



AROUND OUR SSCC PARISHES

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**Cahiers of Spirituality - n° 26
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Cover photo: Celebration at St Gabriel's Parish in Paris.

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INTRODUCTION

Regarding pastoral and missionary conversion, the 39th General Chapter invited us to the following at a parish level:

“That parishes incarnate the charism of the Congregation – according to their own reality - and be animated by the missionary spirit of our founders. In so doing, the parishes will communicate the faith, practice mercy and justice, deepen the reparative sense of Eucharistic adoration, and promote ecumenical, interreligious or intercultural dialogue.”

In this *Cahier*, with the help of our SSCC brothers and sisters who have generously shared their experience of ministry, we hope to broaden the understanding of parish ministry from different perspectives, places and experiences.

May this work help stimulate our reflection and advance the implementation of this pastoral and missionary conversion to which the Church and the Congregation invite us.

A NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH

Susana Dumrauf Díaz ssc (Chile)

This is not the first time that our Church has experienced a crisis. History shows us that the situation faced by the first Christian communities was very similar to that of today. We are living in a globalised world, with a worldly spirituality, marked by free trade, with uniform laws that placed heavy burdens on people dominated by the Empire.

In such a historical context the Church carried forward a process of transformation based on love, embodying the values of the Kingdom announced by Jesus Christ and underpinned by a dynamic ecclesiological understanding. The Church was not so tied to rigid structures or based on roles and positions. On the contrary, flexible gifts and ministries predominated when it came to functioning as part of the body of Christ.

Today the new reform, encouraged by Pope Francis in the face of the crisis in the Church, speaks to us of a new opportunity, of a gift of the Spirit, who with infinite creativity, is beginning to untie complex and impenetrable knots in which we have been entangled for centuries.

Something new is emerging, can you not see it?

Transformation processes, we know, are slow. But they have a common factor: in many places and simultaneously, small common shoots are beginning to appear. We, the sisters of the Chile-Paraguay Territory, are having a new experience, which, although not unique in the world, is still rare. One of our religious communities has been leading a parish in southern Chile since 2021.

The initiative came directly from brother Sergio Pérez de Arce ssc, the Bishop of the diocese of Chillán, who proposed to the Congregation the possibility of taking over the parish of “San José de Pemuco”, in the VIII Region of the country. After a long discernment, the Territory responded positively and three sisters: Valentina Pérez, Adriana Salinas and I, were designated for this mission.

Thus, on the 4th of July 2021, in an emotional celebration, before the Bishop of the Diocese, the inauguration of the parish took place with the handing over of the keys of the church. From that day we took on this new challenge and, although the task was carried out as a community, I was designated as “responsible for the parish”, exercising in practice the functions of a parish priest, except for those that require presbyteral character, for which we have the collaboration of the priests from the neighbouring parish of Carmen.

The words of our brother bishop at the handover ceremony are still fresh in my mind:

“The uniqueness of this change in the leadership of the parish is that it is not taken over by a priest, as is usual, but by a religious community. This is motivated by the lack of priests, but also by the need to be creative in the care of our parishes. Everywhere we must look for new ways; more co-responsible, missionary, synodal ways. Here, undoubtedly, there is an additional element, it assumes a female religious community, which reminds us of a fundamental challenge for the Church today: to ask ourselves about the role of religious women in the Church. It does not mean that we postulate that they should take over parishes here and there, or replace priests in any task, but that we should look together for ways to make ourselves more co-responsible in the Church, with the contribution of all, men and women, ordained ministers, and lay people”.

Moving out of the comfort zone: the surprises of God

We were at our usual Wednesday community meeting, when the superior of the community shared with us about a letter sent by our brother Bishop with the new proposal to take on the responsibility of a parish. She also said that we would start a discernment process and asked us to pray for this. My heart was filled with joy. I closed my eyes for a moment and

imagined this mission. I took a breath and said to myself: "What's stopping us from going?"

A few months later, and when it was announced that we had accepted the proposal, the idea was still going around in my head and in my heart. At that time, I was part of the Pastoral Team at Liceo Ntra. Sra. de la Paz, a government-subsidised school in Viña del Mar. I had been there for 4 years, and I was very happy with the work and with the lay people I was working with. In a way, I was in my comfort zone: why leave then?

It was then, during an occasional chat with a sister, that she told me that she was excited about the new mission and that she had offered to go. My heart was moved again, and I said to her without knowing how: "I would like to go too. I think it is a great opportunity for the Congregation." Saying that marked my future. And after much prayer: I also offered to go.

In 2021, during the pandemic, the strategies of the pastoral care in the lyceum had to be reviewed again. It was then, through Irene Arias ssc, Superior of the Territory, that I learned that I would be part of the community that was going Pemuco. It was on the 8th of March, International Women's Day, when the Lord was asking me to do something new. And I accepted without knowing much about what awaited me.

Two-fold joy

The history of Christianity, the shaping of its communities and the maintenance of its structures could not be understood without the participation of women. Women have participated in the history, narratives, daily life, and many varied expressions of Christianity within the different churches, and even represented the largest number of attendees at church services and the population that provides the most care and services.

However, it is not because our attendance and participation are significant that there is recognition or an exercise of an equality within the religious field. On the contrary, this majority participation should not be confused with the exercise of rights won within the religious field, as it is essential to review the type of positions that women occupy, the responsibilities given to us, what we have been subjected to and, of course, the internal power relationships in which we are immersed. All of the above offers a panorama in which it is impossible to deny the profound inequality that is hidden under arguments of religious tradition.

Here we must recognise that Pope Francis has shown clear signs of change. One of the Pope's videos is dedicated to the mission of religious and consecrated women. In a message in which he considers us vital to the life of the Church, Pope Francis exhorts us to “continue working and engaging in advocacy with the poor, with the marginalised, with all those who are enslaved by traffickers”.

It is also recognised that religious are often unjustly treated (even within the Church), and we are encouraged to continue the apostolic ministries that we carry out and to pray that we may continue to find new responses to the challenges of the present time. “This makes us feel, as consecrated women, very encouraged and called to continue with courage and joy in our mission of witnessing to the beauty of consecration: to give ourselves totally for the Kingdom after the example of Jesus”, as expressed by the president of the UISG, Jolanta Kafka.

As a community of Sacred Hearts Sisters, our joy is twofold when we discover that the Apostolic Plan of the Congregation, fruit of the last 2018 General Chapter, also includes among its 5 fundamental priorities the role of women. Moved by the Spirit, if we encourage ourselves to be protagonists of this renewal in our Church, other women will also be encouraged.

A New Call

Although I was able to accompany Adriana and Valentina on their first trip to Pemuco on the 19th of March, I was only visiting them. They would join the community of El Carmen, which is 5 kilometres away from the new community, to coordinate from there the preparation and arrangements of the future community.

I had my first contact with Pemuco only two months later. The parish house where we would live was still not finished, despite the efforts of the sisters. The pandemic, with its diffi-

culty in buying materials, and the details that were appearing day by day, meant that this stage was prolonged.

During a week's stay - back in May 2021 - I was able for the first time to learn more about this mission that the Lord was entrusting to us. We had a meeting with our brother Bishop, Sergio Pérez de Arce, who told us more details about the future mission and the responsibilities we would assume. I think it was there that I became aware for the first time of the great step we were about to take. And I felt challenged, by this new experience and even more so when, after a long conversation with the sisters, we began to talk about who would be in responsible for the parish. I sensed that a new call had been given.

More questions than responses: we are on the way

The parish has about 8500 inhabitants, 13 active parish groups, 16 rural and 5 urban communities, scattered over 560 square kilometres. Among its responsibilities is the administration of the only cemetery in the village and the rebuilding of the central church, which was seriously damaged after the earthquake of 2010.

The first months have passed by since we took over the Parish "San José" in Pemuco, but to me it seems like many more. Maybe it is because when God gives us new challenges, our awareness of time is heightened.

During this time, we have experienced very beautiful things that our hearts are still processing and complex situations that will require further reflection before we can give an answer. The parishioners have been very affectionate towards us and little by little we are getting closer to a rural reality that has suffered, but which still has many dreams of greater opportunities, more equality, justice and participation, which in practice can be few when one lives far from the big cities. To this must be added the context wherein the macho culture predominates, and we have a Diocesan Church that has suffered the onslaught of abuse and the departure of a not insignificant number of priests.

As a Sacred Hearts community, we have made our first approaches to the different pastoral ministries of the parish, to the rural and urban communities, to the situation in general. For this purpose, we have jointly defined some roles and responsibilities. All the groups have been activated, including the Pastoral Council and the Economic Council, which had not functioned for a long time, the secretariat has been implemented with new technology in order to modernise the administrative management processes, the state of the Cemetery, which for years was unsupervised, is being reviewed and steps have been taken to find out the progress of the project for the reconstruction of the church which was damaged by the earthquake of 2010. We have also experienced many Eucharistic celebrations both in the town and in the rural areas, we have shared times of adoration, beautiful processions, visits to the sick, we have had long conversations with the people and listened to them. Baptisms and

prayers for the dead have been the order of the day. And I have had the opportunity to participate in some presbyteral meetings, being one of the two women who have access to them. There, as well as in the monthly deanery meetings, we share the life of the Church in general and we also have formative instances, especially on the theme of synodality and the Guidelines for the exercise of service in the Church.

To say that I feel empowered in my role as parish leader would be a deception, but what I cannot deny is how the Lord has been transforming my outlook. I perceive - even amid the darkness - that this responsibility has meant being in a space of learning, of active listening, of much humility and patience. I am discovering little by little how lay people do things, what moves them, what is the meaning of doing things in this way. A time to keep looking, to ask questions again and again, to get to know the reality and the idiosyncrasies of the people of Pemuca.

I am also eager to discover, in the light of the Word and today's reality, what kind of leadership we need today. Perhaps it is something more like being rather than commanding, accompanying rather than directing, being involved rather than watching from the balcony, leaving our feminine mark of greater mercy, tenderness, and closeness, as we have outlined in our Community Project. In this way the Spirit will weave new relationships among us, consecrated women, and the community that has been entrusted to us as we take steps towards the much dreamed of synodality that these times call for.

We need to restore freshness to the Gospel

And in this, as people of God, all the baptised are invited to contribute with our gifts and talents to live a new way of being Church. Lord, you know that you can count on me!

SHEPHERDING THE SHEEP AND GROWING AS A PASTOR

Sudhir Nayak ssc (India)

In accordance with the plan of the Congregation in India to establish its first parochial ministry, I have worked as a pioneer brother for twelve years (May 2008 to November 2020) in a bifurcated area belonging to St. Patrick's Parish in the northern suburbs of the metropolitan city of Kolkata. The area consisted of around 200 catholic families that were deprived of adequate pastoral care due to the distance to their mother parish. We began the ministry with a temporary setup of board and lodging with the Christian Brothers, making their school chapel a place of worship and pastoral animation. Eventually this mission was given the canonical status of a quasi-parish and came to be known as St. Damien of Molokai Parish having in view the fact that it would become a fully-pledged parish as and when the new church would be built.

The parish community is made up of mainly Bengali and Hindi Tribal communities with a few other families from other states of India. It is a multi-cultural parish community in the midst of dominantly Hindu location. I worked with the people with the aim of establishing a new parish by creating a parish

infrastructure that included a new church. There were many cherished moments and at the same time many challenges. Even today as I write this article, my heart is in pain as, due to some difficulties, the people still do not have a parish church after setting out on a journey that started many years ago. So, I share in the pain of the people, surrendering this to the will of God. These years of engagement as a pastor have taught me many lessons on faith, life and Christian discipleship as a religious and priest. What I write in this article is not a discourse but it is my learnings from my own experiences and my convictions that I have arrived at after many years of working as a pastor.

Pastors are not born but they become such as they die to themselves daily in service of the flock of sheep entrusted to their care and with whom they share their lives. In dying to self, through the mystery of God's grace and providence, the pastor continues to sprout and grow while no one is watching like the seeds that the farmer sowed in the field (Mark 4:27) and which produce much fruit like a seed when it falls to the ground (John 12:24). One becomes a pastor by leading the flock to good pasture, in nursing their wounds, in searching for the lost sheep, by protecting them from all harm and keeping them all together as one flock. While one fulfils his vocation of being a pastor through one's daily crosses, the actual completion of his vocation happens on the cross when he unites himself with the supreme pastor, Jesus Christ, in his oblation of life. In his union with God through prayer and a life of holiness, he incarnates the grace of the supreme pastor into the lives of the people of God.

As I began my pastoral ministry at Dum Dum in Kolkata (India), there were some basic reminders that I had to keep in my mind: first, I am a small part in the mission of God and am participating in the mission of the supreme pastor Jesus Christ in the name of the local church and of the congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (SSCC). Second, the ministry is a plan of God that is discerned by the community and the local church. Third, I am not alone in this mission but there are people with whom I must work. God has His plans, and so does the Congregation and the local church. I needed to stay focused and committed to this plan. From the beginning, together with the faithful, we set our goal of constructing St. Damien of Molokai Church, a new parish church and St. Damien as the patron and the model of spirituality and pastoral life.

Pastoring the flock of Christ is not a profession. It is a way of life that involves the total being of one's interior and exterior self. Like many priests in the modern world, I started my pastoral work with a conscious effort to follow the path of professionalism in management with a clear instruction and direction. As I encountered the realities of the people, I realized that the flock of Christ does not need a manager but a shepherd whose pillars of professionalism are caring and loving with mercy, compassion and forgiveness which is exactly what Jesus meant when he asked his disciples to be perfect like the Father (Matthew 5:48). Since pastoring involves both the interior and exterior life, in the sense of interior self, the pastor embraces the path of self-detachment by rising above himself and making God

the source and centre of pastoral ministry, and in the sense of exterior self, he frees himself from the rigidity of legal, structural and secular management models of human resources and ministry. Then, he follows the path of spiritual leadership that is modelled by the Good Shepherd. A pastor constantly forms his interior self in the virtues of Christ in order to manifest them in his exterior self so as to witness to the characters of the Good Shepherd among the people of God whom he serves. By such a presence he nourishes the people and leads them to God.

The path of the Good Shepherd model of spiritual leadership, can be captured by two salient features such as, first, being One with the flock so as to build the community, and second, being a Servant for the flock so as to build solidarity network. These two features are the pillars of the spiritual leadership model which find their foundation in Jesus' proclamation of himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), in his Commandment of Love (John 13:34) and in the exemplified Christian living of the First Christian Community (Acts 2:42-47).

Being One with the Flock

Being one with the flock is the first pillar in shepherding the people of God. This is rooted in the desire of Christ that we may be one (John 17:21). It is the earnest desire of Jesus that his flock be one in heart and soul (Acts 2:32) as one body in one spirit (Ephesians 4:4). Thus, a pastor being one with the flock involves the whole self – the body, the heart and the spirit. The union of body, heart and spirit is achieved and strengthened by

acceptance, belongingness and a sense of fraternity beyond the social lines of separation. Many parish communities get divided on the basis of language and other social identities. I learned the languages of the community and had to consciously play the role of a pastor without giving into the temptation of associating myself with one group over the others. My conviction was that a pastor must unite and never divide people. It is in the sense of communion that we become a sacramental sign among the faithful bringing together sacramental and social life through faith and action.

To be one with the flock, a pastor must be a person of integrity and holiness exemplifying these virtues of living, interaction and actions in such a way that he keeps himself above any suspicion. A pastor is not a scribe or a pharisee but is a priest in the name of the High Priest; therefore, he is to maintain the dignity of the seat where one is seated with a mandate to draw people to obedience to God's will and to set an example after himself (Matthew 23:1). His life of integrity and holiness opens up the door for an intimate grace experience with God and a profound spiritual encounter with His people. This empowers him with moral authority to be a model and example for his people. The people of God look up to their pastor, model their lives after him and discern the will of God in their lives with his help; therefore, he needs to possess integrity and holiness which he shows in his simplicity of attitude and life-style. A pastor who possesses simplicity draws people easily to his heart.

A pastor must exercise a great sense of control over his emotions with prudence and patience. The altar and the pulpit are sacred spaces where God reveals himself through his words and is made flesh for the salvation of the humanity. These sacred spaces should never become a podium for self-expression of a priest's egoistic behaviour. Therefore, they are not the places to throw one's rancorous emotions and words towards the people. A pastor is a teacher – teacher of faith and Christian living – and not someone who thinks, 'I have to teach them a lesson'. This vengeful attitude leads one to an extreme rigidity in adhering to the law and eventually to misuse of one's power. It is a serious obstacle in the path of unity which Jesus desires for us and is an utter failure in the path of perfecting oneself like the heavenly Father (Matthew 5:48).

In order to augment acceptance, belongingness and a sense of fraternity among the people, several social and religious events were organized throughout the year for children, youth, the women, the parents, etc. These occasions bring us together, unite us and teach us lessons of community building. Principles of inclusiveness were adopted to encourage participation. Similarly, in organizing such events, with sensitivity, we needed to avoid anything that would be offensive to any particular section of people. Planning of such events and other matters of the parish life was done together with the people paying attention to their opinions and feedback. Trusting people is vital in working together with them. I have found fulfilment and joy in

working with the youth and the leaders of the parish who were extremely committed and cooperative.

On a practical level, speaking the language of the people in order to understand and respect their human conditions and social expressions and participating in their lives by sharing whole-heartedly in their joys and sorrows are foundational to being one with the flock. In every formal and informal interaction with the faithful, it is necessary to be respectful, sensitive and moderate. As much as a pastor likes to talk, it is equally important to listen to the people. When we give time to listen to the flock especially in times of desperation, we experience the miracle of the Lord. During these years of service, as I listened with a sincere heart, I met several persons who averted suicide and started living a life with hope and courage. I could not understand the mystery as I did nothing except to listen to them and hold them up to the Lord in my prayers.

Without waiting for the people to come to us, it is important for the pastor to go to them. For this reason, family visits are a central part in the animation of pastoral life wherein there is prayer, sharing, and faith instruction touching upon the specific situations and needs of the family. Just as God incarnated into the world, it is an experience of the incarnation for the family as the pastor is present among them listening to their life's stories, praying and giving them instructions on faith. This family-based-model of accompaniment is necessary, on one hand, for strength-

ening families in faith and on the other hand, it is an occasion for the pastor to be enriched and transformed by the family stories of the faithful. The Pastor becomes one with the flock, when he allows the stories of the faithful to penetrate into his heart so as to be transformed by them. Since every family visit is done in the name of Christ, to be vested as his minister is as important as the internal disposition of a pastor. I wore my religious habit for every family visit which reminded me of who I am and avoided any unwanted judgement by onlookers. It helped to create an atmosphere of a distinct moment in the homes I visited. Naturally, we were led into mutual respect, trust, openness, sharing and prayer. When the neighbours of other faith saw me with my religious habit and recognized me as a priest, they paid their respect to me and, in many occasions, they asked for blessings and invited me over to their houses to bless their homes as well which in turn brought about harmony among the people in their neighbourhoods and became a means of witnessing the faith in the context of religious pluralism.

Being a Servant for the Flock

Love binds community. When love is translated into action of charity and solidarity, it nourishes and sustains the community. The first Christian Community maintained unity of heart and mind, they prayed together and worshipped God, they gave up their possessions and committed themselves to mutual support. They have left for us a model of a solidarity network for the Christian community. From faith they moved into action

of love and charity incarnating the message of Christ. In the context of this community of faithful with diverse socio-economic conditions and numerous challenges of social evil, only a solidarity network can empower them to carry on their life. When the community is one in mind and heart, it is easy to move into the dimension of building a solidarity network among the faithful. Indeed, the message of the love for God and for the neighbour is incarnated into being one community resulting in the creation of a solidarity network in sacrifice and charity. This is the second pillar in the spiritual leadership model of shepherding the people of God.

A pastor is a servant and is a key-player in building a solidarity network by an exemplary life-style and virtues of sacrifice and charity. Being a servant is intrinsic to the life of a pastor who is commissioned to serve and take care of the flock with sacramental and pastoral service. While sacramental services are crystal clear to understand, pastoral service has no limit but is guided by the principle of “good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over” (Luke 6:38). While the sacramental service is an expression of the pastor’s deep faith and love of God which he must perform with the most diligence and self-giving, pastoral care and social ministry is a charitable oblation of himself for the love of the neighbour. While sacramental service draws him out of himself and leads him towards God, pastoral care and social ministry draws him out of himself and directs him towards the people of God. This two-fold service

of a pastor frees him from his self-centeredness to direct himself towards God and His people.

In assessing the pastoral ministry, we can easily get trapped by a business-model of input and output, gain and loss and having and not having resources. While that is a great model for business, it is not the spiritual wisdom for a pastor to look at his work in that way. He is rather called to work as a labourer relying on the promises of the Lord (1 Timothy 5:18 & Luke 10:7). I was haunted with this question so often as the project involved financial investment for land and construction. What led me forward was the trust and faith in the Lord for I believed that if we give ourselves to God, God will bless us with what is required for his mission. Christ's mission is fulfilled not by our plentiful resources but by our trust and surrender to his providence. Though many thought I was stupid because of this stand of mine, I chose to remain trusting and surrendering.

People face many social problems varying from basic dignified living, relational and socio-economic issues to social injustice and exploitation. The Pastor is the pillar of strength in the midst of these problems for his people. As many people came to me with their problems, helplessly but with sincerity, I listened to them. While some problems were solvable, there were other problems that were beyond my reach. However, we never gave up. What people expect is not always a solution from you but that you stand sincerely with them during the struggles of their life. More often, this reality required me to go out of my

way especially in some of the legal battles of the people in the face of human rights violations and social injustice by the powerful. We reached out to a good number of professionals for their help and as they came into the loop of our solidarity network, we were able to overcome many problems. As a pastor we should not allow ourselves to be trampled under the feet of the problems of the people. When someone came to me with problems, I took him/her as sent by God “so that his works maybe revealed” (John 9:3). Indeed, the so-called problems are the opportunities for a pastor to test his trust in the providential Father, to excel in his life of sacrifice and charity and finally to bring glory to God. If we ignore the problems of the people and act indifferent towards their problems, at a proper time we may find ourselves asking, like the accursed, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” (Matthew 25:44).

Every learning comes through a process of many failures. These learnings were instrumental in transforming me interiorly and in serving more effectively as a pastor. After many years of experience as a pastor, I have come closer to God and grown in faith. I have learned to serve God’s will instead of mine; to put people first and not myself; to learn from their simplicity, innocence and ignorance and not to take advantage of their conditions; to teach by being an example and not by mere words; people are the source of the greatest joy in pastoral service; people will support and challenge; gaining what is good for others is more important than gaining what I desire; and

perseverance is the way because God does not give up on me. I sincerely acknowledge my failures because through them I have learned and grown.

These have been the learnings and convictions for me as a pastor though I am still far from perfection. I have received immeasurable love from the people which is the only treasure I possess today. I conclude this reflection with a debt of gratitude to God and to the many people who have walked with me during this wonderful journey of pastoral life.

PAROCHIAL MINISTRY WITH MIGRANTS IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY OF TEXAS, U.S.A.

Robert Charlton ssc (USA)

Four years ago, in 2019, on Palm Sunday night, I received a call from Sister Norma Pimental, the director of the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas Catholic Charities. On behalf of Bishop Flores, she asked if Queen of Peace parish could offer hospitality to migrants crossing the Rio Grande River from Mexico into the United States. I immediately responded “yes” and then asked “when?” She responded “tomorrow.”

Here in the City of Harlingen, separated from Mexico by the Rio Grande River, there was an urgent need to do something. The U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) had been detaining migrants in overcrowded facilities for months. Federal resources were overwhelmed: accommodation, food, hygiene, and medical attention were all in short supply. As a result, CBP began delivering migrants to the City bus terminal. They did so without giving the migrants the opportunity to shower or properly eat. Nor were they given guidance regarding their rights as legally released migrants nor assistance with transportation arrange-

ments. Nor did the CBP notify the City of its actions. Nothing was coordinated. All of this was happening under the radar. Then employees at Loaves and Fishes (the City sponsored homeless shelter) noticed the new and growing activity at the bus terminal. They began inviting the migrants to their facility. There they received their first nutritious meal in weeks, showered and were given clean clothing. Overwhelmed, Loaves and Fishes contacted Bishop Flores who contacted Sister Norma who contacted Queen of Peace.

This was the sudden beginning of our ministry to migrants. Our first step designated the parish hall as the site for housing our guests. Fortunately, a support network was already in place. As head of Catholic Charities, Sister Norma had many resources at her disposal. She had been quietly building a collaborative network of government and non-government agencies to respond to the border crisis. On Monday of Holy Week, cots and blankets began to arrive from the American Red Cross, Loaves and Fishes loaned us their mobile shower unit, and workers from Catholic Charities arrived to tutor us in migrant hospitality: migrant registration, legal advice, and transportation arrangements.

The City of Harlingen also helped. The City agreed to a more frequent police presence on the parish campus and the gift of a dumpster to help manage the very large amount of trash we started generating. We transformed our parish hall into a reception center and hostel. What we lacked was parishioner volunteers.

This transformation from Palm Sunday to Holy Week Monday was so sudden there had been no opportunity to consult or otherwise notify the parish. Monday morning we began a series of telephone calls to every parish organization asking them to help with this effort. By Monday afternoon, we had approximately 50 volunteers who offered to prepare meals, clean the premises, register and transport our guests. Two immigration attorneys offered their services pro bono. An hour later, 70 guests arrived. They had been detained with CBP for more than a month in cramped and unsanitary conditions. Now, according to one guest, they experienced luxury.

Perhaps it did have a certain luxurious quality. Despite my instruction to prepare the same menu daily, the volunteer chefs insisted on making their favourite dishes. A retired hairdresser offered to give haircuts. Her work was superb. Some of the youth looked worthy of a fashion magazine. Parishioners donated fine, used – and sometimes – new clothing and a large quantity of personal care and hygiene products. The parish campus is largely green and well treed. After their long confinement, our guests had the pleasure of being freely outdoors. After we learned the registration and transportation skills, our volunteers replaced the Catholic Charities paid staff.

Our first ministry to migrants continued unabated from Holy Week Monday until the day after Pentecost 2019. We received 50-70 migrants daily. They were single men and women, some with dependent children, some pregnant, some with infants at

the breast. Most stayed with us only overnight. It was a full-blown Holy Week-Easter-Pentecost blessing for us. Throughout, our volunteers served daily and befriended our brothers and sisters from south of the border.

This is not to say that all of our parishioners agreed with what we were doing. For some Latino and Anglo parishioners and citizens there is a deep-seated prejudice against immigrants. There is a certain irony in this. Most people in the Rio Grande Valley are of Mexican descent. A few of the families here received their land from the Spanish kings. Some have lived here since before the Mexican-American War of 1848. However, for most, their grandparents and great grandparents immigrated to Texas. Some of our elderly migrated with their parents as they planted and harvested crops in the United States. Still, the prejudice is present and sometimes tangible. Queen of Peace is in this cultural mix. Some parishioners disagreed strongly enough to leave the parish because of what we were doing.

Four years ago, the political rhetoric against migrants was intense. Many politicians described the migrants as lazy, criminals, rapists, and carriers of deadly diseases. Politicians stoked peoples' fears and fostered, in many, an uninhibited xenophobia. Were it not for the leadership and steadfast commitment to Christian charity demonstrated by the Diocese and the good reputation of Bishop Flores and Sister Norma, a challenging humanitarian crisis could have been very ugly. Fortunately, 85% of the border population is at least nominally Catholic. Bishop, Sister, and the

Catholic community had a hearing and tempered the worst reactions.

We didn't begin this ministry in the best way. Ideally, we would have had time to consult with the parish pastoral council and properly notify the parish community. Because the need was so urgent, we had to start immediately. Circumstances forced us to put the cart before the horse. We extended our hospitality and then sought endorsement and support. While acting immediately was the right thing to do, it felt like we'd done it in the wrong way. This made the Triduum and Easter weekend a bit tense. The parish was a bit on edge. The Easter Sunday homily gave way to the apologetics for what we had already started doing.

As calm ensued, another call to service presented itself. In our neighboring city of San Benito, the Federal government contracted for the care of unaccompanied minors. Two centers, detained minors until authorities could determine that the final destination for each of the youth was safe. This required the cooperation of child protection agencies in many states. Each facility accommodated approximately 200 minors. While in detention, the youth were able to be in communication with their families at home and in the United States, attend in-house school, study English, receive thorough medical and dental care, nutritious meals, counselling, and exercise. Upon assignment from Bishop Flores, Queen of Peace deacons began Sunday services at these facilities. Eventually, the priests from Queen of Peace

visited regularly for Sunday Mass and Friday Confessions. Because of this relationship, Queen of Peace was able to host an Advent Posada for the residents. Parishioners donated food for the event, music and Christmas gifts for each of 90 youths attending. Another 300 gifts were delivered directly to the detention centers. Some critical parishioners suggested that, the following Christmas season, we should solicit gifts for our own poor neighbours.

For more than four consecutive months, Queen of Peace offered hospitality and pastoral care to our guests. Suddenly, the need for our parish hall abated but not for long. On two other occasions, Queen of Peace offered the same services but only for a month at a time. By then, Trump was president and he implemented Title 42. Title 42 was a Federal statute, supposedly intended to restrict COVID-19 infected persons from entering the United States. The statute effectively stopped the migration of large numbers of people from the south. However, twice more Catholic Charities asked Queen of Peace for migrant hospitality but only for a month at a time.

On May 11, 2023, Title 42 expired. In the weeks leading up to that date, large numbers of migrants gathered in the Mexican border cities of Matamoros and Reynosa. Early in May, our Provincial and Bishop Flores formed a new pastoral team here in Harlingen. It is composed of five priests and three deacons in service to two parish communities, Queen of Peace and Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM). Immaculate Heart of Mary is closer to Loaves and Fishes and has the larger parish hall. In consul-

tation with the IHM parish pastoral council, we responded positively to the request from Bishop Flores that we once again offer hospitality to migrants. Perhaps it is a blessed sign that we began receiving migrants at IHM on the feast of Saint Damien, Servant of Humanity. The expected surge did not materialize. We only received guests for seven days before the need abated. Another door opened in the beginning of May. The two detention centers for minors contacted us and invited us to reactivate our ministry with the unaccompanied youth. The facilities are retraining us while conducting new criminal background investigations. In a few months, we should be ready to resume our ministry.

With four years' experience leading a parish community in this charitable work, and more recently a second parish, I must confess that, much as I would like, it is impossible to bring everyone along. While the work was largely accepted, even applauded, I confess that our apologetics have failed to persuade those opposed to the ministry. I have concluded that many people are not persuaded by facts. This is abundantly clear in our national political life. It seems that many people do not look at life through a religious lens. Instead, as Jesus said, we see things as human beings do and not as God does. After all these centuries, this admission can be quite disheartening. There is something of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* here. Paul VI posed the question: how was it possible for a people who had been Christian for a thousand years to perpetrate the Holocaust? His conclusion? For some individuals and nation states, Christianity is a veneer hiding a barbaric heartwood.

Thirty years ago, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops opined that, in the United States, many people live and act as though they have never heard the Gospel. This brings into bas-relief the summons to the New Evangelization. In practice, the summons focuses mainly on Europe but it is no less needed here in the United States.

At Sunday celebrations throughout the Lenten and Easter seasons, I have focused on three things. First, I invited the community to change its eyewear, to switch out their human eyeglasses for the divine ones given at Baptism. It is a clear and deliberate choice: to ask God for the grace to see as God sees. That means, among many other things, to see in the migrant a suffering humanity that is a brother or sister to us. The second is to suspect that our negative impulses are not of divine origin. Rather they are symptoms of our unredeemed, political worldview. The third is, “fake it ‘til you make it.” That is to do the right thing and let the doing of it change me. Some would say right praxis leads to orthopraxis.

Anyone who has served in parochial ministry knows that, with few exceptions, it is difficult to form and animate a community in works of justice. In most cases, parishioners are content to make donations-at-a-distance to help relieve human suffering usually in times of natural disaster after fires, floods, and earthquakes. These communities can also have difficulty receiving new members since new members upset the constellation of well-established relationships. Welcoming the stranger is not

something we do very well since the stranger stands before us and demands a human encounter. Fears and uncertainties surface revealing what lay beneath the veneer of our charity. The vast image of a moving, suffering humanity seeking welcome and safety stands before us. Now it is close, as close as eye contact. We need new lenses in our eyewear. I pray that we may see as God sees.

"DO WE HEAR THE CRY?"

Bertrand Cherrier ssc (France)

Fifty years ago, from 5 - 16 June 1972, the first international conference on the environment was held in Stockholm (Sweden) under the aegis of the UN. Since that first meeting, the international community, under pressure from civil society, has come a long way. Meanwhile, the environmental crisis has worsened, causing irreversible damage. In the face of such an emergency the international community has never been up to the challenge. This is what Pope Francis deplores in *Laudato Si'*:

“Recent World Summits on the environment have not lived up to expectations because, due to lack of political will, they were unable to reach truly meaningful and effective global agreements on the environment”.

(LS 166)

He goes on to say:

“There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good”.

(LS 54)

For its part, the Church, through the intermediary of Paul VI, had already expressed its concern at the lack of collective action on the part of the political and economic world. At the time, Paul VI called for a “radical change of mentality”.

In his message to the participants in the 1972 Stockholm international conference, he asked:

“Will our civilization, tempted to increase its marvellous achievements by despotic domination of the human environment, discover in time the way to control its material growth, to use the earth's food with wise moderation, and to cultivate real poverty of spirit in order to carry out urgent and indispensable reconversions?”

Paradoxically, governments make encouraging speeches but are not able to mobilise a reversal of the consumerist trend and ensure that civil society takes the path of sobriety and fights insistently against “the culture of waste”. The habit, which Hannah Arendt called “the eternal yesterday without tomorrow”, will gradually lead us into a dead end.

Are we able to find another way, to undergo a true “ecological conversion”? Fifty years after the first Stockholm conference, the challenge remains relevant and tells us what we still have to do to bring about a real change and put an integral ecology into practice.

Pope Francis' encyclical

The success of the publication of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* has extended beyond the Christian sphere and many commentators have praised the text. The reason for this is simple: for the first time we have been able to read a document that does not oppose ecological and social issues. Pope Francis' reflection succeeded in dismissing politicians of both the right and the left by speaking of “a cry”, which does not come from an idea, a political party, an intellectual or another media star but from the earth and the poor! This cry can lead everyone to agree that: “a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” (LS 49). Pope Francis does not hesitate to add that the dramatic situations of today “have caused sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course”. (LS 53). Courageously, in the first chapter of the encyclical, Francis is not afraid to note that “it is remarkable how weak international political responses have been ... and that there are too many special interests”. (LS 54). The present world system is “unsustainable” (LS 61) and we live as if we were capable of continuing our existence with infinite and unlimited growth. Against the ever-greedy multinationals and other forms of capitalism that are never satisfied, the Pope launches a call for “decreased growth”, a prophetic call that unfortunately does not appeal to the masses, and sometimes even less so the bishops, who keep their distance for fear of offending the Christian communities and creating divisions

among the baptised. For his part, Francis has decided to take the radical path, leaving no room for relativism. In view of the success of his words, it is clear that he is not a marginal figure! The truth of his discourse lies in the methodical demonstration of an idea that never leaves him: “everything is linked”. As he often says, the whole is greater than the part and “the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves, which leads in turn to how they relate to others and to the environment.” (LS 141).

Of all his proposals, the most important is one that he does not develop enough but presents as essential, namely “decreased growth. “That is why the time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth.” (LS 193). This message seems to me to be the challenge for the years to come. Will we be able and willing, individually and collectively, to promote more sober behaviour in order to better distribute the fruits of creation?

Pope Francis dreams of seeing new models of progress emerge that can correct economic inequalities and social imbalances. A new political world must influence today's economic world, not the other way around. We need to “find forms of interactions directed towards the common good” (LS 198). “Thus we forget that ‘time is greater than space’, that we are always more effective when we generate processes rather than holding on to positions of power.” (LS 178). Unfortunately, this takes

time and our politicians want quick results. One wonders whether the war in Ukraine will not force us to discover decreased growth, in particular through sobriety in electricity and gas consumption. Solidarity with the Ukrainians is a necessity and we could learn a good lesson from this tragic war. Consumption habits will be put to the test.

If you have not already done so, I invite you to read the last chapter of the encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, entitled "Ecological Education and Spirituality". From another perspective, Francis invites us individually to change our behaviour. Without always realising it, we are consumers, sometimes "compulsive" and "obsessive". Obviously, "The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume". (LS 204). If politicians, economists and local authorities are the first to be able to change our lifestyles, let's not forget that the small gestures of our daily lives are important and have the capacity to change things. Gandhi was a prophet in this field. Ecological conversion is also a personal and spiritual matter.

It is good to hear Pope Francis say that "an integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness." (LS 230). Thus "Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little." (LS 222). Surprisingly the Christian must be convinced that moderation is the way to happiness. As the Pope says: "less is more". (LS 222).

The experience of the parish of St Gabriel (Paris)

After the publication of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, three parishioners of St Gabriel's asked me to meet them to discuss the document by Pope Francis. They were happy to read (at last!) a text that tried to link ecological issues with faith in Jesus Christ. Their joy touched me and I encouraged them and accompanied them in the work on this theme of ecological conversion taking place in the heart of our parish.

The first step was to raise awareness through conferences, debates and concrete information on the text of the encyclical. This first initiative made it possible to set up a more substantial team to continue the reflection and to carry out practical actions by making sure that the whole parish was involved in this area, starting with an awakening to the faith of the group of retired Christians and other parish groups such as the finance council and the liturgical animation group. Thus, the pastoral council decided that ecological conversion would be a transversal topic in our parish life and that it would impact all the activities of our Christian community. Each year, a session of the parish council and the economic council would be entirely dedicated to ecological conversion. This was a good way to witness to how everything is linked and how it is urgent to hear the cry of the earth as well as the cry of the poor.

The actions were very diverse: compost in the church, visits to an organic farm, reciting of the universal prayer *Laudato Si'*, environmental walks, participation in ecological events, aware-

ness-raising through film-debates, eco-diagnosis of the parish, insulation of the buildings, change of lighting for the church, organic workshops, children's activities on creation, sorting of waste, organisation of a "Creation" day ... The initiatives were numerous!

The thinking behind these activities was not to do anything in a hurry and to take the time to develop our ecological actions. The challenge was not efficiency but fruitfulness. We needed to keep the joy that came at the beginning, from the reading of the encyclical which invited us to make ecology a spiritual question and to joyfully become witnesses to the cry of the earth and the most poor.

As a parish priest, I was marked by this parish conversion and spiritual initiative of several families. By rediscovering a more attentive relationship with nature, I have been able to restore balance in my relational life with my neighbour, because a better attention to creation has the effect of having a better attention to the other... and to its Creator! Thus, it is "right and just" to tell ourselves that it is through love of creation that we can access love of neighbour with greater fruitfulness. A better knowledge of what surrounds us and makes up our daily lives has the effect of opening up even more to the realities of the world and to fraternal relations. In Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, one of the characters says:

"Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love

the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything you will perceive the divine mystery in things; Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.”

(The Brothers Karamazov, Book VI, Chapter 3)

Sometimes I wonder if the absence of a spiritual life and faith in God results in a loss of faith in the greatness and beauty of creation. Does not believing in God and consequently not believing in creation impact on the felt need to do something with and about creation? By abandoning God, does humanity not come to abandon a creation that ends up losing its meaning and serving only our particular interests? Does not ignoring God's love lead to ignorance of the origins and purpose of creation? Let us not forget the challenge of an integral ecology: if we do not respect nature, we will not respect the most fragile among us (and vice versa).

Many young people want to get involved in these ecological issues and hope that a change of direction is possible. The success of the scouting movements in the parishes is a testimony to this. In six years, the parish of Saint Gabriel has started a scout group which has grown from zero to one hundred and ten young people. Scout groups are growing everywhere. For families, the return to nature, to a simpler life, is a sign of a desire to change their behaviour. They are rediscovering that “nature is full of words of love!” I am one of those who believe that young people are capable of shaking things up bringing with them the older gener-

ations who are still wondering about what new behaviours to adopt. Young people intuit that it is urgent to change our way of life, which is far too consumerist. Let us unite with them in their expectations, their proposals and their commitments.

The action of the Church and of our Congregation?

If the Church, through the addresses of Pope Francis, is committed to the fight for ecological conversion, this does not mean that the whole Church is committed to implementing the Pope's proposals, or even to encouraging them. We can count a number of bishops who remain cautious on the subject and who have not launched any great campaign of ecological conversion. Having made a presentation in 2019 to the priests of Paris (350 priests were present) on the importance of ecological action in the parishes, I was able to see that opinions were very divergent and that a good number of parish priests in Paris did not dare to launch a *Laudato Si'* campaign.

The parish of Saint Gabriel was the first parish in Paris to obtain the “green label” from the French Bishops' conference (through the “green church” association). For this reason, I had the opportunity to meet a good number of parish priests who explained to me the reasons for their hesitations. There are two main reasons:

- 1) the fear of dividing the parish, as opinions on the subject are very varied and often opposed;

- 2) a lack of conviction on the subject, which leads to a permanent relativism. This is how nothing takes place...

Faced with this situation of slowness and disagreement between Christians, I hope that from the baptized, a “cry” will rise up towards our ecclesial leaders asking that the Church makes a move and witnesses strongly as to how “the common home” must be protected because it is “like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us”. (LS 1).

What about our Congregation? How has it been imbued with the call to care for our common home? Do we have a coherent message and actions in line with the expectations of the encyclical *Laudato Si*? The last General Chapter does not explicitly say so, nor does it develop an ecological catechesis to be implemented. That said, it is good to read between the lines and so discover the expectations and hopes that were expressed during that Chapter (2018), in particular the hope and desire of the capitulants to see the birth of a “pastoral and missionary conversion” that moves in the direction of new activities and engagements. The pastoral conversion of which the Chapter speaks could unite itself to the perceived urgency of an ecological conversion. If the General Chapter longs to see the emergence of “other ways of being and serving in the Church” (39th General Chapter, Rome, p. 18), the reconstruction of a “common home” is one of the possible paths. The passage on challenges (General Chapter, Rome, p. 19) illustrates this, as it speaks of “a greater ecological awareness” and “concern for

creation". The need to broaden our missionary horizons (General Chapter, Rome, p 21) should lead us to a more elaborate ecological policy.

Our PARLS can no longer ignore the urgent need for an increase in attention and priority to be given to the ecological cause. This work should not be the commitment of one brother, "who is specialised" in this field, but that of the whole community. It is collectively that we will be able to bear fruit.

Among the fields of pastoral and missionary conversion, ecology is not sufficiently taken into account for the moment. It does not seem to be a priority. This does not mean that we are not acting in this direction, because many communities are implementing concrete actions, but the collective dynamic is not yet effective. Thus, our next General Chapter and the provincial chapters need to have a more precise and more constructed discourse in favour of ecological conversion.

In connection with our charism, I see three challenges that we can take up:

- 1) *To hear the cry of creation through our closeness to the cry of the poor.*

Our Picpucian vocation has long been to reach out to the poorest. Our founder himself said this from the very beginning when he asked to open schools for poor children (Constitutions, 2). It is by pursuing this path that we will be able

to concern ourselves with the cry of creation and live a missionary conversion. A spirituality of the heart begins by listening to the cry of Jesus on the cross, which is in solidarity with the cry of the poor. It is from this primary cry that we are invited to join in the cry of creation. We have to discover that “everything is linked” and that our commitment to the poorest must be related to an ongoing concern for the safeguarding of creation. Our concern for the most poor will be more fruitful if we link it to other issues, notably the environment, water, education, housing and agriculture. The famous slogan “to live in solidarity with the poorest” will become more fruitful if we integrate today's ecological challenges into this mission of solidarity.

2) Get out of our comfort zones and live more poorly.

The management of goods is an emergency for many of our provinces. They are often in debt and dependent on external benefactors (other provinces, the General Government, donors, subsidies...). In his encyclical, Pope Francis constantly calls for sobriety. For this reason, each province must think about its economic policy from the point of view of how it can lead us to spend less and to move out of our comfort zones. It is by revisiting our approach to economics that we will be able to discover possible conversions in our management of goods and in our spending. The challenge is to prioritise less spending rather than trying to earn more money to make up deficits. Two examples: transport and food. With a little care and inventiveness, I am sure we could

greatly reduce costs in these two areas. Other areas could also permit us to spend less (heating, recycling, personnel costs, pooling of goods, management and maintenance of the buildings, community account, etc.) If we want to have a balanced budget, it is urgent to start by reducing expenses.

3) Linking ecological issues to our Eucharistic prayer and adoration.

The Eucharist and Eucharistic adoration have a place of priority in our mission. The encyclical *Laudato Si'* opens up perspectives by reminding us that “in the Eucharist, all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation ... Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed, the Eucharist is an act of cosmic act” (LS. 236).

The example of the Creation Masses at St Gabriel's parish have provided an opportunity for catechesis on the mystery of creation in relation to the lives of the poor. Many parishioners had not imagined such a source. At the heart of the Eucharist, we live the mystery of divine justice and mercy while praising the Creator for the goods he freely gives us. We should reread Teilhard de Chardin's Mass on the World! Greater attention to the Eucharistic liturgy will allow us to share a true joy, that of discovering in the Eucharist the cry of a God who places “the poor of heart” at the centre of his creation and his kingdom by giving them from today, the dignity of children of God.

Conclusion

Do you recall one gesture of Pope John Paul II during his many visits? He would kneel down and kiss the earth. This reminds me that I am born of the earth. My ordination also reminded me of this because when I lay down in front of the altar, I was attached to the earth, peering into its depths! As the psalm says: “Truth shall spring forth from the earth”. In the same way, on Holy Thursday, I was amazed to see Pope Francis, also on his knees, kissing the feet of the prisoners after washing them. With these two gestures, the two popes unite together and symbolically testify that it is good to be close to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

Will we be able to hear this double cry and respond to it with a missionary and pastoral conversion? Let us take up the challenge to create a fraternal path between our sister creation and our mother poverty without forgetting the essential teaching of *Laudato Si'*: everything is linked!

JOYS AND CHALLENGES IN INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE (ESPECIALLY WITH MUSLIMS)

Felix Supranto ssc (Indonesia)

I live and serve in Saint Odilia Parish which is in the area of Tangerang Regency - Banten Province - Indonesia. The parish area that I serve covers thirteen sub-districts (more than half of Tangerang Regency) and has a radius of 50 kilometers. The population of Tangerang Regency is approximately 3,500,000 people and most of them live in rural areas. The environment is primarily Islamic given that many Islamic scholars live there. Tangerang district is filled with Islamic boarding schools. Beginning with elementary school, most of the children live in Islamic boarding schools. The graduates of Islamic boarding schools generally become involved in government, politics, education, or health. Islamic scholars play an important role in society decision-making.

Due to the strong Islamic atmosphere, non-Islamic communities (including Catholics) are a minority. As a Christian community, the Catholic Church must not close itself off. By isolating itself, living alongside each other becomes increasingly exclu-

sive and is overshadowed by mutual suspicion of one another. When we continue to close ourselves off, the art of living together can result in a growing loss of the family spirit. Kinship only occurs within the community itself. Caring only occurs within its own group. As a result, Catholics can become increasingly isolated in society.

This situation must be resolved immediately. Overcoming this problem is not easy. However, we Catholics must have the courage to be a creative minority to build an inclusive life together. The more senior Islamic scholars there are, the more respected they are and the more they become a source of wisdom in society. The seniority of these Islamic scholars pushed me as a priest to get out of the comfort of the Catholic community and start introducing myself. Self-introduction is the first step that must be taken to participate in building a tolerant and plural society. Building tolerance and living together only happens when we can build synergy and solidarity with Islamic scholars, Army-Police, government, economic actors, society leaders, and grassroots citizens.

To build synergy and solidarity, the following steps must be taken:

1. *Encounter:*

Meeting with Islamic scholars, government and society leaders, and various groups in society must be repeated until it becomes a habit. The first encounter raises

suspicious. The second encounter gives birth to longing, and the third encounter forms brotherhood.

2. *Be present in life's events:*

Once we become known, we must work our way into the hearts of the Islamic scholars, the military - the police, the government, mass organizations, and society in general. Because once we enter into their hearts, they will surely invite us to attend the celebrations they hold for significant life moments such as religious celebrations, births, weddings, circumcision, official receptions, and commemoration of the deceased.

3. *Participate in overcoming common problems (Spirit of working together):*

Overcoming common problems, such as volunteering to help those affected by COVID-19, cleaning up trash and dealing with flooding, can strengthen tolerance in living together. Shared concern strengthens the spirit of working together. Working together makes us realize that we are brothers. Behind the Covid 19 pandemic we found blessings in life together. Covid 19 helped us to realize that we cannot live alone (sectarian) so there is a desire to build a universal family (*Fratelli Tutti*).

4. *Working together to improve the welfare of the poor (including Catholics):*

a) Building food security in villages.

Many citizens live in poverty. They are unable to get a job not because of laziness, but because they have no education, no skills, nor the means to create jobs for themselves. Their difficult life makes it easy for them to be scapegoated. Helping them to have a good life is the best way to maintain brotherhood and create attitudes that understand, support and respect differences. The concrete objective is to build food security groups, such as the seven agricultural groups (plantations and rice fields) and animal husbandry such as cattle fattening, goat breeding, and laying duck development.

b) Help create Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises to improve their economy.

c) Building liveable houses for poor people.

Many citizens do not have a decent place to live. To overcome this, various elements of the community have helped to build proper houses for them to live in.

Our parish has always been an initiator of these activities and has become an inspiration for many people from various religious backgrounds, ethnicities and social statuses to participate in them. All forms of assistance to create prosperity make grass-roots people happy. Their happiness opened the eyes of

their hearts to see that many people from all kinds of backgrounds had helped them. In this way, they began to see people who did not share their beliefs neither as blameworthy nor as their enemies. In this way, social harmony does not only happen at the top level but also at grassroot level.

Happiness/joy in living together full of tolerance

1. Catholics are no strangers to society.

Today members of the Catholic Church are no strangers to society. Catholics are no longer citizens who are to be suspected, but very much loved. Catholic citizens are recognized as equal in their rights and obligations. For example: Catholics have their own burial place; Catholics can worship in their homes without being disturbed and even their neighbours come to help, such as preparing food; Catholics who were infected by Covid 19 received help from the local government. When we are not strangers and are no longer alienated, living together becomes beautiful and not overshadowed by feelings of fear. Apart from that, the priest's house has become a stopover place for Islamic scholars, society leaders, and the grassroots citizens, even it has often become the main place in planning activities.

2. Featuring in society.

Catholic priests are prominent in society, but not in the form of clericalism. To feature here means to be a source of wisdom, advice, inspiration, and an initiator in dignifying

human beings and building unity and common prosperity. In many ways, Catholic priests become peacemakers in the midst of conflict. Catholic priests are recognized for their role in strengthening synergy and solidarity between the Army - Police, the Government, the Islamic scholars, and the citizens. As elders, Catholic priests are often asked to provide input in fostering mass organizations, especially Islamic organizations.

3. The students of Islamic boarding schools are candidates for leadership in government and already consider priests and Catholics to be part of their family.
4. Realizing God's command to bring peace.
It is a source of happiness that Catholic priests and Catholics can be pioneers of peace in society and that the unity of a nation of various ethnicities and religions is getting closer.
5. I am increasingly loving, proud and happy with my priesthood, Church, country and fellow human beings.

Challenges

1. Manipulating religion in the political arena.
In democratic life, candidates for councils as well as village leaders (including presidential candidates) often use religion and the religious leaders for their political interests. Politicizing religion is very dangerous because it can divide communities.

2. Feelings of inferiority within Catholics.
Many Catholics feel themselves as an isolated minority. This feeling of inferiority keeps Catholics away from social life, preferring more their own community. In short, Catholics allow themselves to be like frogs in a shell.
3. Among Catholics themselves there are still those who consider the service in religious dialogue and in common life as something that is not important, in vain, a waste of time and money.

All of these challenges can be overcome by remaining diligent in virtue, mercy, gentleness, patience, and humility: **“As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience”.** (Colossians 3: 12).

These virtues will definitely triumph over the bad because they are a language that everyone can understand and they can both disturb and soften a hard heart. In other words, benevolence, mercy, gentleness, and humility are like beautiful flowers that the blind can see and like beautiful music that the deaf can hear.

