expected to take place at approximately 6:30pm.

Text of the prayer is available at <https://bit.ly/our-lady-325>

Happenings

- **April 7, 2022**
2 pm ET (1 pm CT, noon MT, and 11 am PT)
Intercultural Living – The How and the Who with Fr. Anthony “Tony” Gittins, CSSp. This is the companion webinar to Tony Gittins’ first webinar on Intercultural Living - the What and the Why. Spaces are limited so [PLEASE REGISTER SOON](#) and plan to participate in person in order to enjoy discussion opportunities.
- **April 14 – 17, 2022 | The Triduum**
Mission leaders, and the communities they serve, are encouraged to enter deeply into the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The USCMA staff will hold all mission leaders, their communities, missionaries, and missions in prayer through these holiest of days. USCMA offices will be closed these days and will reopen on Easter Monday.
- **April 28, 2022**
2 pm ET (1 pm CT, noon MT, and 11 am PT)
Freeing Congregational Mission: A Webinar with Dr. Hunter Farrell
Now is the time for parishes and churches to rejuvenate their short-term mission trips - whether those trips are domestic or international. Hunter will share practical insights from his new book, with S. Balajiedlang Khyllap, on accompaniment, cultural humility, and co-development. *Freeing Congregational Mission* is published by IVP Academic (2022). [REGISTRATION](#) is required.
- **May 26, 2022 NEW DATE - PLEASE UPDATE YOUR CALENDAR**
2 pm ET (1 pm CT, noon MT, and 11 am PT).
Mary, Mother of Mission – A Webinar
Before Mary of Nazareth became Queen of Heaven, she was the Mother of Mission. In this webinar, we will explore how Mary is the mother of mission and how she, as Queen of Heaven, continues her mission today. [REGISTRATION](#) is requested.



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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 the [Catholic Communication Campaign](#). You build bridges of global solidarity by supporting USCMA. Donate at uscatholicmission.org. Copyright 2022.