

SHEET 3 – MISSION BEYOND ORDINARY PASTORAL CARE

The General Council's letter on mission notes that "in various contexts, sometimes even in formation, a worrying clerical trend is emerging. For example, we note a concentration of our presence in traditional parishes and in a type of ordinary pastoral ministry that is more tied to the past than to today's missionary challenges and to social ministry according to the Comboni charism." It seems that the heart of the message of *Evangelii Gaudium*, namely, the missionary conversion of the entire Church, has not yet been understood. This is not simply an adjustment of pastoral techniques but a shift in mentality and ecclesial paradigm. "Pastoral ministry of conservation" and "missionary pastoral ministry" are two antithetical ways of conceiving the Church's identity and mission.

Often, perhaps without even realising it, we are tempted to operate with a "pastoral ministry of conservation." What is it? It is a Church that, concerned with protecting its heritage, ends up turning in on itself. It is a Church whose energy is absorbed primarily by the maintenance of its structures, the functioning of its offices, and caring for those who are already there, perhaps with the secret hope that tradition alone will draw people through our doors.

This is "sterile ordinary pastoral care," which is not the leaven of evangelisation. It is a Church that "is reduced to an organisation created for self-preservation, concerned above all with running smoothly, where the logic of 'it has always been done this way' prevails" (EG 26). Conservative pastoral care is the state in which the Church, consciously or unconsciously, withdraws into itself, into its own structures and routines, into its own maintenance. Thus, it ends up speaking primarily to itself and perceives the outside world as a threat.

Evangelii Gaudium forcefully contrasts conservative pastoral care with missionary pastoral care, which is characterised as a Church that "goes forth." A Church that does not wait, but goes forth. A Church that is not afraid to get its hands dirty in the dust of the streets and existential peripheries. *Evangelii Gaudium* is crystal clear: small adjustments are not enough. "What is needed is a pastoral and missionary conversion that cannot leave things as they are" (EG 27). Its appeal is for a "revival of an evangelising and outgoing Church," because the joyful newness of the Gospel "cannot remain closed off or suffocated by obsolete structures and models" (EG 20).

Therefore, the Church is called to step outside its security to encounter humanity, especially those who are excluded, impoverished, and oppressed. The heart of the message is the encounter with the person of Jesus Christ, and it is important to focus on the essential, on the centrality of the kerygma. Closeness, understanding, and integration (mercy) are prioritised, and all structures must be revisited for the mission. **Maria Soave Buscemi's** contribution explored the meaning and implications of an outgoing Church, the priorities. A missionary Church has its antennas pointed not toward the centre, but toward the peripheries. Toward those distant, the disillusioned, the wounded by life. "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 comfortable" (EG 24). It is a Church that does not "impose its truths," but which "knows how to draw near, which accompanies people on their journey" (EG 46). The third consequence is the Institute's choice of specific pastoral care according to continental priorities in terms of human groups (*ad gentes*), as illustrated in the contribution of the **General Secretariat for Mission**.

Church, bringing Latin American sensibilities to the table.

This vision has three consequences. First, the parish. The parish is not a refuge for the saved, but must become the driving force of the mission in the territory, a place of encounter, of listening, of generous charity, with a new flexibility and creativity. **Jean Paul Bitia** offers us a reflection on this point, drawing on the long experience of the parish of Kariobangi (Nairobi).

Community Day – Our Mission Style

After allowing time for personal reading and reflection on the three short essays on this topic, the community dedicates a day to reflection, sharing, and community discernment. The following format is proposed: personal reflection, community sharing and discernment, celebration.

At the heart of personal reflection (1 hour)

The insights offered by the OGF program on this topic have touched on various aspects of the Comboni mission in relation to the changing reality of our time. Each member is invited to reflect on the **community's missionary experience** that, in their opinion, most fully interprets the model of the outgoing Church. Give yourself time to relive it through a contemplative gaze, seeking to discern the Lord's presence in the unfolding of history. Then, in a climate of prayer, reflect on:

= How do the insights offered by the written contributions—or other personal insights—speak to that experience?

- There could be some insights from reflections on the outgoing Church...
- Or perhaps from reflections on the model of the missionary parish in Africa...
- Or perhaps on the model of specific pastoral care...

= What does the Spirit suggest to you through this new awareness of yours regarding the missionary style of your community today?

Community Discernment¹

= Invocation of the Holy Spirit

= Generative Question: *From prayerfully reflecting on your most beautiful missionary experience, what does the Spirit suggest to you about our community's missionary style?*

= Silence

= First Round of Sharing: (30 minutes)

- > Each person offers their own response to the question under consideration (maximum 2–3 minutes)
- > There are no comments or reactions, only attentive listening
- > A moment of silence between each person's sharing
- > It may be helpful to note what stands out during the sharing sessions.

= Second Round of Sharing: (30 minutes)

> *What did you hear or perceive from others in your group? What does the Spirit move you to share about what you heard?*

- > It's no longer about what you think, but what you heard from other group members.
- > There are no comments or reactions, only attentive listening.

= Third Round of Sharing: (30 minutes)

> *What missionary style, in line with the Comboni charism, is the Lord asking of us as a community today? What is the Spirit saying to us as a group?*

> At the end of the sharing, the community tries to focus on several actions to implement in response to the Spirit's promptings.

> A secretary records what the group decides as 1–2–3 key points.

> Consensus check: Do we, as a community, recognise these key points to be implemented?

> When the group has concluded, a volunteer closes the conversation with a prayer of thanksgiving.

The celebration

= The community gives thanks in the Eucharist, preparing for it with ad hoc animation.

= Take advantage of the opportunities the liturgy offers to meaningfully celebrate the fruits of community reflection and discernment.

= Consider the possibility of using meaningful signs.

= Bring the community's experiences and hopes into prayer.

Indications for a community of up to 5-6 members. In larger communities, this exercise may be carried out in small groups. In such cases, after the third round of sharing, the work of the groups is shared.