



Sixty-sixth Annual National Assembly PMS Diocesan Directors Gracelyn R. Nacionales

Preparing for the celebration of the Extraordinary Missionary Month (EMM) of October 2019 was the main agenda of the sixty-sixth PMS Diocesan Directors Annual National Assembly. It was a special month of prayer and action called by Pope Francis to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of Pope Benedict XV's Apostolic Letter on mission, *Maximum Illud*; it sought to emphasize that the Church is to be in a permanent state of mission. The theme, "Baptized and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World" was provided by Pope Francis in his desire to reignite the awareness and response of the whole People of God to their baptismal identity, dignity and destiny as missionary-disciples, especially in relation to *missio ad gentes* (mission to the nations). It places the mission of Jesus where it should be—at the heart of the Church, making it the criterion for measuring the effectiveness of her structures,

the result of her labors, the fruitfulness of her ministers, and the joy they all should awaken.

In consideration of 2019 as the Year of Youth in the Philippines with its theme, "The Filipino Youth in Mission: Beloved, Gifted, Empowered," the PMS Diocesan Directors Annual National Assembly had for its theme: "Baptized and Sent. The Church of Christ on Mission in the World: Beloved, Gifted, Empowered." The Assembly had the following objectives: ♦ to appreciate more and be inspired on how to live out the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019; ♦ to share with each other best practices in mission animation and cooperation; and, ♦ to renew commitment to assist one's local ordinary and his presbyterium and the people of God entrusted to his care to be "permanently in a state of mission." The Assembly was held at Sugarland Hotel in Bacolod City on July 8-11, 2019; it was



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attended by the PMS Diocesan Directors and their assistants and collaborators coming from all over Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

Day One. The Assembly officially commenced with a Eucharistic celebration at the San Sebastian Cathedral with Bishop-Emeritus Vicente M. Navarra, DD, as the presider and preacher. In his homily he said that all the baptized have the innate duty to proclaim Christ, to introduce Christ, and to take initiatives so that the ideals and values of Christ are planted, made to grow and bear fruit in the lives of people and in society as a whole. He ended his homily with the hope and prayer that in due time and in God’s grace, a Church that is likewise, beloved, gifted and empowered will be more and more realized in our midst, becoming a Church that does not cease in working until Christ is formed in every baptized Filipino.

The Mass was followed by dinner and a short program to welcome the delegates. A short

orientation about the assembly was also given. There was an introduction and recognition of the new PMS Diocesan Directors. This was followed by the awarding of the Certificates of Recognition to the ecclesiastical territories that gave the highest contributions to the pontifical collections, and to the ecclesiastical territories that had the highest number of enrolled members in the pontifical associations for the Fiscal Year 2017-2018.

Day Two. There were two major talks on the second day. The first presentation by Father James H. Kroeger, MM, focused on *Maximum Illud* and the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019. After presenting the historical context of *Maximum Illud*, the speaker, a theologian and missiologist, underlined several main points of the document: missionary leadership, new missionary methods, prayer, personnel and finances in support of mission. The other salient point was on the urgency and crucial need to promote and establish the indigenous clergy.





In relation to the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019, Father Kroeger discussed the priorities of Pope Francis regarding mission in the following ten pivotal themes: **(1) Urgency of Missionary Renewal of the Entire Church.** This stresses that “all renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal, if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion” (EG 27). For, “missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity.... We need to move ‘from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry’ (EG 15). **(2) Encounter with Christ.** Having a personal encounter with the person of Jesus Christ is crucial. Pope Benedict XVI has noted: “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (EG 7).... “Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization” (EG 8).

(3) Integral Nature of Missionary Evangelization. Placing evangelization at the center of the Church’s identity and mission, *Ad Gentes 2* asserts that “the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature.” Evangelization is comprised of five “principal elements”: ♦ presence and witness; ♦ commitment to social development and human

liberation; ♦ interreligious dialogue; ♦ proclamation and catechesis, and ♦ liturgical life, prayer and contemplation. **(4) Mercy: Heart of Mission.** “It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace.... Mercy [is] the bridge that connects God and man” (MV 2).... It is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral [and missionary] activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers” (MV 8).... The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel.... Wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy” (MV 12).

(5) Reading the “Signs of the Times.” Mission involves attentiveness to numerous challenges, especially those arising from the “peripheries,” being “ever watchful to the scrutiny of the signs of the times” (EG 15) and invoking the “Holy Spirit who help us together to read the signs of the times” (EG 14). This is our “grave responsibility” (EG 51) as baptized Christians. **(6) Pastoral Initiatives Needing Attention.** This concerns the importance of the preparation of the homily by the priests in their pastoral ministry. Pope Francis emphasizes that the personal and deep conviction of the preacher of the love of God for him is essential to have good preaching because what he preaches then flows from what he carries in his heart.

(7) *Renewed Emphasis on Holiness of Life.* The Holy Father proposes “the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time” (GE 2) as he further says that the Lord “wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence” (GE 1), because “to the extent that each Christian grows in holiness, he or she will bear greater fruit for our world” (GE 33). Pope Francis quotes Leon Bloy, succinctly saying that “the only tragedy in life is not to become a saint” (GE 33). (8) *Potential of Popular Piety for Evangelization.* A powerful and genuine resource-for-evangelization is the “the evangelizing power of popular piety” (EG 122-126).

(9) *Joy, Pivotal Sign of Missionary-Disciples.* Pope Francis asserts that if the Gospel is not heard from “joyful evangelizers,” it will not be heard at all by contemporary humanity. The lack of joy and hope is an obstacle to effective evangelization. (10) *Constant Invocation of the Holy Spirit, Mary and the Saints.* Being “spirit-filled evangelizers” is another “missionary key” to Pope Francis’ agenda for contemporary evangelizers. Father Kroeger exhorted everyone, saying that *Evangelii Gaudium* is a “must-read” and “you will find the fire of the Holy Spirit rising in you.”

Three priests shared their responses to the presentation of Father Kroeger. These were: Father Ronaldo Quijano, Rector of the Sacred Heart Seminary of the Diocese of Bacolod, Father Arturo Paraiso, PMS Diocesan Director of Malaybalay, and Father Dennis Beltran, PMS Diocesan Director of Imus. After the Panel of Reactors shared their thoughts, an open forum and small group workshops followed.

Second Presentation. The afternoon session of the second day began with the talk of Bishop Socrates C. Mesion, MSP, DD, on “Mission Animation and Cooperation.” He emphasized the need for a missionary animation which is to communicate life and spirit to persons, institutions, Christian communities and local Churches to become truly missionary. The bishop also said that animating the missionary work of the Church

must be a sustained effort and not only sporadic; it must “always be directed toward assisting a young Church from infancy to maturity,” thereby leading to “missionary awareness” wherein everyone in the Church is conscious of and responsive to the missionary mandate. Otherwise, he pointed out, sooner or later our Church will become like those in Europe that are nearly empty of people. Towards this ultimate end, he underscored that cooperation is needed in spreading the Gospel.

Bishop Mesion ended his talk by putting forth four forms of missionary cooperation: ♦ prayer and sacrifice for missionaries; ♦ promoting missionary vocations; ♦ openness to receive missionaries; and, ♦ sharing of resources. The talk was followed by an open forum and small group workshops as well.

Eucharistic Celebration. The afternoon Mass was presided by Bishop Gabriele Giordano Caccia, Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines. In his homily, the Papal Nuncio recounted the fond memory of Pope Francis in the Philippines during his 2015 visit. He said, “The Holy Father was struck by the number, the hospitality, and devotion of the Filipinos.” From this, he drew some points for his homily: ♦ as Christians, wherever we go, we feel at home because we belong to the same family; ♦ Christian charity is for all, without distinction; ♦ the Lord is calling us to purification, to look outside, and to also look inside, just like what Jesus did in the Gospel as he saw the crowds... The laborers are few... Jesus sees the heart of the laborers. The Nuncio continued saying that when we are moved and really care for people, even with a few laborers, it is more than enough. “One saint can move millions of people throughout centuries.” Hence, as the Philippine Church is preparing to celebrate its 500th year of Christianity, the Papal Nuncio encouraged all to hold fast and continue asking the Holy Spirit to bring life, hope, and smiles to other people. “We are the treasure, but sometimes we are not conscious that we keep it to ourselves.” After the Mass, dinner followed at

the Social Hall of the Provincial Capital hosted by Eugenio Lacson, Governor of Negros Occidental.

Day Three. The annual business meeting was conducted in the morning of the third day. Staff members of PMS national office made their respective annual reports. Monsignor Esteban Lo discussed with the assembly some matters concerning membership in the pontifical mission associations and about preparations for EMM celebration. Bishop Arturo M. Bastes, SVD, DD, Chairman of the Episcopal Commission on Mission (ECM), presented the program of the Second National Mission Congress to be held in Cebu on April 12-16, 2021 as one of the highlights in celebrating the 500th Year of Christianity in the country. Its theme is "*Missio ad Gentes: Gifted to Give.*" Monsignor Lo announced that the sixty-seventh PMS Diocesan Directors Annual National Assembly on July 20-23, 2020 will be held in Dipolog. He thanked Monsignor Joel Montederamos, PMS Diocesan Director of Dipolog, for his support. The Business Meeting concluded with the closing prayer led by Bishop Bastes.

Third Presentation. After the Business Meeting, the third major talk entitled "Pastoral Conversion: Not Maintenance Mode Only, but

Missionary Mode Also" was given by Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, DD, Archbishop of Manila. He indicated some areas in need of pastoral conversion through the rediscovery of the missionary component of pastoral life in the teachings of Pope Francis, especially in *Evangelii Gaudium*.

The first point focused on the danger of pastoral life becoming simply the self-preservation of the Church. Without any malicious intent on the part of anyone, sometimes our pastoral approach is really focused only on maintaining the institutions in a manner that becomes ecclesial introspection and ecclesial introversion, which could eventually lead the Church to being dried up and wilted. Revitalizing the Church demands overcoming complacency and embracing creativity by visiting homes, talking with people, getting in touch with the realities of their daily life, listening to their hopes and fears. Once we do this our pastoral programs will be challenged and enriched by the concrete situations of real people. Cardinal Tagle quoted Pope Francis who has said, "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security." Indeed, missionary outreach requires that we re-think our structures,



our policies, our styles, our methods of pastoral life in the light of the demands of evangelization today. It is not an either/or thing (either pastoral maintenance or missionary outreach). Rather, it is both/and, involving a pastoral ministry which is at the service of missionary outreach as well as a missionary outreach that is guaranteed and promoted by parish communities.

The Cardinal's second point focused on the preparation of the homily, which must inspire, guide, and animate the whole of pastoral life and the missionary life of the Church. A homily needs to consider the "what and how" of communicating the Gospel. It must be rooted in one's prayerful reflection on the Word of God, meant to address the concrete situations of the people, clear in distinguishing which point is essential and which point is secondary, and delivered effectively, using new methods and new expressions with new fervor.

The third emphasis focused on being a Church that is always "going forth." Using the images of an open heart and open doors, Cardinal Tagle emphasized the need for the Church to go forth to reach out to the poor, the broken, the undeserving, and the sinful. He pointed out that the open door through which the Church goes forth must be left open to allow others to enter. It is not only us who have something to share with them and to teach them; they have also something to share with us and to teach us. This welcoming method is what Jesus showed us as he went out to people to welcome them, and they followed him. Tagle further said that going out for mission is the way for the sheep to enter the sheepfold.

Cardinal Tagle reminded the assembly that the Lord Jesus used two metaphors in calling Peter. He called Peter to be a fisher of men. This means going forth, crossing the sea, doing mission outreach, inviting those outside to come in and be part of the community. He also called Peter to be a shepherd of the flock. This means being a pastor who walks with and leads the sheep, watches over and feeds those who are already part of the flock,

does pastoral care. There is no conflict between the two images. There is no competition between mission outreach and pastoral care. In fact, these two complement each other.

The talk was followed by an open forum; then the morning concluded with the Eucharist presided by Cardinal Tagle. After the Mass, Bishop Bastes, who was ending his third and final term as Chairman of the Episcopal Commission on Mission, was honored and thanked with a plaque of appreciation, a lei of flowers, a short video presentation of an album of pictures of his presence and support to the PMS Diocesan Directors Annual National Assembly through the years, as well as a warm and loud round of applause from those in attendance. Afterwards, Bishop Patricio Buzon, Bishop of Bacolod, addressed the assembly in his capacity as host. The afternoon of day three was spent touring interesting places just outside Bacolod City and having informal fellowship among the delegates.

Day Four. The sixty-sixth Annual National Assembly of PMS Diocesan Directors culminated with the celebration of the Eucharist at the Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help with Bishop Bastes as presider and preacher. In his homily, Bishop Bastes underlined that it is the message of Christ that we have to share by the power of the Holy Spirit. This presupposes intimacy with the Father in prayer and in "walking the talk." After the homily, Bishop Buzon officially launched the diocesan preparation for the celebration of the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019. Before the Eucharistic celebration ended, Father Louan Torrefranca, PMS Diocesan Director of Bacolod, thanked everyone for helping make the assembly a wonderful experience. Everyone went home inspired, challenged and empowered!

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