

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Together with Bishop Socrates C. Mesiona and Father James H. Kroeger, I am happy to share with you this booklet as we celebrate the World Mission Month of October 2021, in the Year of *Missio ad Gentes* and on the 500th anniversary of Christianity (500-YOC) in our country.

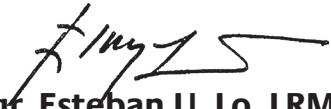
The pandemic brought about by COVID-19 continues. Our celebration of 500-YOC continues as well, albeit on a much scaled down manner and mostly online. Our celebration continues not only because we love to celebrate *fiestas*. Rather, it is because we need to go through this pandemic and the rest of our lives, with a “blessed consciousness,” not a “cursed consciousness.” As this pandemic continues to do its worst, let us continue to do our best in the spirit of our 500-YOC theme, “Gifted to Give” (cf. Mt 10:8).

This booklet is filled with printed words. On the one hand, it is true that words are cheap. As we say in Filipino, “*laway lang ang puhunan*.” Yet, on the other hand, words are powerful. Thus, we also say, “The pen is mightier than the sword.” One song captures these two contrary aspects of the reality of words by saying, “They’re only words and words are all I have to take your heart away.” If this is true as far as human words are concerned, how much more the Word of God! The Lord Jesus himself tells us, “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (Jn 6:63). We thank Father Kroeger for sharing with us in this booklet some fruits of his study, reflection and prayer on the Word of God, the teachings of the Church, and his experiences as a missionary in Asia for several decades.

The theme chosen by Pope Francis for our celebration of the World Mission Month of October 2021 is taken from Acts 4:20: “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” These past seventeen months of the pandemic we have seen and heard a lot of tragic stories and frightening situations. But, thank God, we have also seen and heard countless stories of faith, hope and

love. Indeed, Jesus is Emmanuel, God-with-us, at all times. Truly, in the midst of darkness, his word “is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path” (Ps 119:105). As we hunger for food, security, health, and many other needs, we realize more and more that “man does not live on bread alone, but on the word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). Facing stress, fatigue, fear, anxiety, psycho-emotional sickness and spiritual struggles, let us wield “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Eph 6:17).

May this booklet of reflections on the gift, call and challenge of mission help us to become more and more mature missionary disciples. With our “blessed consciousness” may we all the more witness to the abiding and life-giving love of God, not just despite but in the midst of this pandemic. Let us continue to pray for one another and for all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Lo', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Msgr. Esteban U. Lo, LRMS
National Director

Pontifical Mission Societies-Philippines