



Becoming an SVD Missionary Parish

SVD Publications
Generalate, Rome

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PRESENTATION

For our Founder, Saint Arnold Janssen, it was clear that permission to take up a parish was only granted if the parish is mission oriented. There must be other missionary activities besides the regular sacramental services and administration. Running schools was one of missionary endeavors he envisioned to be linked to the parish ministry.

In the course of history, parish ministry has become important for our congregation. As mentioned in this booklet, a big group of confreres are serving in this area. The main challenge we face is how to nurture and shape the missionary profile of the parishes entrusted to us. To help our reflections in responding to this challenge, we now publish this booklet: “Becoming an SVD Missionary Parish.” This is a continuation of the previous booklet “Profile of SVD Parish”. The concepts, ideas and examples provided in this booklet are meant to animate us in our efforts to grow as missionary parishes.

We encourage all confreres in PRM leadership and all who are involved in parish ministry to read and utilize this booklet and to promote this among lay mission partners and the parishioners. The booklet should also serve as a source of inspiration for our formation houses so that our young confreres get familiar with the ideal of a parish administered by the Society, as this is one of our important ministries.

We want to thank all who have contributed to this publication. We thank Frs. John Prior, Carlos Macatangga, William Odeke Owire, Wojciech Szypula, Aureenhor Nercua and Mr. Royston Braganza for sharing their ideas and experiences. A word of

thanks is addressed to Fr. Stanislaus Lazar, mission secretary, for the amount of work he has put into preparing and publishing this booklet and also to Fr. Pedro de Dios Martín for translating this text into Spanish.

May our journey on becoming an SVD missionary parish help us to be faithful to the Word and one with the people.

Fraternally in the Divine Word,
Fr. Paulus Budi Kleden, SVD and Leadership Team

BECOMING AN SVD MISSIONARY PARISH



A parish is the ordinary presence of the Church in a given territory, and this institution has great potentialities for the growth of the community, for the word of God, charitable works, worship and celebration. Pope Francis says, “We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation and to make them completely mission-orientated.” (*Evangelii Gaudium* [EG], 28)

In this context, our SVD parishes are centers of continuing our missionary charism in a more vibrant way.

We acknowledge that confreres in the parishes are engaged in many sacramental ministries, both in preparing them as well as performing them; apart from this, they are involved in many pastoral activities such as funeral services, devotions, visiting parishioners at home, in hospital, accompanying the sick and needy, etc. They are also involved in administrative works, educational ministries and social projects. We appreciate their efforts in serving the people. This booklet is a guide as to how we could improve our commitment in parish ministry with a **missionary vision**.

1. Mission of the Church

God's mission is to share his immense outflowing love to the whole world, so that the world might have the "abundant life" that Jesus promised (Jn 10:10). This love flows from the Trinitarian relationship and the bond of oneness. God sent his only Son Jesus to the world to manifest the outpouring of his love (Jn 3:16), to reveal his care and forgiveness. Jesus came to witness to the Reign of God; but God, whose essence is sharing and partnership, needs also human beings' cooperation to actualize his Reign fully in the world, and so the formation of the Church was necessary for the continuation of his mission. Thus, God's mission has the Church.

The paramount mission of the Church is to participate in the *Missio Dei*, and this is revealed through his Son, Jesus Christ. Thus, the mission of the Church is to continue the work of Jesus Christ to preach and live the Gospel by taking care of those who believe in him and by reaching out to those who have not known him and his message. Therefore, mission is for those who do not believe, people of other religions, and the unchurched, and to strengthen and nurture the faith of our brothers and sisters who regularly come to church, and also for those who are "occasional Christians" – those who come on special occasions. The Church's mission is to proclaim the Gospel, so that God's grace may touch the hearts of every man and woman and lead them to him. Mission is also to witness to the love of God through active participation in reaching out to others, especially to the poor, the excluded, the downtrodden, neglected youth and the elderly, and all those who need God's tangible love. To realize the Reign of God more fully, dialogue with other religions, cultures and the poor is essential. Through missionary activities, the Church needs to establish the values of the Reign such as justice, peace, joy, fellowship, and freedom. The Church is at the service of the Reign of God (*Redemptoris Missio* [RM], 20). The ultimate goal of the Church is to lead people to the fullness of salvation by showing concern for both their temporal and spiritual needs.

The Society of the Divine Word is at the service of the mission of the Church: "Missionary work is, therefore, the end and aim of our

Society. All our activities, diverse though they be, are ultimately intended to help the church fulfill its missionary task” (C. *Prologue*). We live and undertake our ministries so that the goodness and kindness of God be made visible among people. “The love of Christ and our rootedness in the Word lead us to a renewed and transformed commitment in our mission.”¹ The General Chapters of our Society have given directions for our *ad intra* and *ad extra* activities.

2. SVD Parishes

Parishes are vital places to participate in God’s mission, and where all members - laity, religious, ordained; men and women and young people – are called to “missionary discipleship” (EG 24). “The parishes are entrusted to the Society and not to the individuals... Although the local ordinary is in charge of parishes and the whole diocese, the parishes taken care by the confreres can be called SVD parishes.”² In 2018, our confreres were working in 880 parishes (AFRAM-110, ASPAC-332, EUROPA-153 and PANAM-285), the total number of confreres who are engaged in pastoral ministry is 1480 (AFRAM-230, ASPAC-596, EUROPA-214 and PANAM-439). Along with these confreres, there are many retired confreres and others who work in pastoral service; and so we have the biggest number of confreres involved in this apostolate. In some countries, due to the lack of priests, many parishes are amalgamated into a “Parish Unit” or “Parish Area”.

All of our parishes should have a contract with the local ordinary; this is very important in order to focus our involvement and commitment in a diocese. Living in a community is encouraged in order to foster our charism and witness value in the local Church. Our *ad intra* life with the other confreres in a parish should mirror the fountain of love, forgiveness and fellowship. The example of our life is our first and most fundamental witness. The missionary call invites us to live up to this challenge.

¹ *In Word and Deed* [IWD] Documents of the 18th General Chapter SVD 2018, Rome, No 6, 2018, 40.

² *Profile of SVD Parish*, Rome: SVD Publications, 2016, p. 9.

3. Approaches to Be a Missionary Parish

Our approach in becoming a missionary parish is made visible in how we respond to the needs of our parish community, and how all of us could live our faith in a more dynamic way. In one of the parishes in PANAM Zone, every week new families register and want to become part of our SVD parish community. Most of them are from neighboring parishes. But when asked why they want to move to our parish, most respond: *There is more life in this parish; there is joy and a sense of belonging in this community and there is mission.*



The categories listed below - *welcome, dialogue, experience, participation, action plan* and *evaluation* – are some ways a parish could position its approach. The main orientation should be the *celebration of faith, building the community, and living the mission.*

3.1. Welcome

An open-door policy is very helpful. Our churches are to be open to everyone – believers and non-believers, members and guests, sinners and saints. A structure to welcome people in a parish is significant. The availability of someone in the parish to attend to the needs of the people who come, making them feel comfortable with kind words and responding to their needs, taking every possible step to show that they are important and respected, are some basic steps for a parish. Coming from diverse cultures or backgrounds, everyone should feel that there is no discrimination and they are welcome. In all programs and activities, we should highlight the importance of *respect, openness to others* and their call to be missionaries of *joy and hope*. For example, in some parishes, every weekend and at solemnities, all the altar servers (at times nearly 100 and above) and the priests stand by the door to wel-

come the people. We recognize some attend to the parishioners at all hours while some do this according to office hours. We must be attentive to local culture and customs in this regard.

3.2. Dialogue

Regular consultation, communication and transparency are essential components in any family and this is also true in a missionary parish. Dialogue is essential in a missionary parish; it is life-giving. Dialogue opens lines of communication between the diocese and the parish, between the pastoral staff and parishioners, and between and among parishioners themselves. Dialogue in a pastoral setting is not only about the dissemination of information but also the art of explaining and making sure that the parishioners understand what is going on in the wider Church in general, and in the diocese and the parish in particular. Dialogue also facilitates a better understanding of the actual needs, concerns and priorities on the ground. A missionary parish is open to dialogue with parishioners both for information, explanation and consultation. Authentic dialogue gives every parishioner a feeling of self-worth that they are not only observers in the process but they are also active participants. The use of various social media is essential in any dialogue; it allows parishioners to participate in many different ways. A well-structured mechanism to have dialogue would be of great help for any parish.

3.3. Experience

A *celebrating parish* is an inviting parish – celebrating faith, family and mission. A parish celebrates in what it says and does; this experience gives life-giving energy. Remember the maxim: *You cannot give that which you do not have!* People will be attracted to our parish because of the lived experiences of our people. When they come to the parish and see a **community of faith who values family and who is committed to its mission**, they too are challenged. A missionary parish has to be creative in ways to keep the

faith alive and at the same time attest to experience that it is missionary. This is only possible if the parish knows its *people* (their needs and concerns), its *resources* (time, talent and treasure) and its *priorities* (signs of the times, relevance and appropriateness). For example, some parishes invite people to take part in activities and so have a personal experience. A *see and experience* approach needs proactive measures.

3.4. Participation

A missionary parish will not be viable without the active participation of the laity (parishioners) on different levels: lay movements, prayer groups, parish and finance councils, social organizations, different committees and various ministries. There should be enough room for everyone to get involved in the life of the parish: from the young members to young adults, from adults to the elderly. Everyone has a gift to offer and they should be given the opportunity to share that gift with other people not only in the parish but also in the wider community. Hence, clericalism



has no place in our parishes. A missionary parish creates and promotes activities where everyone can participate. Creating a sense of ownership of the parish and recognizing their importance would be a way to be participants and not just observers.

3.5. Vision-Mission Statement and Action Plan

Every parish should have a **vision-mission statement** and this should be prominently displayed. If there is no vision-mission and action plan for an organization, there is no future, it is a dead body. This is the same for a parish too. Fulfilling and giving life to that statement is an important step. Planning for future action

is a must, and the wider community should be represented in the planning: youth, middle age, elderly, active members as well as seasonal members, and representatives from different cultural or ethnic groups.³ One of the parishes in the AFRAM Zone has an action plan for 5 years, and every year they evaluate their activities. In another parish in PANAM, their theme of “joy and mission” has guided them for the last 10 years. A plan of action is an invaluable tool for a missionary parish.

In responding to the local context, dioceses have pastoral plans and every parish has to resonate with the diocesan pastoral plan, but including the profile of the SVD parish with missionary vision is our duty.

3.6. Evaluation

Action without evaluation is spineless behavior. An evaluation has to be constant, regular and ongoing. Here, a spirit of openness, respect, critical listening and the willingness to learn from one another are significant. An evaluation in the context of a missionary parish highlights and celebrates primarily the good, the beautiful, the life and the love-giving before dwelling on the less positive issues which are equally important for a parish to grow and remain relevant. An authentic evaluation welcomes the parishioners in a spirit of dialogue to share their experiences on how they participate in the life and mission of the parish today and to carefully plan on how they wish to continue to do so in the future.

4. Nature of SVD Parishes

4.1. Sharing Divine Love

Buildings do not define a parish, parishioners do, the People of God with a compassionate and vulnerable bearing, ever open to God’s Spirit who is present as *wind / breath* vivifying dry bones

³ Cf. *Profile of SVD Parish*, pp.14-15.

(Ezek 37), as *flowing water* from the temple (Ezek 47), as *balm* that heals the wounds of whoever has lost hope (Is 61). Jesus exemplifies the work of the Spirit: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; the Lord has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. The Lord has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord” (Lk 4:18-19). We concur with Meister Eckhart, the fourteenth century mystic, that the best name for God is compassion. For when we see how Jesus teaches, acts and suffers, we know how compassionate and merciful God is, and how caring and forgiving and willing to suffer we need to be. This is what defines the SVD parish: a communion of communities enfolded by divine love, ever reaching out in vulnerability, respect and gentleness, living for others, in particular for the last, the least, and the lost. Our parish denotes having a **global vision reaching out to the needs of people around the world** and not just in the local community. Each parish is encouraged to do the following:

- Make the Sunday liturgy a place to experience divine love.
- Design creative activities for children, youth, adults and the elderly to experience divine love.
- Identify the vulnerable people in your parish and assign a group of persons to reach out to them with time-bound programs.
- Identify the needs of the poor in the world, and try to reach out to those who deserve the most.

4.2 Prophetic Mission and Dialogue

To be prophetic is to resist being co-opted by power or wealth. We view society with the eyes of the poor, the oppressed, the excluded, and the forgotten, which leads us to encounter God outside the parish, outside our traditional ways of viewing life, open to meet God who cannot be contained in any single way of thinking. To be prophetic calls us to search for an alternative way of life with au-



thenticity. In prophetic dialogue, we listen, respect and challenge others and we search for meaning together with those at the periphery, moving ever deeper into faith, hope and love. Our Society is on a pilgrimage with the Church: “our *witness to the Reign of God* has to do with the aim of our journey; *prophetic dialogue* focuses on the partners with whom we share the journey and the way we relate to them; and the *characteristic dimensions* indicate the pathways we follow.”⁴ The prophetic mission grows in hearts that are ever ready to listen with compassion to those bruised and wounded by life. This

draws our attention to the dialogue partners. In prophetic mission and dialogue, we enfold “the other”, whether of another faith commitment or none, with diverse cultures, with the poor, and in the same embrace with which we have been held by the Divine Word. To make this happen, the following activities need to be followed:

- Organize sessions on prophetic mission and prophetic dialogue at least once in three years.
- Identify the dialogue partners in each parish together with the people and draw a yearly action plan with them.
- Develop a method of prophetic dialogue in staff meetings, parish council meetings, general meetings in the parish—work to discern in dialogue and openness how we might offer prophetic action: how might we be signs of hope, preach the gospel more clearly, confront evil and injustice and witness to love and justice.

⁴ *In Dialogue with the Word* [IDW], 16th General Chapter SVD 2006, Rome, No. 6, 2006, 3.

4.3. Interculturality

There is no such thing as a “generalized humanity”; each person and human group is culturally specific. Nevertheless, as a result of massive and ongoing global migrations, parishes throughout the world are increasingly multi-cultural. Hence, due to mobility and interaction, there are few if any “secluded cultures” left in the world. To a lesser or greater degree, we have become multicultural beings possessing a variety of different ethnic identities, languages cultures and social-economic backgrounds. In an SVD parish, we need to intentionally promote interculturality and foster an atmosphere to grow as intercultural beings. In an intercultural parish all belong to each other. Each member is a vital building block in a parish which is forever in the process of building. We acknowledge that no one culture is more important than another; each culture can and needs to be infused with the Word of God. Interculturality also implies having good relationship among the laity and clergy, among various generations, and that all are gender sensitive.

The parish becomes intercultural when it is not simply tolerant or non-discriminative, but creates a welcoming atmosphere where parishioners are eager to learn from, and be enriched by, each other’s culture and are also challenged by others. In an intercultural parish, parishioners from different cultural groups interact with one another and mature together, building up relationships, allowing themselves to be shaped and molded by each other’s experiences.⁵ The intercultural parish focuses on such relationship-building: mutual gifting, respect, and learning from one another. Our SVD parishes need to make a great deal of effort to build an intercultural community, which will resonate with our charism and mission. In this context, we have the responsibility to work out an integration process of the migrants in a parish. The recommended actions are as follows:

- Organize an “Intercultural Day” in a parish where diverse cultures display their richness.

⁵ Cf. IWD 6, 2018, 28.

- Each culture could also be given one day a year to celebrate their richness.
- Give room for diverse cultures in the leadership of a parish.
- Place the symbols of diverse cultures in the parish which express divine love, joy, and happiness.

4.4. Interculturation

The Divine Word chose to be born as a first-century Galilean, among foreigners and Gentiles, half-pagan in cult, who spoke Aramaic and Koine Greek rather than Hebrew or Latin. This is the multi-cultural context of the incarnation. And from the “Galilee of the Nations” the apostles were commissioned to proclaim the Word (Mt 28:10). Thus, what began as a rural Galilean renewal movement in Jesus’ lifetime gradually morphed into intercultural urban communities (Col 1:15-20). Today we enjoy a mix of cultures in our very selves from the traditional to the digital. Each cultural expression has its positive values and drawbacks. We challenge the negative while witnessing to the Word through the variety of positive values present in the parish. We are aware that there is no living transmission of the Word without reinterpretation. Such a positive, mindful intercultural transmission creates not just new and creative interpretations of the Gospel, but new cultures within and between parishes; thus, interculturation takes place and new cultures emerge. Some of the practical ways to promote interculturation are;

- Conducting seminars and analyzing the goodness of each culture as well as bad elements.
- Interpret the goodness of the culture with the Bible / the teaching of Jesus.
- Make efforts so that each cultural group adopts or imbibes or absorbs the goodness of other cultures.

- More importantly, create a new culture where the goodness of diverse cultures is expressed and where everyone feels that they are part of that new cultural expression, custom or tradition and feel at home.

4.5. Arnoldus Spirituality

Arnoldus spirituality is centered on the Trinity. Arnold's life, the founding generation's – and our - whole life is rooted in this Triune God of loving, intimate, complementary relationships that create, liberate, inspire. *God is relationship; relationships define who we are and what our mission is. Indeed, God is mission, creating out of love in order that we may love, and so become one with God's creation. The Triune God embraces reality in love, whether cosmic, social or personal. This cosmos with humanity is embraced by the Triune God who is life-giving, freeing, renewing.* For Arnold, the Word is at the heart of the Trinity, at the heart of the cosmos, in the heart of each one of us. To make this present, he developed prayers, novenas and meditations.

As pastors of SVD parishes, we are bound by this spirituality and it is imperative that we pass on this rich legacy to others in the parish. Thus, designing liturgical programs, conducting various Arnoldus spirituality sessions in the parish and creating an atmosphere of *svdness* are ways we promote this spirituality. Some practical ways are:

- Recite the Quarter hour prayer in the parish daily.
- Adoration to the Holy Spirit and the Sacred Heart.
- Celebrate the Feasts of St. Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz.
- Have pictures and statutes of St. Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz and our founding generation.
- Organizing seminars on Trinitarian Spirituality, Incarnational Spirituality, Intercultural Spirituality, and Marian Spirituality.

4.6. Beyond the Service Station: From “Maintenance” to “Mission”

Some see a parish just as a “service station” or “spiritual gas station”. This is simply not enough in today’s world. A parish is not just to fulfill people’s needs. The parish does not exist for itself; it is not the center. We do not evaluate the parish by way of dry statistics, whether by counting the number of members or the amount of money. The parish exists to enable us to go forth in prophetic witness into the surrounding society and the wider world. The parish is both a sign and an enabler of God’s mission, when we become a grace, a blessing, a witness to God’s presence which frees, heals and challenges. Regular sacramental liturgies nourish our roots in the Word of God and rejuvenate us as Christ’s Body on earth, in order to send us forth as missionary disciples. Thus, parishes serve beyond the image of a service station, rejuvenating as well as equipping, challenging and supporting women and men to take part in the Church’s mission. The task of parishes today is to move from a stance of maintenance to one of mission.



For the goal of everything that occurs within the parish - its plans, activities and liturgies - is to form, and continually reform, our lives in the family, among neighbors, at work, and in society at large, as witnesses of the Word. The parish is truly alive when we

witness to human dignity, human rights and equality, when we inspire conversion of heart through example and persuasion. Thus, our life and breath have to be infused with a missionary impetus, our time and energy have to be spent making every member in the parish into a missionary. Certainly, this challenges any maintenance mode of a parish preoccupied with mundane things or just maintaining the status quo with structures and rules. Structures and rules are useful to the extent they assist everyone to get involved in reaching out to the other. Consider the following aspects:

- Challenge every association or group in the parish to engage in missionary activities – sharing God’s love through words and through concrete actions (reaching out to the poor, the marginalized, the sick, the elderly and excluded people).
- Evaluate the various associations and groups in the parish once a year, whether they are in the maintenance mode or have a missionary vision; and also the use of place, time and resources and the leadership team by both clergy and lay-people.

4.7. Communion of Communities

Forming many Small Christian Communities according to the given territory in a parish creates room for actualization of what a parish envisions. A Small Christian Community is an ecclesiological reality, of which it can be said that the holy, Catholic and apostolic Church is truly present and active. Numerous terms are used by Christians to describe the active, spiritually imbued basic ecclesial groups – Small Christian Communities (SCCs), Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) and Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) and Ecclesial Base Communities (CEBs) – these heterogeneous expressions emerge from diverse local Churches, but they all refer to the same reality. Small Christian Communities are described as a “sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization, and a solid starting point for a new

society based on a ‘civilization of love.’” (RM 51) In some places, Basic Human Communities are formed including people of other faiths in order to build a just society.

A parish’s vision and mission orientations and its action plan could be effectively carried out in a small community. Fostering these communities, the faithful could build good relationships and an understanding of the mission of the Church. The transformation of community takes place when these communities gather to pray, to discern their missionary vocation, and actively participate in the decisions that they have made. Participative leadership and the tangible living of the faith makes a community more joyful and one can find the seeds of the missionary vision emerging here. A parish’s active achievement of these communities and their function set in motion a living faith. Sharing and discerning among these communities together, further occasions the process of transformation in the parish and in society. Many of our parishes have such Small Christian Communities. We could strengthen these communities towards becoming a communion of communities with a missionary vision. This is our challenge today.

- Form Small Christian Communities in a parish where these do not yet exist.
- Impart missionary vision to these Communities and have regular meetings, drawing up action plans and evaluations.

5. Missionary Life of a Parish

If there is one thing that will differentiate a ‘missionary’ parish from a ‘stagnant’ parish (refer the oft quoted comparison between the ‘teeming with life’ Sea of Galilee and the ‘Dead’ Sea), it is the flowing nature of the ‘waters of life’. The clergy and laity are like the two lungs of the body and both are needed to function fully for the body to work well and for the Church / parish to teem with life. One is not opposed to or meant to ‘pull-down’ the other. The need of the hour is robust laity formation, empowerment and leadership

in ‘real’ decision making in parishes. A real partnership is the new normal as technology and new structures disrupt the status quo. In a missionary parish, could we see laity conducting retreats, chairing finance and administration functions, determining the Mass schedule and probably also a (lay) CEO structure with the parish priest focusing more on pastoral activities? Could we actually allow the laity ‘decision-making’ authority or will we try and limit them to ‘advisory’ bodies? People vote with their feet, and empty churches are often a sign of poorly catechized and disconnected laity. Each member in her/his own proper way shares, “in the one priesthood of Christ.” Contrary to widespread thought and practice, the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood.⁶ Therefore, missionary parishes evolve in partnership with the laity.

5.1. Kerygmatic Community



With the characteristic twinkle in his eye, Pope Francis speaking to Church leaders once said, “The faith is not that difficult; don’t make it so complicated!” The simple kiss blown to the picture of the Sacred Heart by the toddler who can barely walk, the tentative sign of the

cross made by little fingers guided by the loving hand of a parent, the Instagram post of the daily gospel message, the e-retreat conducted for the housebound, Bible Apps for study and reflection, Vacation Bible Camps for school children – all simple yet powerful ways to introduce the truth of God’s love; His sending Jesus to save us from our sins, through His passion, death and resurrection and the empowering accompaniment of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The world of today provides wonderful and exciting new

⁶ *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005, 1547.

ways to transmit the faith of the Apostles in ways ever relevant, ever fresh, ever new (Mt 13:52).

Today as we face a new world order – due to hyper-nationalism, the digitalized world, the new normal post COVID-19, etc. – we still face the same challenges as did ancient times such as poverty, exclusion, hopelessness and a need for meaning. As SVD parishes, we need to constantly seek the creative help of the *Paracletos* (Jn 14:16) – the primary agent of evangelization – in bringing, breaking open and translating God’s Word into action. “Announcing the gospel is the first and greatest act of charity”; these words of St. Arnold serve as a lodestar for a truly missionary parish in a world where the Church/parishes often tend to mimic NGOs (the Church is not an NGO: Pope Francis). To be effective –

- Create a group/commission in the parish for guiding the Kerygmatic activities.
- Prepare lay mission preachers for parish feasts/Lent/Advent.
- Organize a Bible week/month once in a year.
- With practical training, send out parishioners (in twos) as missionaries to be proclaimers in word (where possible) and action. This can be once in a week/month;
- ‘Jesus walk’ – where for 60 minutes a week SVDs leave their offices, residences, churches and go out ‘into the highways, by-lanes, marketplaces, railway stations, street corners’ and just ‘be Jesus’. Be it smiling, lifting a heavy parcel, helping someone to cross the street... a conscious leaving ‘the comfort zone’ and being one with people/strangers.

5.2. Vibrant Prayer and Liturgy

Derived from *litos* ‘people’ (public) + *ergos* ‘working’; it is evident that in order to be a true missionary parish – all the *people of God* come together to worship the Lord, centered around the Eucharist - the source and summit of Christian life.⁷ A missionary Church would be characterized by a joyful collaboration in

⁷ CCC 1324.

prayer and liturgy – with a humble openness to a Spirit who blows where She wills (Jn 3:8). Liturgical training, courses in seminaries/ on-line for lay ministers, flexibility in timings for the Eucharist (lunchtime in business districts, late evenings where there are long hours of commute, etc.) and relevant-to-life catechetical instruction could go a long way in bringing back zeal for the Father’s house (Jn 2:17). Some of the encouraging ways to build a lively praying community are:

- Inclusive liturgy teams of men and women, the young and the experienced with clergy;
- Zonal/neighborhood prayer meetings and Eucharist.
- Find ways to integrate in an appropriate way different languages, ethnic music, and cultural expressions of spirituality into regular parish liturgies.
- Include in the liturgy an international dimension, and focus on the plight of the poor
- Praise and worship sessions once in a week/month.
- Teaching different forms of meditation – including the quiet time of Eucharistic adoration.

5.3. Social Outreach Programs

In *Misericordiae Vultus* (MV), Pope Francis writes: “In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a word, wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy” (12). Do those who are burdened find refreshment and acceptance in our parishes? A missionary parish, much like the missionaries of the early centuries, goes out to the periphery to bring the love of Christ to a bruised world. And we know the world is wounded today, probably more than ever before. Broken families, disillusioned teenagers, tattered marriages, unemployment and financial distress, deep-seated addiction – everywhere one looks, yes, there is a ‘thirsting Christ’ (Jn 19:28). Some of the ways that parishioners can support one another and truly be Church and catholic (universal) are:

- Feeding the poor/soup kitchens.
- Providence rooms (where people leave good quality second hand things for those in need to come and take).
- Providing room for gatherings of Self Help Groups or civil organizations;
- Employment cells/placement services.
- Women's health/security services.
- Crèches/classes for coaching of needy students by retired teachers.
- Medical devices/water beds/wheelchairs that could be lent/circulated, etc.
- Creating a common social fund for the parish.
- Finding sponsors to educate needy students in higher education.

5.4. Solidarity

In an increasingly selfish world, solidarity is often a victim. However, this is also an opportunity for the Church to be counter-cultural, a witness for the 'unity' we share. Green shoots of these are visible in the newfound solidarity which is seen today in times of natural or other calamities. Can our parishes build on the revival of solidarity that brings back the Church of Acts 2:42-47? Everything in common, a focus on loving God and neighbor. Signs and Wonders. No one in need. More getting added. Praising God. Isn't that what being missionary is all about? Interestingly, "No one in need" is the theme of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030. Our parishes can be those 'oases of mercy' (MV 12). In fact, most of the parishes in the EUROPE Zone have engaged in special pastoral care for the migrants. A parish could do the following:

- To show solidarity, choose one/more specific group (migrants, the aged, the destitute, unwed mothers, transgender, sexual minorities, single mothers, substance-abusers, etc.)

- Set up a committee to take care of these groups or network with other agencies (Good Samaritan helplines, foster homes, etc.)
- Find ways to work against injustice in the society - establishing legal cells, justice/rights counselors or networking with other civil groups. A clear vision of justice and peace needs to be part of the vision-mission statement.

5.5. Eco-Parish

Laudato Si very clearly exhorts us to develop a “culture of care” for our common home. The havoc caused by global warming and the harm to our biodiversity is playing out before our eyes. A missionary parish is also called to be a Green Parish – extolling the glory of God in His people and all creation. One of our parishes in the ASPAC Zone and one in AFRAM Zone are known as a ‘Green Parish’ because of their unique policies. The “Fridays for Future’ movement by Greta Thunberg has shown the commitment of young people to this cause and this could make the Church more ‘relevant’ to them.

- Promote “environmental conversion” based on *Laudato Si*.
- Celebrate annually “World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation” on September 1.
- Form a Green Cell which creates both a tactical and strategic plan to reduce the carbon footprint ultimately moving to a zero net carbon parish.
- Involve Sunday school children, youth and families in tactical and practical methods of reduce-reuse-recycle, including the church premises.
- Encourage the homes of parishioners (also the parish buildings) to have solar panels, kitchen gardens, rain-water harvesting and other environment friendly habits.
- Encourage zero single-use plastics and waste segregation.

5.6. Celebration of Diverse Cultures

The dialogue of cultures invites us to appreciate the “rays of truth” (*Nostra Aetate*, 2) and grow in fraternity and fullness of the Spirit, who blows where She wills (Jn 3:8). As the world shrinks and becomes a global village, our parishes are likely to become more cosmopolitan and heterogeneous in nature. ‘Incarnational spirituality’ is the spirituality of the gospel and the SVD approach; hence a true integration and appreciation of diverse cultures are called for. A missionary parish would foster the promotion of the local culture(s), celebration of diverse cultures in the liturgy, social gathering, intercultural expressions and the building of bridges among the various cultural groups both within and beyond the ‘peripheries’ of the baptized and others. Whether in Latin or North America, Africa, Papua New Guinea, Philippines and Indonesia, or the interior villages in Orissa (India), the SVDs have exemplified true integration and celebration, which are to be fostered, and the ‘success stories’ could be shared while retaining cultural identities and helping people discover their ‘deeper identity in Christ’.

- Adopt diverse cultural forms in liturgy, catechism and social gatherings.
- Have the representation of diverse cultural members in every committee or association.
- Organize programs for deeper understanding of richness of cultures within the parish and neighborhood through such activities as youth groups, workshops, bible sharing, social outreach, story-telling among people of different cultures and backgrounds.
- Create an opportunity for each culture to contribute to the growth of the parish.

5.7. Family and Youth

The family today is in crisis more than in earlier years. Whether one reads the prophecies of Fatima or the newspaper, it doesn't take much to arrive at this conclusion. The battleground for souls is the family. Gadgets, addictions, work stress, and a lack of a sense of sin are wreaking havoc on Christian families, if not all families. The first casualties are often the children and the youth. In these times of conflicting messaging, the Church seems to be perceived as an outsider. A true missionary parish needs to serve and build its families. There is

no substitute for prayer and pastoral visits. *Christus Vivit* talks about the various pastoral initiatives that can be put in place in dealing with young people; the need for them to be loved, respected and appreciated and at the same time giving them authentic apostolic



teaching and not insulting their intellect or perspectives. Enabling them (through sponsorships) to attend World Youth Days and other diocese-level, local or national programs would go a long way in their formation and in building relationships.

- Take initiatives to have family / couple counseling, legal aid, senior citizens resources, employment bureaus, crèches, career guidance, reimagining Sunday school, etc.
- Have trained resource persons or teams (in youth interaction, mental health issues, etc.) that would be useful in reaching out to families and youth, involve them in mainstream parish activities for 'who they are' and not just as 'performers for cultural events' or 'physical labor' for organizing events.

5.8. Media and Parish Community

If there is one thing universally agreed upon, it is the ubiquity of technology in our lives. Be it digital, internet, social media, artificial intelligence (AI), big data, blockchain – it is everywhere. While media is neutral – what we make of it determines its effect. The COVID-19 crisis indicated how helpful it can be, while the rising cases of sleep deprivation, stress, gadget addiction, cyberbullying, pornography addiction, crimes on the dark-web, sexual predators online, etc. are examples of the clear and present danger. Or possibly the tip of the iceberg.

We are in an age of nationalism and state surveillance, with facial recognition and biometrics, and this has accelerated rapidly. There are risks to freedom, data privacy and targeting. A missionary parish cannot bury its head in the sand, but must network with civil society organizations and those advocating human rights to ensure that *every human being's rights* must be protected and respected. The philosopher Nietzsche used the expression “transvaluation of values” to critique the prevalent Christian culture of his time, which he found to be impotent and ineffective. Today, “media pastoring” is becoming increasingly common, but faith through media consumption does not build a community. Media has the potential to up-end a clerical-centric Church and to democratize access and interaction. Are we ready for that, or do we feel threatened? It may be a blessing to see ‘what the spirit is saying to the Churches’ (Rev 2:29). The digital era helps us to be at the service of people and mission, but more discernment is needed.⁸ A missionary parish has to have a clear strategy in place to both:

- Harness the potential of media in the “new ways of being Church” to a generation growing up on smartphones and social media (Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp).
- Provide the crook and staff needed for the sheep to know the risks therein.

⁸ IWD 6, 2018, 46.

5.9. SVD Lay Partners



Freely responding to God's call, SVD lay partners are those who strive to live their lives in accordance with Christ's mandate to serve the people in the light of the charism of the Society of the Divine Word. As SVDs, "we are all encouraged and challenged to actively invite and welcome lay people to

join the SVD lay partners' groups".⁹ Our parishes are apt places to promote lay partners who have tremendous witness-value. A missionary parish is characterized by genuine lay partners.

- Find ways and means to establish an SVD lay partners group in every parish. Animating them with a spiritual director is imperative in promoting the lay partners group.
- Formation and empowerment of SVD lay partners is of prime importance.

5.10. SVD Day/Weekend/Week

In order to imbibe more fully the Arnoldus Spirituality and help all parishioners to internalize core elements of the SVD Apostolate and Mission, it is recommended to have a celebration of an SVD Day/Weekend/Week to draw different aspects of the 'Rootedness in the Word of God' and the 'Commitment to Mission' with our lay partners. It would be good for all to appreciate the life, thoughts, writings and works of the founding generation and pioneering SVD missionaries. These celebrations can be in a traditional format of retreats or talks, but could be creatively presented using digital media or even with outreach programs. This has to be part of the parish calendar (not simply part of World Mission Sunday).

⁹ IWD 6, 2018, 49.

- Arrange a meaningful liturgy, with the focus on informing people about the charism and missionary activities of the SVDs throughout the world. To be practical, each year a particular theme could be chosen.
- Arrange a special outreach program to help the needy in the parish.
- Display SVD world mission activities: posters, flyers and photos; organize Bible quiz, dramas, creative cultural programs.
- Where possible, celebrate this event with the SSpS and include their missionary activities; also display information about the SSpSAP and worldwide lay partners.
- Sow/nurture the seeds of zeal for evangelization and vocations to the religious life.
- Make a special collection for SVD missionary activities.

5.11. Four Characteristic Dimensions

A missionary parish “would include promoting our fourfold prophetic dialogue and characteristic dimensions”.¹⁰ Bible, mission animation, JPIC and communication are not exclusive to each other but permeate each of the aspects mentioned above – be it in the area of liturgy, social outreach, missionary approaches, environment and media. The various activities which are listed above and other activities could be coordinated through the leaders of these dimensions.

- Establish a committee for each of the characteristic dimensions to plan and evaluate the functions in the parish.

6. Images of an SVD Parish

The SVD parish community is a microcosm of the universal Church, carrying out locally the mission of Christ himself. The Church, being essentially a mystery of faith, can best be ap-

¹⁰ *In Dialogue with the Word (IDW)*, Documents of the 15th General Chapter, 2000, No.1, 2000, 91.



proached, in Avery Dulles' view, not directly but through models, images, analogies or metaphors arising out of our mundane experience. Here we offer five such metaphors that encapsulate the identity of the SVD Parish and identify the main thrust of its mission in the contemporary world.

6.1 Caring Mother

As a community of believers carrying out the mandate of Christ, the first image that should adequately represent an SVD parish is that of a caring mother. Pope Francis understands a parish community as a mother with an open heart (EG 46-49). Fundamentally, the caring mother leaves her doors open for all who, burdened by the troubles of this world, are in need of a listening ear. Moreover, the doors of an SVD parish are to remain open for those who, moved by the promptings of the Holy Spirit, sincerely seek to partake in the sacramental life of the community. In keeping with the Pope's conviction, SVD parish doors need to be left wide open, particularly for the poor, the less fortunate, and those pushed to the fringes of society. A caring parish, guided by the maternal spirit, does not only teach her children, but also listens and learns from them. This brings about mutual learning in the community and the bearing of fruit for the common good (EG 139-141). Thus, an SVD parish should encourage open listening and learning, and an attitude of dialogue among its members, so that all may flourish.

- At least once in three years conduct a formation seminar on this image – Church as a caring mother.
- Make an effort for the creative involvement of the whole community to understand this image and how they can live this image.

6.2. Body of Christ

The second image which should form the core of an SVD parish is the Body of Christ. This metaphor has solid Scriptural grounds. Paul uses the metaphor of the body to remind the Corinthians that just as there are many members in a human body, each with its own role, so there are many spiritual gifts in the Church (1 Cor 12:12-26). Accordingly, an SVD parish must be a seedbed where each member's contribution in building the body of Christ, namely, the parish community, is identified, appreciated, nurtured and developed to full fruition. More importantly, the parish Church is one body in Christ precisely because its members, though many, partake of the one bread (1 Cor 10:16-17). Essentially, the Eucharist makes the unity of the Church in Christ as one body, a reality. Vatican II underlined the principle role of the Holy Spirit in constituting people into the Body of Christ (*Lumen Gentium*, 7). This happens primarily through Baptism and the Eucharist. The Council affirmed that the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, is the high point towards which the life of the parish community is directed; and it is the fountain from which its power flows (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). The Eucharist makes the Church, and the Church makes the Eucharist. The inseparable link between the parish community and the Eucharist is affirmed most clearly in Pope John Paul II's Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistica* (1, 3, 23). Fundamentally, an SVD parish must be a worshipping community around the Eucharist, from where it draws its effective capacity for mission. Celebrating the Eucharist creatively, taking account of the local context, is very significant in our parishes. Through the Eucharist, people should feel the missionary vision in them.

- At least twice a year arrange a special celebration of Eucharist to highlight this image in a parish;

- Each sub-station, or each local unit in a parish could celebrate this image one day each year.

6.3. Field Hospital

The third metaphor which may characterize an SVD parish is the image of the Church as a field hospital. The origin of this metaphor goes back to the early days of Pope Francis' papacy. He likened the Church to a field hospital, which is an invitation for the Church community to radically rethink and reconsider its identity, mission and life. From a self-referential Church to an outward looking Church – to the periphery by prioritizing the needy and the wounded. The Church should be bruised, hurting and dirty because of its involvement with the suffering masses in the streets and battlefield of life, rather than a Church which is sick as a result of an obsession with its own securities (EG 49). A Church that is like a field hospital after a battle is never caught up in its own comfort and self-adoration, waiting for those who are troubled to come to her. Rather, it goes forth to the world, which is the battlefield where the sick, the needy and the wounded reside and are in dire need of the helping hand of the Church. The Church does this with the view of transforming their lives (EG 121).

Taking the lead from this understanding, it should be a defining characteristic of an SVD parish to be a community of transforming missionary disciples who become “an agent of transforming the world” (IWD 6, 13). As a matter of fact, an SVD parish must become one with the people under its care and its pastors; and should be ready to take on the “smell of the sheep”, and the sheep should be able to recognize the pastor's voice (EG 24). Essentially, this means that the proximity and availability of SVD pastors and the entire parish community to serve, heal wounds and support each other is an indispensable attribute of an SVD parish. To be effective, each parish needs to design its activities to realize this goal.

- Identify the needs of the parish and resources, both personnel and finance, to implement this image.
- Create a structure or establish a team to live the image of the Church as a field hospital.

6.4. Pilgrim Community

From its earliest days the Church saw itself as a community on a journey, on a pilgrimage, moving towards the ultimate goal of its existence, often symbolically named “the house of the Father”. This self-understanding provides a perfect image for an SVD Parish, which, like the early Church, ought to be founded on Scripture and guided by apostolic teaching. There is no better scriptural passage to simultaneously express the pilgrim and the communitarian nature of Christianity than the Emmaus story, one which perfectly describes the character and mission of an SVD parish.

Much like the two disciples walking away from Jerusalem, shattered and broken by the death of their Master, many SVD parishes today face a world shattered by confusion, disillusionment, waning faith, hopelessness and resignation. Through the example of Jesus, the story beautifully teaches us how to act and do mission amidst such a destructive reality. First, the disciples walk together. They might have lost their confidence, but they did not lose each other. The basic task of an SVD parish is, therefore, to bring and hold people together, no matter how disillusioned or skeptical they might be. Mission today might well be about providing a platform for people to come together, even if it would be a group of confused travelers. Like Jesus, who personally joined the disillusioned travelers, an SVD missionary or parish community joins those modern travelers “to Emmaus” driven by incomprehension and resignation.

This story provides the definitive metaphor for an SVD parish and an SVD Missionary. Employing a systematic and well-founded biblical catechesis and education, the parish could lead to an authentic and effective sacramental life – one that moved beyond mere ritualism so rampant in our communities – and to the transforming experience of an encounter with the Risen Lord. The story of Emmaus provides a sound and credible pastoral program for any SVD parish.

- Organize a pilgrimage once a year highlighting the image of the Church as a pilgrim community.
- Conduct a session for the whole parish on the experience of the Emmaus story, maybe for different groups at distinctive times.

6.5. The Farm

The final image for an SVD parish, that appears particularly relevant to our times, is that of a farm. Farming has always been a communal enterprise, uniting women and men of various trades, performing diverse but complementary tasks. For this reason, farming serves as a very suitable metaphor for a parish that brings together men and women from all walks of life.

However, the essential contribution of the farming metaphor is the question it raises about the purpose of bringing those individuals together. All farming has one essential goal – the harvest. Harvest provides two things: a testimony that the work was successfully completed and bore fruit, and then it provides food so that the work can continue and human bodies can be sustained. In this way, farming reflects nature in its cyclic and self-nourishing labor. However, on a deeper level, by its cyclic nature farming endows the lives of farmers with rhythm and meaning. This makes farming very applicable for an understanding of the purpose and mission of an SVD parish in the modern world. Our age is undoubtedly one of relativism, plagued by meaninglessness and uncertainty as to life's meaning and purpose. This sense of being lost in life often leads to the extremes of fundamentalism or suicide, both of which are often ways of escaping meaninglessness. An SVD parish ought to be an exercise in communal "farming". This means that its members ought to be guided to see their presence and engagement in the community as a means to nourish and be nourished, above all, in a spiritual way. By bringing together and coordinating efforts of diverse individuals, by giving each a meaningful task and role to play, SVD parish communities can and should provide their members with a sense of direction and purpose, and ultimately provide a sense of meaning and importance for their presence in this world.

Without such a sense, no happy and fruitful human life is possible.

- Very useful for rural parishes – organize the Eucharist in a farm field to highlight this image.
- Organize the reflection in a field highlighting nature and human care for it.

7. Dream of an SVD Parish

A dream helps to enthuse oneself to look forward. A dream of a parish is helpful for galvanizing the people of God to enjoy God's divine love. Let every parish set its dream.

7.1. Volunteerism

All parishes have lay members but how many of them are willing to be part of the activities of the Church both for liturgical activities as well as for the social outreach programs? Normally we see a good number of volunteers for some pious associations, and that is good; but missionary discipleship and missionary spirituality demand much more, as there is a need for good numbers of volunteers for all the activities. Without lay participation and whole-hearted involvement, a parish will be stagnant. The missionary vision of a parish can be enabled only through committed volunteers, trailblazers, and innovative thinkers who are ready to give their time and energy for the activities of the parish. *The dream of every parish is that all the parishioners volunteer for the commissions, associations and various activities.* Well, this dream can come true, if the parish is attractive with programs, transparent with finance, respectful of the laity, allowing them to be co-responsible persons in the Church.

7.2. Faith in a Public Square

Is faith private? This is a question that many countries debate. But the question could be, how does each Christian live his/her faith in public or civil society? Many people think that the parish is only a place where they go to pray, hear Mass, receive sacraments

and ask for certificates. For this reason, only a small group considers the parish as a Christian community that can enrich their faith with the word of God and the sacraments, and that they are agents witnessing to the Reign of God in the world through their presence and collaboration. We see the need for parish renewal, but that renewal must come from the people, based on how they want to live their Christian faith. *The dream of a parish is that all the faithful live their Christian values in their families, in their offices or working places and are also able to celebrate their faith publicly without offending anyone.* The dream of a Christian community is that others recognize that it is full of joy, equality, oneness, fraternity, freedom and justice.

7.3. Involvement in Mission Outreach Programs

“Love one another” is the primary command of Jesus. This can be tangible only through reaching out to others with everyone getting involved in the parish. “Missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity*” (EG 15), thus without a mission outreach program, a parish is a rubric-oriented and outdated parish or dormant parish. ***Forming SVD lay partners in every parish*** helps to take this orientation forward. *We dream that everyone gets involved in the outreach programs.* For this, we need to listen to everyone, and encourage their readiness to reach out to the other. Teamwork is the second step. Everyone becomes part of a solution. The next step is to call everyone to submit themselves to the common good. This requires that all people in the parish, with their ideas, tasks, and projects, turn to the common good. For example, each parish tries to detect social problems around the parish. Then, the parish JPIC team visits the families and diagnoses and determines their needs. Solutions are achieved together with everyone’s help, for example by collecting goods for the poor and marginalized or accompanying workers in their fight against injustice or for the dignity of work, or taking on other initiatives.

7.4. Parish That Goes Forth

Building a structure that helps parishioners learn how to work together with other ministries, pastorals and social groups outside the parish is imperative today. But this structure needs to exhibit “fidelity to her own calling”, otherwise this new structure would be ineffective (EG 26). Planning is



one of the main instruments of growth and change that any parish or other institutional body can have. The parish which goes forth becomes relevant today, it takes on the “smell of the sheep” and the sheep are willing to hear its voice (EG 24). Thus, activities are to be mission-oriented and effective for transforming the surroundings in the parish and the diocese. *Liturgy and life are combined, prayer and social action take place, the parishioners go forth and reach out to all categories of people while transforming the local situation, creating a just society and actualizing heaven on earth:* this is the dream. More importantly, the laity are in the forefront and they make visible the face of Christ through their decision making, involvement and activities. This can take place only with good formation, an organized structure and committed lay leaders. The formation of parishioners starts in childhood, going forth through adolescence, marriage and even to becoming grandparents.

7.5. Self-Reliance and Service Oriented

Finance is one of the concerns in a parish. Each parish seeks to achieve self-reliance. A finance committee is must in every parish; financial planning, financial statements and auditing need to be done regularly. *The dream of every parish is to be financially self-sufficient with long term planning for sustainability; it also has some resources to do charitable activities, especially having a true international vision, in solidarity with the poor of the world, refugees, and*

migrants, etc. Every parish has to strive to reach this goal. Other than financial resources, this dream can be realized with SVD lay partners and parish benefactors, and not just the friends of SVD confreres. The SVD charism is guaranteed even if we are going to turn over the parish to the diocese, because of the continuity of the SVD lay partners in every parish. Our dream is to have a structure where the economic committee is able to subsidize all activities in the four dimensions and at the same time take care of the maintenance of the parish in general. Find ways. Have a list of donors. Above all, be transparent.

Conclusion

The missionary life of a parish is much like the missionary life of the Church. Missionary discipleship can be lived in a parish when a parish has a missionary vision. Today, people may have diverse ideas about a parish, some even do not like to be part of a parish, not only because of their own ideas but also because of the experiences that they have had. The Spirit is calling us today to be a welcoming, dialoguing, communicating parish, actualizing gospel values and transforming community. With an effective and efficient missionary vision, our Society can contribute more life to the community and the local Church. Let us make our parishes the light of the world (Mt 5:14), a city on the hilltop (Mt 5:14), and an oasis of mercy (MV 12) through our lives and actions!

