

Preparing for Mission Congress 2015

Celebrating the Gift of Mission

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We have all, at one time or another, placed ourselves in the context of a Gospel scene – been present at the last supper, or pondered with Nicodemus what it meant to be “born from above”, or listened as peacemakers were proclaimed blessed and children of God. My favorite passages evolve around that first day of the week when Jesus, raised from the dead, appeared to his disciples. With them I find myself vacillating between emotions of fear, doubt, bewilderment, amazement, and joy as in celebration they acclaim: “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” (LK 24-34) Having encountered the living Christ, the disciples’ joyful celebration could not be confined to an upper room in Jerusalem. Their life-giving mission was to be witnesses, even to the ends of the earth, that he is truly alive and offers that life to us. And that same gift of mission became ours at Baptism. Celebrating the gift of mission is at the center of Mission Congress 2015.



Although Mission Congress 2015 is the fourth offered since the beginning of the millennium, each Mission Congress has offered a unique vision of being Church. Jubilee Congress 2000, after exploring contemporary ways in which the Catholic Church expressed and practiced mission, challenged us, as a US Church, to greater participation in the life and promotion of mission – including here in our own country. Mission Congress 2005 invited us to reflect on mission as reconciliation, as a means of building solidarity, as a challenge to our understanding of mission and borders, and to examine the relationship of faith and culture. In 2010, we discovered a portrait of how, in varied and broad-stroke colors, the US Church reflected the movement of the Spirit among us, of our call to celebrate the creativity of the US Church in mission energy and vision, as well as being invigorated by what is happening elsewhere.

In this first of many articles to be presented by members of the Catholic Mission Forum in preparation for Mission Congress 2015, I would invite you to think of how you have witnessed to Christ in your own missionary discipleship. In chapter 9 of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, I am astonished at how his experience often parallels what will be proposed in Mission Congress 2015 presentations. We will open our hearts to discipleship as based on our encounter with the Lord Jesus; from this flows an obligation – woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! Missionary discipleship surely entails giving up a great deal of freedom, and in so doing to offer freely a gospel of hope to people who have turned aside from their commitment to Christ. Discipleship involves being disciplined, faithful, and strong, yet includes a willingness to adapt culturally to the multi-faceted Church we are in the US. How far are we willing, like Paul, to become weak with the weak, to win over those on the periphery of our normal societal boundaries? Will a short-term mission experience be in my future?

I look forward to celebrating with you the mission identity of our US Church during Mission Congress 2015 in Houston, Texas October 1-4, 2015. Hopefully we will come away with a renewed sense of the great adventure Jesus has in store for us as he invites us to deepen our sense of missionary discipleship. “But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)