

**Papal Missionaries of Mercy USA meet at St. Meinrad Archabbey in Indiana  
August 30 through September 2, 2021  
By Father John Hurley, CSP**

The weather in St. Meinrad, IN was everything one could imagine from high temperatures and humidity, rain from Ida and two beautiful days in the 70's and by then no humidity to walk the campus. However, the weather did not dampen the spirit among the 35+ missionaries who travelled from all corners of the country for the second convocation since the great Jubilee Year of Mercy, August 29th-September 2<sup>nd</sup>. The theme for the convocation was taken from the fourth chapter of *Fratelli Tutti, A Merciful Heart Open to the Whole World*.

**Opening Evening** Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst, Delegate for Catechesis at the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization gave the keynote on the opening evening, presided at two daily masses and celebrated the renewal of the mandate given by Pope Francis at the beginning of the Jubilee Year of Mercy in 2015. His presentation focus on *How Faith Can Create a Merciful Heart...Attitudes of a Believing Person*. Recognizing the challenges in our time and in particular the pandemic around the world, he reminded us that "this crisis has taught us that we still need to learn much more about compassion. How can this crisis influence and shape us to make us more merciful and how can it make mercy that unique characteristic of Christian life?" He exemplified for those gathered that "crisis teaches Christian mercy." And, went on to say that mercy is not creating projects or strategies. It is an attitude of the heart..." This is the second convocation of Missionaries USA that Bishop Franz Peter joined us for the whole event. At the end of the convocation, Bishop shared with those gathered how happy the Pontifical Council is with all that is going on in the USA such as more missionaries being added to the USA missionaries and being at St. Meinrad for the second convocation.

**Day Two** all were treated too and honored to have Sister Norma Pimentel, MJ for a whole day. She is a true witness of God's compassion and mercy at the southern border. She also developed many positive relationships with border guards and government officials. As one border official said when he witnessed her presence among those being held in detention or processing centers, "thank you sister, you helped me see these people as human beings..."(with tears in his eyes). Sister shared her own journey with her parents to the U.S. and that her goal in life was to be a painter. In her witness and sharing of experiences, she painted for the missionaries not only an experience of anguish and tears, she also painted stories of hopeful experiences of those families who were welcomed into the U.S.

Sister focused on four areas in her presentation. *Welcome...*the immigrants experienced no welcome along their journey from their home country and at the U.S. border. As people of faith, we must first say welcome before we say anything else. When people arrived at the Casa Romero where people would be processed, people would shout out *Bienvenidos* with great applause before they proceeded with anything else. And, for many it was the first smiler on their faces in a long time. *Protect...*the immigrants from being taken advantage of in their journey. Trust in relationships is very important and they need authentic advocates for their request for asylum. *Support...*They have many basic needs.

For most, they have not had the opportunity to shower in days and most crossing the river have dried mud on their bodies. TLC is what all of those crossing the border seeking asylum need both bodily and emotionally. *Integrate...*those searching for light and hope need to be welcomed into a community of support to remove the fear and darkness in their lives. She concluded her presentations by sharing the implications of government policy decisions such as the policy to deter numbers coming to the border by separating children from their parents or making people wait in Mexico which can take months. She raised questions for the missionaries to reflect on at the tables and facilitated a wonderful exchange with all gathered. It is not wonder why Pope Francis, called for the sister working at the border in the famous video connection between the Vatican and a parish in Texas in anticipation of his trip to the U.S. and thanked her for her ministry. And, asked her to let all the sisters in the United States to know how grateful he is for all they do. She was affectionately known by the media thereafter as the “Pope’s favorite nun.”

The evening was a special gathering of all the missionaries to acknowledge the Corporal Works of Mercy. Missionaries Fr. Dave Caron and Fr. Jim Sichko coordinated an activity of preparing 600+ bags of needed supplies for people crossing the border or waiting on the other side in Mexico. All those present participated in ongoing walk throughs of packing the bags with much needed supplies.

**Day three-** The morning began with two presentations on the canonical implications for the mandate given to the Missionaries of Mercy. Fr. Anthony McLaughlin, JD, Judicial Vicar in the Diocese of Lexington gave very inspiring presentations. He focused on “nothing is more important than healing the excommunication of anyone.” He made clear for the missionaries that there is a clear distinction between absolution of sin and remission of penalties incurred in some sins. As Missionaries of Mercy, we are able to remove the penalties which he himself cannot do without going through all the procedures in going to Rome. However, one must also be aware of the imposed penalty and if they are not aware, there is no penalty to be removed. Throughout the presentation, he was being clear over and over again, that the “Law is pastoral in the life of the church.” In the end, it was clear from Father Anthony’s remark that nothing can be more urgent in our time than for one to be released of any impediment in their own healing process.

In our celebration of mass this day, one of our fellow missionaries was going to leave after mass because he had a scheduled heart procedure the following morning. Bishop Franz Peter anointed our brother and it was a moving experience for him and all those concelebrating. At this mass, Bishop also invited all missionaries to reaffirm their acceptance of the mandate of Pope Francis to be Missionaries of Mercy. There were also opportunities for brother missionaries to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The afternoon sessions began with a presentations given by Fathers Roger Landry and Dave Caron. The steering committee gave a green light to conduct a survey of Catholics who participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The report is over 300 pages. Both missionaries broke down all the responses and shared key insights gathered from all the information given.

**Day Four-** Members of the Steering Committee updated on next steps for Missionaries of Mercy USA including our invitation to go to Rome for Divine Mercy Weekend and

Convocation of Missionaries of Mercy, April 23-25, 2022. Arrangements are tentative at the moment, however we are looking to gather in Rome at the Pontifical North American College for a reception in the afternoon or evening. Fr. Roger Landry will also coordinate some special tours for those who have not had a chance to sightsee in Rome. Stay tuned for more on this as we get closer to our time in Rome.

One of the concerns raised was that approximately 10 missionaries cancelled out 1 or 2 days before convocation, which impacted the budget since it was too late to adapt arrangements with the retreat house. It is being proposed that a registration fee be added for future gatherings to offset these kinds of circumstances with a deadline for cancellations.

Our convocation ended with a closing mass with Archbishop Charles Thompson of Indianapolis. Following our custom of not meeting the year we meet in Rome, our next gathering of Missionaries USA would be in 2023. Dates are yet to be determined.