

# Renewed Servant-Leaders Serving the New Evangelization

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The coming year, 2018, will be the sixth year in the nine-year spiritual journey of the Catholic Church in the Philippines as we prepare to celebrate the five-hundredth year of the arrival of Christianity in our beloved country. We could consider the canonization in 2012 of the second Filipino saint, Pedro Calungsod, as a major milestone in the history of the Church in the Philippines. It was around that time that our bishops gave us a pastoral exhortation on the Era of the New Evangelization, outlining the directions for the Church in the Philippines at this juncture of our history. This thrust builds upon the Second Vatican Council and the vision-mission the Philippine Church enunciated in the Second Plenary Council in 1991. Today we continue to move forward to fulfill these aspirations, guided by the magisterium of the recent popes.

This sixth year in our nine-year spiritual itinerary as a local Church in the Philippines will focus on the Clergy and Consecrated Persons. By “clergy” we refer to *all* our priests, both those in specialized ministry as well as those in direct pastoral service to our faith communities. By “consecrated persons” we refer not only to priests and brothers belonging to religious congregations, but likewise to our numerous religious women, and even the lay faithful who belong to secular institutes. In the words of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines: “In our cultural context, nothing on the human plane will influence both the shape of the Church and its impact on Philippine society as palpably as the leadership of its ordained ministers” (cf. *PCP-II, Acts and Decrees* 507). The clergy therefore plays an indispensable and vital role with regard to the thrust of the Church today, the New Evangelization. Consecrated persons too share in the mission of the clergy in furthering the goals of the New Evangelization in our country.

**Theme for 2018.** The chosen theme for the sixth year of preparation towards the Fifth Centenary of the First Evangelization and as we move towards the New Evangelization is: “Renewed Servant-Leaders for the New Evangelization.” The biblical quote (Jn 13:1-17) that underlines this theme as some sort of foundation upon which it rests, is taken from that tender scene in the upper room in Jerusalem on the night before our blessed Lord accomplished the redemption of humanity. He washed His disciples’ feet as a sign of his unfathomable love for us sinners and useless servants, in full action for all of us to see, and above all, to thus imitate his humble service.

We may view this scripture passage as made up of three moments, three stages that will guide us in understanding this dynamic, this moving example bequeathed to us by the Lord; we are to emulate Christ so as to become truly his disciples: “by this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples” (Jn 13:35). Jesus begins with this awareness and intimacy with His heavenly Father. He was fully united and always so united to the Father. The second moment shows Jesus decisively acting with strong determination and will, propelled by the Spirit in Him; He rose from the table of the Last Supper. The third moment sees Him bending down at the disciples’ feet in all humility and love; he performs the most menial of tasks, thus bestowing upon us and all generations thereafter, a powerful witness to the core message of the Gospel: love for the other in humble and selfless service. This is the very spirit of mission!

This year’s focus on the Clergy and Consecrated Persons builds upon the previous

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five years before it. We began in 2013 by reflecting on the state of personal faith, a faith that must be integral, adequately formed and strong enough to influence our individual lives, our families, and our communities. Then, in 2014, we focused on the faithful that make up the great majority of the Church; they also are called to holiness and sent forth in mission to the world, even to the point of heroism. In 2015, we called to mind the many poor and weak, those in darkness and in despair among us; we should care for them, help them, include them in our lives in the spirit of solidarity, justice, and compassionate love. For the year 2016, in union with the Jubilee of Mercy of the Universal Church, we reflected on the importance of the family

and the Eucharist as a pivotal fount and source of spiritual life and strength. Finally, this year's focus (2017) was on the Parish as a Communion of Communities, the ordinary setting of Christian discipleship and Christian life. And so, we come to this Year of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons, that sector composed of persons in our Christian communities, the clergy and persons in consecrated life. They take up and fulfill vital roles of leadership and education and other forms of pastoral service and spiritual care of the people.

**Focus on New Evangelization.** The entire nine-year period of spiritual preparation is meant to usher in the “Era of the New Evangelization” in the entire local Church in our country. There is a very strong *missionary* dimension in all these activities and efforts. Evangelization in itself is missionary; we seek to bring the Gospel to others as we strive to make it real and concrete in our lives as individual persons and as families, communities, as a nation. This process of evangelization is “new” in that it seeks to be responsive to “the signs of the times,” using the new methods and means at our disposal that have arrived with scientific and technological progress. We need to face with courage and faith the challenges that arise today; they are quite different from the situation when the Christian Faith and the Gospel Message first arrived in our country five hundred years ago.



*Nemo dat quod non habet*; nobody gives what he does not have in the first place; so goes the old Latin adage. If we are to impart the Gospel, if we are to share the Faith, if we will use the new means and methods at our disposal today in the light of the new contexts, situations and challenges, then we must first possess this Faith; we must first believe and live out the Gospel. Only then would we be able to share it as missionaries. And, this process of “ownership,” this internalization, this deepening, this profound living out of Faith and Gospel should rightly begin with our leaders and guides, the Clergy and the Persons in Consecrated Life. The activities for the year 2018 are all geared towards this goal” that our Priests and Religious may all be truly *renewed servant-leaders in the service of the new evangelization*. In short, may they be the most effective witnesses and missionaries of the Gospel of Christ for the men and women of today.

**Continuing Renewal.** Since we began this nine-year period of preparation leading to 2021, 500 years since Ferdinand Magellan landed on our shores, 500 years after the celebration of the first Holy Mass and the Baptism of the first native Filipinos, we have been following what the bishops laid out as the guide for the meaningful commemoration of each year with its specific focus: *formation, celebration, legacy*. The Formation component encourages us to

prepare the self, to form individual minds and hearts, families and parish communities, local Churches, and eventually, the entire nation. Only then, with hearts and minds properly disposed, could we truly benefit from the activities of the Celebration phase. And, the Legacy aspect reminds us that these events and all these efforts should bring forth lasting fruit, something that we would cherish for the future and pass on to the next generation. So it was in all the previous years, so will it also be for the coming Year of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons.

The three phases of Formation, Celebration and Legacy are lived out at the four dimensions of Personal, Parish, Diocesan and National levels. The Program for the entire Year 2018 includes these aspects lived out at these different levels. Since the New Evangelization itself seeks to renew and strength the missionary impetus throughout the local Church, then the missionary thrust and character should always be present, although it may not be so evident or obvious at first glance. With this year focused on the Clergy and Consecrated Persons, we ask how they, our Religious Leaders and Spiritual Guides, could serve the missionary duties and missionary responsibilities that are inherent in the very core of our being Church, at the very core of our being followers of Christ?

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The Program for the Year of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons is dedicated to the abovementioned *integral renewal* of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons, without which they could

not be effective witnesses and guides for our faith communities. Without renewal, they will not be effective missionaries within the communities where they live, work, lead and guide. The Program also seeks to strengthen the notion and the ideal of servant-leadership, which has been the vision of the Philippine Church, especially since the Second Plenary Council in 1991. Priests and Religious are leaders in the manner set out by Christ, not to lord it over others, but by being servants to all. Our present Holy Father, Pope Francis, has been setting a splendid example of *servant-leadership* ever since that day that he began his pontificate in 2013. His constant emphasis on “mercy and compassion,” his thought-provoking appeals and words directed to all in the Church and especially to Priests and Consecrated Persons, are truly inspiring, comforting, and direction-setting; they guide us all along the paths that Christ would want us to take, so that we may truly and fully be the disciples—priests and religious—that He wants us to be.

**Renewal of Formation.** The Year of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons would also be an



opportune time to revisit the formation process for the Clergy and persons in Consecrated Life. The key to having effective priests and religious is to form them, right from the start, in ways, methods and approaches that, in themselves, are already efficacious. One of the highlights of the Year is a National Conference on the document issued by the Holy See regarding the formation of priests, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, the new *Ratio Fundamentalis*. The national-level conference to be held in Cebu in January 2018 seeks to formulate a corresponding version for the Philippine context. It will be the guide for priest-formators in our seminaries in forming and preparing the coming generations of priests. There are activities that seek to deepen the relationship and synergize the efforts of the diocesan clergy and the religious communities within a given locale. The Religious have special charisms that must be optimized for the good of the entire faith community. Greater cooperation and synergy would redound to the benefit of the people. To achieve this, initiatives at the level of the parish and the diocese will be held in order for the local diocesan clergy to get to know better and search for mechanisms in which

to collaborate with the religious in the pastoral care of the communities which they both serve.

The Year of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons will also involve two aspects that are closely related: Vocation Discernment and Seminary Formation. As mentioned earlier, there will be a significant meeting early next year to chart the pathways of forming our future priests using the new document coming from the Holy See with regard to priestly formation. In the area of vocation discernment, the coordination of efforts nationwide of the vocation directors in every diocese and the development of tools and strategies to assist our young people in discerning the call to serve will be further strengthened. The young generations today already belong to the so-called “millennials,” and they have their particular needs and concerns that pertain to their personal and socio-cultural contexts.

There needs to be spiritual activities and moments of encounter at the parish and diocesan levels; regular meetings of the clergy will be encouraged and strengthened. The role and duties







of the Vicar of the Clergy in each diocese are to be clarified and explained with the hope that this particular office in the diocese will be empowered and “professionalized.” Gatherings of the Vicars for Clergy at the ecclesiastical or metropolitan province level (archdiocese) have already been carried out for the entire country. Succeeding gatherings will seek to further strengthen the capabilities of the diocesan vicar for clergy in order to be effective instruments in the on-going formation and further progress of individual priests for more effective carrying-out of their ministry.

Renewal programs are constantly being offered to the priests and consecrated persons to assist them further in their respective ministries. Because the great increase in demand, hubs for priestly renewal have become scarce and inadequate. Plans are underway for the expansion of these hubs, such as the John Mary Vianney Galilee Development and Retreat Center for Priests

in Tagaytay. There are many other initiatives along these lines. The goal is to raise the standards of quality and professionalism among our clergy and religious, and even more, to foster personal holiness and total dedication that is required of mission.

**Conclusion.** May the Lord Jesus, the High Priest, the Good Shepherd of us all, who is the fulfilment of our deepest spiritual longings, guide and bless our priests and all other persons who have willingly and lovingly dedicated and consecrated themselves to God. May the Lord protect and strengthen the shepherds in our midst so that they may continue to care for us, as we journey together until His Kingdom will finally be established in us all.

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