

# LIFE AND WONDERS



Christ the Priest

REGION

## INTRODUCTION

The task of telling the story of Christ the Priest Region fills me with joy and enthusiasm. The progress made since the United States was Zone 1 of the Apostleship of the Cross (AC) up to the present day is the story of real people, hardworking groups, and an environment that in many ways is both a CHALLENGE and a BLESSING. I want to tell this story, speaking sometimes in the first person.

## A LITTLE HISTORY

I do not know if there were groups of AC in El Campo, Texas when the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit (MSPS) were there from 1946-1961. I am sure that in 1973 there were already groups of AC in the parishes of St. Martha and Our Lady of Guadalupe in California. Later the work spread to northern California, when MSPS went to the Diocese of Fresno. Forging the way were Missionaries of the Holy Spirit José Ibarrola Grande, Carlos Furber, Pedro Vera, Salvador Carasa, Bishop José de Jesús Madera, and others. In Texas, the AC grew thanks to the enthusiasm of Ms. Josefa Ochoa, Ms. Angelica Chuck, Ms. Mary Marshall, Ms. Teresa Kocian, Mr. Samuel Ramirez (+), Fr. Antonio Armendariz, MSPS, and Fr. John Upton of the Archdiocese of Houston. Other groups were formed in other states of the union because of the enthusiasm that many of the laity and the Guadalupan Missionaries of the Holy Spirit had for the work. The Central Council organized all these into AC Zone 1 and celebrated the 1st Zone Assembly in December 2000.

The IX General Assembly of the AC, held in 2005 in Monterrey, NL, Mexico, opened the way for something new: it approved AC Vision 2020 and set us on the path for the ongoing pursuit of solidarity with our fellow travelers, following the example of the Good Samaritan. To follow up on this, the Central Council of AC and the General and Provincial Councils of MSPS held a special meeting in February 2007, in which they stated: "The Apostleship of the Cross and the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit are two distinct Works, sharing a common charism, mission and history."<sup>1</sup> That document speaks for the first time of "Regions" and "Regional Councils"<sup>2</sup> and paves the way for the formation of these regions and their structure and function: "The Zones will follow the Regional Council of the Apostleship of the Cross, adapting to the organization of the region, without losing the essentials that give identity to AC." This organizational framework was consolidated at the second meeting of this same group in 2008.<sup>3</sup>

The Council of Christ the Priest Province met with the Central Council Feb 1-3, 2008 to present the state of the province and to spell out its plan for implementing the AC vision.<sup>4</sup> A few days later, from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> of the same month, Zone 1 had its assembly in Cerritos, CA, USA.<sup>5</sup> Here we studied the document *Relations between Christ the Priest Province and the Apostleship of the Cross*, in which

<sup>1</sup> First Document about the Relationship between the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit and the Apostleship of the Cross, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Idem., 4, 5 y 6.

<sup>3</sup> Second Document about the Relationship between the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit and the Apostleship of the Cross

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Central Council Minutes 188, pages 12-16 and Minutes 189, pages. 8-16.

<sup>5</sup> Invitation to the Fourth Assembly of the AC signed by Fr. Roberto Saldívar, MSPS.

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the state of the AC and MSps in the USA was addressed and some commitments were made that have since guided our journey. One of the most important was that all groups in the United States would belong to Christ the Priest Region. These were the first steps in organizing what would become the Regional Council.

## PROFILE OF CHRIST THE PRIEST REGION

### a. Distances

In the meetings just mentioned it was determined that the new region would include the entire United States. Soon we began to see that, between California and Florida, Washington and New York, Oregon and Texas, distances were so great that we needed to organize by geographic areas. Thus the three areas were established that are currently the geographical structure of our region.

The Northwest Area is comprised of groups in the states of Oregon and Washington: Mount Angel, Portland, Bothell, Kirkland, and Vancouver.

The Southwest Area is California: Chula Vista, Downey, Huntington Park, and Modesto.

The South-Northeast Area consists of groups in the states of Texas, Florida and New York: El Paso, San Antonio, Houston, Miami, Jacksonville, and Babylon.<sup>6</sup>

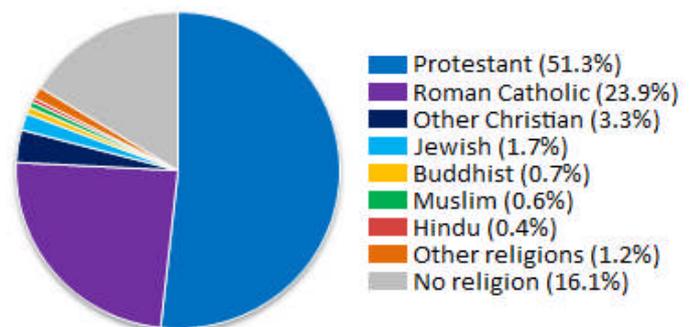
Although the distances are great and the difficulty of monitoring groups is evident, the Regional Council seeks to meet the challenge and the commitments made at the General Assembly of Cerritos, CA. Thus, in each of the areas there is one lay representative and one Missionary of the Holy Spirit representative who are entrusted with

the mission: "to promote unity in the area they serve and to represent the interests of the Area in the Regional Council and vice versa."<sup>7</sup>

### b. The numbers, the social and cultural diversity

Living the Spirituality of the Cross in following Jesus is a challenge anywhere in the world since all of us are burdened with the cross from the womb to our last breath. This difficulty, which is a Gospel call, becomes a greater challenge in the USA. Here are some facts that illuminate the situation facing our AC groups. The first graph presents the percentages of religious affiliations in the USA. You will notice the mixture of religions in which we live!

Moreover, the map of the nation shows the Catholic presence by state. As you can see, our groups develop in a difficult religious situation where Catholics are always the minority. It takes a strong personal and group cohesion and a profound faith to persevere as Apostles of the Cross and carry the message to others. Graphic 1 and 2.

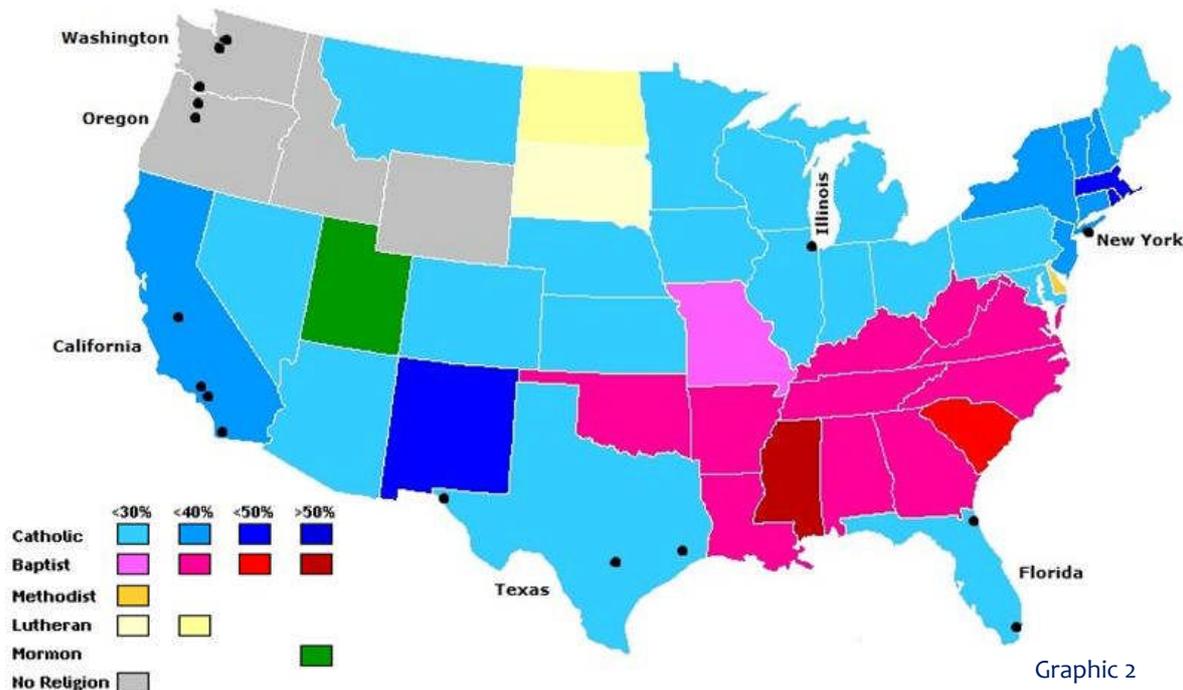


Graphic 1

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Christ the Priest Region, Booklet 5, *Organization, Association and Administration at the Local Level and the Regional Level*. October 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Idem, p. 26.

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Graphic 2

## WHO BELONGS TO OUR APOSTLESHIP OF THE CROSS?

Last year we conducted a survey among all groups to collect data on history, membership, organization, etc.<sup>8</sup> Here is some of that information:

- We have 298 integral commitment members and 90 fundamental commitment members. Of these 388 members, 60 speak only English. There are 15 centers divided into 45 groups of which 7 are English speaking.
- In the groups of our region, multicultural assets and challenges are both great. According to the survey, we have members from the following countries: the United States, Mexico, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Poland, Greece, the Philippines, Japan, Vietnam, and some African countries. A number of these members are

first-generation immigrants with all that that entails.

As you can see, the challenges and the blessings we have in the region are considerable; among other things, it is necessary to work in small communities to foster relationships. Multiculturalism is an immense asset to further the message that has been entrusted to us. The situation of immigrants who are in a nation full of social and economic difficulties results in them living the commitment of the cross profoundly every day.

## CELEBRATING OUR IDENTITY AND LIVING OUR FAITH

### a. Formation and Community

Many of our groups hold weekly meetings with prayer and training. A number of participants have a ministry within the Church, either in the parish or in connection with one of the MSpS houses of formation. The presence of MSpS in Southern California and Oregon provides that the Northwest

<sup>8</sup> The complete information will be published in Booklet 1, *An overall view of the Christ the Priest Region*.

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and Southwest areas have well attended retreats in preparation for Advent and Pentecost. Houston groups have been working hard and often have conferences and retreats with the help of some MSpS. Recently, the Regional Council decided to provide some funds to help smaller and remote groups with some of these services.

The Northwest Area reports: “The Second Regional Congress of the AC was held September 15, 2012 in St. John the Evangelist Parish in Vancouver, Washington. About 180 people joined us for this event. The conference theme was: Mary: Our Example of the Priestly Attitude. The Congress was presented bilingually.”

The Southwest Area recently held a Congress entitled: Biblical Foundation of the Spirituality of the Cross. Father Jaime M. Francisco Reyes, OSB came from Puerto Rico. The conference took place at St. Martha Parish in Huntington Park, CA. It had broad participation and bore much fruit. In addition, the area organized a workshop on the Chain of Love and participated in the annual meeting of the Family of the Cross in Modesto.

Several Missionaries of the Holy Spirit visited Houston in 2012 and presented various topics in English and Spanish. Presenters included Frs. Alejandro González Ibarra, Armando Moreno, José de Jesús Sánchez, Hugo Maese, and Bishop José de Jesús Madera. A new impetus is emerging in this area with the presence of our brother Gustavo Garcia-Siller, MSpS, Archbishop of San Antonio.

### **b. Social advocacy**

The variety of these activities is in tune with the lifestyle of the United States, the people who

make up our groups, and the way they relate to the formation houses of MSpS. Following the country's cultural style, the groups have participated in the March against Hunger, walks to raise money for ALS patients, demonstrations for the rights of religious freedom, marches in support of life, and have offered assistance to the victims of Hurricane Sandy, etc. Photo 1 and 2.



Photo 1

San Bernardino, CA. Walk to raise money for ALS patients



Photo 2

San Francisco, CA. March in support of life

There are also many activities that remain, as the Gospel says, in the silent encounter with the heavenly Father, for example, solidarity between migrants, help for one who does not have

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immigration papers in order, taking care of little ones so the parents can earn their daily bread, care of the sick and the elderly who are in nursing homes, helping the formation houses, etc.

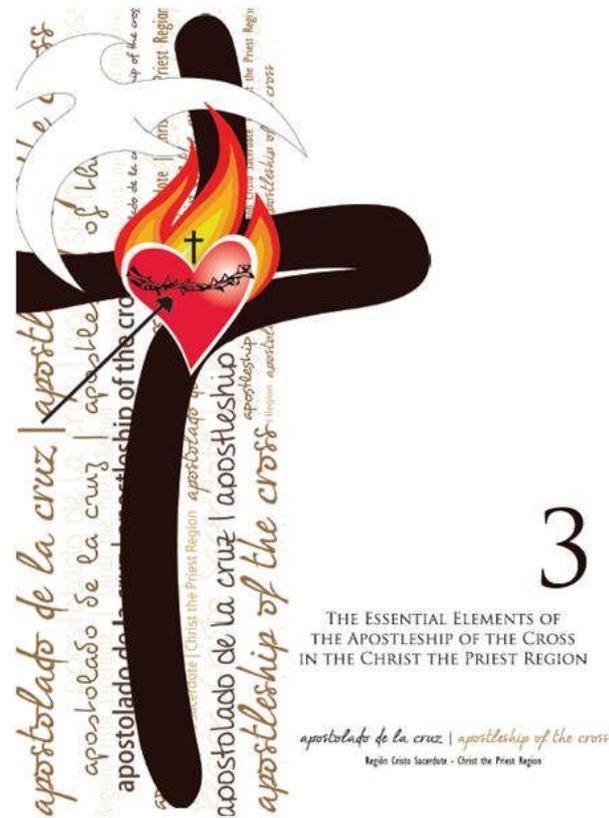


Illustration a. Booklets cover.  
Designed by Lucero Castañeda, LDG

## FUTURE PROJECTS IN OUR REGION

I want to conclude by telling you about a project that will unify our region. This is the publication of six booklets of information and training that will help us take a step forward.

They will discuss the history of the work, the essential elements of the AC, holistic formation, the organization of the Region, and methods of expansion and growth. Illustration a.

## THANKS

Thanks to the Emmaus Pilgrim at our side who urges us to proclaim the Good News of Love Crucified and Risen. Please keep us in your prayers!

By Fr. Domenico Di Raimondo, MSPS



Edited by Maureen Okerstrom and Nancy J. Bowman Holt

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