

# **Gathering Mission: A Meeting**

## **Report on the Mission Congress of the Archdiocese of Saint Louis**

On April 10, 2010 the first Mission Congress of the Archdiocese of Saint Louis took place.

The goals of this local Mission Congress were:

1. As input for the October 28-31, 2010 National Mission Congress in Albuquerque, New Mexico.
2. As a format for dialogue for those engaged in mission *ad gentes* from the Archdiocese of Saint Louis.
3. As an opportunity for mission education about the work and role of the Pontifical Mission Societies.

The day included the following:

- **Message of Welcome:** Archbishop Robert J. Carlson delivered his message to the Mission Congress.
- **Opening Prayer Service:** Sister Kathy Schmittgens, SSND led an Opening Prayer Service entitled “Who Will Speak If You Don’t” with song and photos.
- **Introduction/Overview & Goals:** Sister Kathy Schmittgens, SSND gave the Overview and Goals for the day, as well as the process of the small group sharing. We used the process for local Mission Congresses provided by the USCMA.
- **1<sup>st</sup> Reflection Session:** This small group session emphasized how each one is involved in missionary work, as well as what energizes us about being involved in mission. Each small group developed a Headline.
- **Pontifical Mission Societies:** Msgr. Francis X. Blood presented on “The Role of the Pontifical Mission Societies” in advocating for worldwide missionary activity and as responsible for mission animation, education, and concern in the Archdiocese of Saint Louis.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Reflection Session:** This small group session included 4 open-ended questions.
- **Plenary Session:** This session included the Key Elements in Painting a Portrait of Saint Louis Catholics in Mission, as well as recommendations from each table from the 4 open-ended statements from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reflection Session.
- **Closing Prayer:** Led by Msgr. Francis X. Blood

Having this overview of what transpired during our Mission Congress, I now include further details of what transpired in each of the above parts of this event.

## **Message of Welcome: Archbishop Robert J. Carlson**

Below are some excerpts from Archbishop Carlson's Message of Welcome:

*"Six years ago I founded a Missionary community in the diocese of Chiquinquirá, Colombia called "The Messengers of Peace." I know this was the work of the Holy Spirit. I simply get out of the way and allow the Holy Spirit to work. This community is thriving!"*

*"As I think of missionaries in the world, I am reminded of Jesus' parable in the Gospel of St. Luke of the rich man and Lazarus. The society we live in is very materialistic. The danger is that we ignore Lazarus, on our doorstep, whether here in the Archdiocese or in other lands. Our call to be Missionaries challenges us to go beyond our comfort zone to care for Lazarus, our suffering brothers and sisters around the world."*

*"The Archdiocese of Saint Louis has a long history of missionary activity. In that long history, here are some highlights: When our first Cathedral, now known as the Old Cathedral, was under construction, Bishop William DuBourg received \$4,000 from Pauline Jaricot's Society for the Propagation of the Faith to help build the first Cathedral of Saint Louis."*

*"Another missionary milestone for this Archdiocese was Archbishop Joseph Ritter's decision in May of 1956 to send three priests of the Archdiocese to begin a mission in La Paz, Bolivia. Today, some 54 years later, three priests continue to serve as missionaries in Bolivia."*

*"The face of Saint Louis Catholics in mission today include many Religious Orders of Men and Women whose members serve in various countries. The Vincentian Fathers serve in Nairobi, Kenya where they are training young men there for the priesthood. The School Sisters of Notre Dame serve in Sierra Leone, Ghana, Japan, and several countries in Central and South America."*

*"The face of mission in Saint Louis includes many teenagers from various Catholic High Schools: St. John Vianney High School, St. Louis University High School, Nerinx Hall, Ursuline Academy, and many other schools whose students participate in mission immersion and service trips overseas."*

*"The face of mission for Catholics in Saint Louis includes parishes that partner with other parishes in countries such as Haiti, Honduras and El Salvador."*

*"Thank you for your participation in missionary work and in this meeting. I look forward to receiving your recommendations for greater missionary involvement in our Archdiocese."*

## **Opening Prayer Service: Sister Kathy Schmittgens, SSND**

Sister Kathy Schmittgens, SSND, National Board member of USCMA, led an Opening Prayer Service entitled "Who Will Speak If You Don't?" with song and photos. As the music played, photos from the missions, primarily in Africa, appeared on the screen. This was a powerful and moving way to pray in the context of our call to be missionaries, and of the work of various missionaries *ad gentes*.

## **Introduction/Overview & Goals: Sister Kathy Schmittgens, SSND**

Sr. Kathy gave the Overview and Goals for the day, as well as the process of the small group sharing. We used the process for local Mission Congresses provided by the USCMA.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Reflection Session**

This small group session emphasized how each one is involved in missionary work, as well as what energizes us about being involved in mission. Each small group developed a Headline.

#### **Headlines from the Small Groups:**

Mission...

- Gives energy to others.
- Changes lives.
- Brings community together.
- Gets me fired up.
- Inspires us to reach out.
- The circle in mission has widened to include people of all ages.
- The Holy Spirit is stirring native vocations to Priesthood and Religious Life in mission lands.
- The Spirit is calling us to celebrate global diversity and enriches society.
- No one is so poor that they have nothing to give and no one is so rich that they have nothing to receive.

#### **Pontifical Mission Societies**

Msgr. Francis X. Blood, Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies, Archdiocese of Saint Louis, gave a presentation on “The Role of the Pontifical Mission Societies” and their role in advocating for worldwide missionary activity and as responsible for mission animation, education, and concern in the Archdiocese of Saint Louis.

- The Pontifical Mission Societies are the Holy Father’s network of worldwide support, both financial and spiritual, for the missionary work of the universal Catholic Church.
- Who takes care of the forgotten areas in mission territories that no other Diocese or Religious Orders partner with?
- There are over 1,100 mission territories, mostly in Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands and in remote areas of Latin America that receive support from the Pontifical Mission Societies.
- Example from Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen: No one would send 100 boxes of aspirin to a patient’s hospital room. That would not be good for anybody.
- The Pontifical Mission Societies look out for the needs of the entire universal Church and allocate resources accordingly.

#### **Brief overview of each of the four Pontifical Mission Societies:**

- 1) Society for the Propagation of the Faith
- 2) Holy Childhood Association
- 3) Society of St. Peter Apostle
- 4) Missionary Union of Priests and Religious

- Funding missionaries is accomplished in different ways.
- World Mission Sunday unites all Catholics worldwide in giving to the general solidarity fund of the SPF.
- Funds for HCA come through a variety of local initiatives in schools and parish schools of religion.
- Having specific examples of how our donations make a real difference in mission lands helps to motivate donors.
- HCA examples: Pre-school in Tanzania; mosquito netting for beds in St. Cecilia Home for children in India.
- Another way that the Pontifical Mission Societies can be helpful for those engaged in mission *ad gentes* is by helping put people in contact with one another through our website.
- While local initiatives of partnership are praiseworthy, we must never forget the needs of the universal Church and missionary support through the Pontifical Mission Societies.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Reflection Session**

This small group session included 4 open-ended statements:

- 1) The Spirit is moving in our midst, and we see that in... Therefore we commit ourselves to...
- 2) The mission of Jesus is alive and well among us as Catholics and we see that in... In order to continue that, we commit ourselves to...
- 3) The Spirit always asks our collaboration in carrying on the mission of Jesus. We will invigorate that mission and our leadership by...
- 4) Because we know the importance of celebration, we will plan to...

## **Plenary Session**

This session included the Key Elements in Painting a Portrait of Saint Louis Catholics in Mission, as well as recommendations from each table from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reflection Session.

### **Key Elements in Painting a Portrait of Saint Louis Catholics in Mission:**

*(These key elements emerged in small groups as people identified how they are involved or see others as they are involved in missionary work.)*

- 1) Our Archdiocesan Missionary Priests who serve in the Latin America Apostolate in Bolivia.
- 2) Religious Communities of Men and Women who have had overseas missionary experience in various countries: Bolivia, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Kenya, Peru, El Salvador, Honduras.
- 3) Catholic School Principals and Mission Moderators who promote missionary awareness through the HCA and through support of Missionaries they know personally or through their Religious Communities.
- 4) Nearly 2,000 Members of the Daily Worldmissionnaires who pray and sacrifice daily to support missionaries through the SPF.

- 5) Laity who are involved in missionary partnerships in various countries: Haiti, Honduras, El Salvador, to name a few.
- 6) Full-time Staff engaged in missionary education and support, including Staff of the Pontifical Mission Societies and of particular missionary works of the Archdiocese (Latin America Apostolate and Pan y Amor) as well as Mission Office Personnel from Communities of Men and Women Religious.
- 7) Youth from Catholic High Schools and Colleges who have done overseas mission service projects. (Unfortunately, none were present at this Mission Congress).

### **Recommendations**

The process of small group sharing also led us to make recommendations under 4 different open-ended statements:

- 1) The Spirit is moving in our midst, and we see that in... Therefore we commit ourselves to...
- 2) The Mission of Jesus is alive and well among us as Catholics and we see that in... In order to continue that, we commit ourselves to...
- 3) The Spirit always asks our collaboration in carrying on the mission of Jesus, we will invigorate that mission and our leadership by...
- 4) Because we know the importance of celebration, we will plan to...

*Here are some insights for each of these respective statements that came from the small groups:*

1a. The Spirit is moving in our midst, and we see that in...

- Global acts of solidarity; generosity of Catholics in support of missionaries and the needs of the poor (e.g. relief efforts in Haiti).
- The people God brought to this meeting and the enthusiasm of the participants for missionary work.
- More laity and youth engaged in missionary work overseas in short-term mission projects and partnerships in places such as Mexico, El Salvador, Haiti, and Honduras.
- Awareness and reaching out beyond the local community as seen in our Archdiocesan Latin America Apostolate in Bolivia Children and adults.
- The desire to be a part of something beyond ourselves and our own small circle of family and friends – especially the youth.
- The immigrant Catholics who are challenging us to move out of our comfort zones.
- Our youth (service they do); laity (service as well as their generosity); and community (does respond when they know the need).
- Community; reaching across borders; challenging myself; changing attitudes; breaking old habits; people transforming; welcoming immigrants; and generosity to Haiti.
- Our Church and our community.
- Our country.
- People who evangelize are being evangelized by people they serve.

1b. Therefore we commit ourselves to...

- Encouraging long term commitment to help others in foreign countries.
- Seeking connections for personal volunteer opportunities.
- Taking ideas and energy for mission back to our parishes.
- Making known what is being done in missionary partnerships of our parishes with other countries.
- Be connected to one another through ongoing email contact and sharing through the Mission Office website.
- Continue this conversation through annual meetings of this kind.
- Continuing to share our gifts, talents, love, and care with those in our hometown and around the world.
- Be open to let the Spirit work.
- I commit myself to connecting with the Filipinos in St. Louis and the Africans in North County.
- Sharing our experiences and educating others.
- Taking El Salvador as an invitation to explore St. Louis. (Salvadoran Society?)
- Continue.
- Share.
- Educate.
- Make kids more aware of missions.
- Have speakers speak to groups of all ages, not just kids.
- Making known what is being done in our own parishes and communities.

2a. The mission of Jesus is alive and well among us as Catholics and we see that in...

- The enthusiasm of participants in this meeting.
- The Archdiocesan Mission in Bolivia.
- Nearly 2,000 Daily Worldmissionnaires in this Archdiocese who pray and sacrifice daily for the support of Missionaries through the Society for the Propagation of the Faith.
- Many laity who support and do missionary work in foreign lands through parish partnerships or Catholic youth through mission immersion service projects overseas through their High Schools or Universities.
- Children, teenagers, young adults, and adults.
- The outpouring of financial support when natural disasters strike.
- Catholics crossing cultures. We are going abroad and other countries are sending us ministers.
- The number of laity as well as priests and religious who are involved in mission. I do think we need to be open and welcoming to the immigrants who are in our own country.
- Doing with less; letting go of desire for more; accepting our role in the world's condition; and transforming hearts.
- Church groups.
- Retreats and RCIA.
- Marriage Encounters.
- People meeting to pray.
- What we do every day in spreading the news.
- Everyone.

2b. In order to continue that, we commit ourselves to...

- Look for ways to spread the word and share our experiences through the use of the Mission Office website.
- Help develop a new page of parish partnerships on this website.
- Continue this conversation through other meetings annually such as this one.
- Keep trying to move the missionary work of the Church to a higher place on our Pastors' agendas.
- Encourage our Principals and DRE's to participate in events during October through the HCA and efforts to support World Mission Sunday at the parish and at the Cathedral.
- Keep learning, sharing with, and educating others.
- Help people to a conversion so that this generosity is a part of their very nature.
- I commit myself to helping our Kenyan seminarian feel at home by listening to his story of entry to the U.S. and by assisting with his visa situation.
- Learn their culture, share some of their culture, and be open to their culture.
- Explore and respond to ex-offenders re-entering our society.
- Sharing our own experiences.
- Foster awareness and community.
- Create network (website).
- Interact between parishes (we don't know what others are doing).
- We would be overwhelmed to know all the different mission activities
- Find resources for mission awareness.

3. The Spirit always asks our collaboration in carrying on the mission of Jesus. We will invigorate that mission and our leadership by...

- Search for talent among the laity and channel them where they are needed.
- An internet clearing house that lists what is available for the laity to volunteer in missionary work, whether near or far.
- Encourage others to be missionaries, no matter how small their commitment may be.
- Coordinating, networking and sharing.
- Making better use of resources available for promotion of World Mission Sunday in our parishes, schools and parish schools of Religion.
- Becoming a facilitator and bringing people together.
- Sharing food with the Filipino community and some African families.
- Telling our story of mission and inviting those to tell their story. The more you get to know someone, the less fear there is and people will become more open. Systemic change – promoting activities that help a mission become better. Idea that if you give a person a fish – they eat for a day. Teach them to fish – they eat for a lifetime.
- Line of sight to needs in St. Louis; alignment to Church's social teachings; seeking and developing leadership for programs to reach out; and adult opportunities to speak for those in need.
- Make time to help. It is hard sometimes, but we have to commit ourselves.
- Keep plugging away.
- Coordinating, networking and sharing.
- Reminding everyone baptized is a missionary. You don't have to travel.

#### 4. Because we know the importance of celebration, we will plan to...

- Keep the fire of mission alive.
- Promote World Mission Sunday and October as World Mission month.
- Meet again.
- Open our hearts more fully to the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Involve more Youth in our parish and archdiocesan celebrations of World Mission Sunday by having those who participate in overseas mission work carry flags or other symbols of the mission countries in which they have served.
- Include adults who have served in overseas missions in these celebrations of World Mission Sunday in parishes and at the Cathedral for the Archdiocesan celebration.
- Appreciate and celebrate all cultures, and help everyone to feel welcome and at home in the universal Church.
- I have a seminarian working at our parish and he is planning an event for Kenyan families and I will be there to support him and to try and gain some trust.
- Hold local celebrations of culture – maybe it can begin socially and then go into other areas, possibly schools, churches, etc. People always like to come to gather around food – maybe that is a starting point. Celebrate as an Archdiocese – the idea of MISSION CONGRESS.
- Thankfulness; common milestones; prayer and reflection; create new solutions; all invitations with meals and celebration.
- Keep the fire alive.
- Be with people and share your life.
- Promote Mission Awareness Month (October).
- Promote World Mission Sunday.
- Sharing our own experiences and remembering:
  - All the programs Sr. Rosario plans at her school to help the missions
  - St. Cletus's trip to El Salvador in 2008 and plans for another trip in 2011
  - Trip to Bolivia and celebrating the Latin America Apostolate's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

#### **Closing Prayer Service**

Msgr. Francis X. Blood led the closing prayer service. It consisted of the following:

- Opening song: "Come Holy Ghost"
- Scripture Reading: Acts 1:4-8 -- "You will be my witnesses, even to the ends of the earth."
- Pause for reflection
- General intercessions
- Our Father – sung
- Closing Prayer
- Blessing

## **GENERAL THOUGHTS:**

### **Notes**

- Feedback from mission gives energy to each other.
- Go and serve respectfully, not to act like we have all the answers.
- Teach people how to move ahead.
- Get stable in business and can start paying back, like a loan and then when self sustaining can pay back.
- Educate people on how to care for themselves. 3 generations in 1 household not uncommon.
- There is a guide for teachers of K-6, "Journey with Jesus".
- It is a challenge to get kids more involved these days.
- The Spirit will move where the Spirit is able.
- We are the Body of Christ, no matter where we are.
- God is community – what we live for and what we die for.
- We celebrate community in our area wherever we are.
- It is easy to throw money in a basket, but difficult to have the missionary sense until you actually do things.

### **What can the Mission Office do to promote missionary awareness?**

- Involve the laity.
- Personal contact.
- Don't just do mailings.
- Presentations – Who would be a presenter?
  - Lay people who have gone on mission trips.
  - High school and college students who have gone on mission trips.
  - Missionaries from around the world.
  - People who are originally from other countries, but are now living in St. Louis.
- Hold social gatherings with food, song, etc.
- Provide volunteer opportunities and activity ideas, whether it's programs of the Mission Office or activities happening in parishes around St. Louis (for example, collecting items).
- Pair up parishes in St. Louis to participate in activities together.
- Act as a portal for all mission activities in St. Louis, so people can find out more about mission.
- Is there any way to offer grants to people who are attending workshops or conferences?