



# PAPAG

THE OFFICIAL STUDENT PUBLICATION OF SAINT VINCENT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
AUGUST 2020 - MAY 2021



Living in Hope  
after Five hundred years

ATHLE

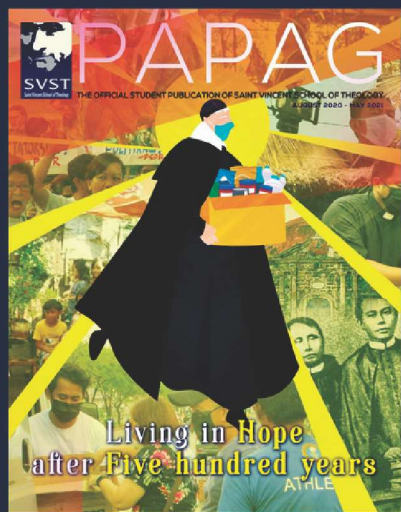
THE OFFICIAL STUDENT PUBLICATION OF  
ST. VINCENT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

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AUGUST 2020 - MAY 2021

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## EDITOR'S VOICE

The academic year 2020-2021 was no doubt a very tough and exceptional year for us here in SVST, mainly because of the COVID-19 pandemic that has profoundly impacted our lives and the way we were used to doing things. It reshaped our institution, conversations, education, and mission outreach to the extent that now we are all being forced to rethink how we engage with one another.

Specifically, the pandemic has changed our traditional way of in-class learning and has tampered with some of our SVST communal get-together activities that are best enjoyed and appreciated in person. SVST, however, as a progressive institution and always ready to adjust, did not waste time in utilizing the new opportunities that the pandemic has brought for study, reaching out in mission, and for a genuine encounter. It quickly leverage on the online digital platforms and other creative mediums for classes, symposia, assemblies, and gatherings. SVST as a community has remained consistent in its educational vision and charitable mandate, exploring countless initiatives for concrete charity that bears witness to God's love at work and reminding everyone of the real essence of mission, especially to the poor. We have become more creative and flexible in our learning and study methods as we continue to be on track together in building the SVST that the world needs now.

Therefore, this year, as Christianity clocks 500 years since its arrival in Philippine soil, we dedicate PAPAQ 2020-2021 to looking back at our missionary journey as a Church. In doing this, we reflect on how Christianity has helped shape the beautiful history and rich culture of our nation, as well as relate the successes that have brought us thus far, coupled with its many setbacks. So 500 years after, despite the many challenges ranging from socio-political to economic disparities to poverty and even now to the scourge of a pandemic, we are thankful for the gift of our unconquerable Christian faith and the resilience of the Filipino spirit. We as a community and even more as a Church have kept hope alive on our missionary journey towards the complete realization of God's kingdom on earth.

On the following pages, you will find short reflections coming from SVST on our mission as a Church, where we are today as an institution amid the pandemic as well as the opportunities for reaching out that await us. We have also captured here the beautiful experiences and reflections from SVST on the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the ongoing online classes and how we have been able to utilize all the good that it brings.

Our hope as always is that the reflections within, while they come as a conversation starter, continue to serve as a trigger for action. Wishing you all a happy read!

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# SVST

**Adah Audu, MMMP**  
*Editor - in- Chief*



## MESSAGE FROM THE **SVST RECTOR**

**This has been a most trying time for many of us, if not all of us. The pandemic caught us literally off-guard. Towards the end of last school year, we thought we would wake up from this 'nightmare' soon enough. We even confidently planned for the School Year 2020-2021 in face-to-face mode. But it was not to be. We are well into the end of this school year, and yet even the prospect of a normal School Year 2021-2022 is not assured. We continue to live in HOPE.**

Little did we know when we were choosing the theme for this current school year that we would be “living in hope” almost every single day. Today we continue to live in hope for

... the end of COVID and the pandemic  
 ... the minimal loss of lives, especially among our loved ones, our circle of friends  
 ... the eventual discovery of vaccine that would stem the spread of the virus  
 ... the kind of vaccine that would be affordable, if not free, especially for the poor  
 ... the systematic program in dealing with this wholly unexpected interruption in our lives  
 ... those in government and hospitals to address the needs and concerns of the people rather than to use the occasion as another opportunity to make money, to institutionalize corruption  
 ... and on and on and on.

This hope lingers, flutters in each one of us, in our communities, in our common humanity. Because it is anchored on something real, something deep down in our being. For, as the recluse American poet, Emily Dickenson, said,

***"hope is a thing with feathers  
 That perches on the soul . . ."***

Throughout the season of the pandemic, we have been awed by the many surprises that nurture this hope.

... the sacrifices of many front-liners, caring for the stricken, sacrificing time and even their own family just to be able to render the service the pandemic demanded  
 ... the realization among many of the need to reconnect with friends and foes, with family members, with long-forgotten acquaintances  
 ... the overflowing generosity of the 'haves' in favor of the 'have-nots'  
 ... the concern of many who venture into new entrepreneurships to augment family income  
 ... the return to Mother Earth, joining her in producing food for the hungry, income for the unemployed, and relaxation for the depressed.

Although we at SVST miss the face-to-face contact with our students and administrative staff, yet we found ways to keep the lines of communication open, through live-streaming, on-line classes and even inter-active social forums. Our fervent desire to get back to our normal ways.

In the meantime, we continue to LIVE IN HOPE.

**Fr. Dr. Manuel Ginete, CM  
 SVST Rector**



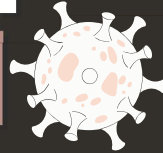
## FROM THE OFFICE OF THE DEAN

I have read this in a newspaper somewhere: “As the world prepares to resume its normal grind, people across the globe will have to adapt to the new normal way of doing things.” Almost automatically, this means face masks and social distancing, hand washing and alcohol, temperature check and contact tracing slips, online classes, and work from home.

However, what is often hidden in the new normal discourse are realities in the other side of the coin: closure of businesses and loss of work, fear and suspicion, depression and anxiety, high prices and hunger, militarization, and repression of dissent,



# REFLEXIVITY *and the* "NEW NORMAL"



incompetence and impunity, etc. These things have become normal, too, and we are socialized through the media to accept them as they are. The distinct police uniform, checkpoints, high-powered firearms, curfew—all these projects a war on human consciousness—war against “coronavirus”. But the “war against the virus” slides into the war against terrorists, communists, indigenous peoples, and drug addicts. The message is clear: we are at war. If you want to survive, obey. No questions asked. This is the new normal!

Michel Foucault, the famous French philosopher, writes in his book *Discipline and Punish*: “The ‘Normal’ becomes an instrument of coercion and power imposing not only necessary standards, but also limits, hierarchization, and surveillance”. The Normal becomes a principle of coercion, an act of social discipline — classifying us into one group or other, locating us in hierarchies, segregating and differentiating people, even as we are made to believe that we belong to one equal homogeneous body.

In this play of power, the poor are the usual victims. As the African proverb goes: “When the elephants play, it is the grass that dies.” Foucault’s project is to unmask impersonal power in modern society. Whether it is the Ship of Fools in medieval times, the expulsion of lepers, or quarantine surveillance, it is the poor who are the real victims. It is always them who are eliminated by brute force or subtle State machinery or both combined. They are the first ones to be detained from minor law infractions. They are the last ones to be tested for the

virus or to be inoculated with a vaccine, not their own choosing. They are the first ones to be killed or silenced; they are the last ones to be given a voice and meted justice. Let me invite everyone towards reflexive philosophizing and theologizing. Before we theologize or philosophize, we need to step back and think again. Any philosophical or theological insight on the “new normal” without any analysis of its discursive power—no matter how creative and necessary—is at best naïve or at worst an enabling of the victimizer and a complicit act with the poor’s victimization.

We know that theology also “to normalize” things. And like the rest of reality, Foucault and others argue, normalization is dual-faced. Christianity and its bearers—both missionaries and soldiers—who arrived at our shores 500 years ago also came with both the cross and the sword. And our celebration of this historic event needs the same reflexive stance.

**Fr. Dr. Daniel Franklin E. Pilario, CM**  
SVST Dean



# LIVING IN HOPE,

## AFTER FIVE HUNDRED YEARS

By Fr. Dr. Jimmy Belita, CM

**“Five hundred years after that historic landing, we are in a similar boat. The Church today is still loaded with saints and sinners, buffeted by the strong winds of socio-political adversities, economic inequalities, miseries, and even the scourge of a pandemic. We continue to live in hope”.**

One humid day, five hundred years ago, a boat dropped anchor at one of the islands, later to be known as the Philippines. A motley group of adventurers, conquistadors, sailors, and a friar disembarked after months of rough sailing. This disease-infested boat carried saints and sinners, battered by nature’s harsh elements and occasional mutinies. But hope was persistent! Not only to survive but also to flourish under God’s providence.

With them came the image of the Santo Nino, the icon of their religiosity, possibly their anchor of hope. The first proclamation of the gospel was made at the First Mass in these islands, witnessed by the Child. At that first Mass (Latin and Tridentine), emerged a new people that the Spirit would transform into God’s chosen ones, enlightened by God’s word and nourished by Christ’s Body. That was the “given” past, and gratitude is a rightful response to it for all its worth. So they moved on as if in a dark sea but with hope.

Five hundred years after that historic landing, we are in a similar boat. The Church today is still loaded with saints and sinners, buffeted by the strong winds of socio-political adversities, economic inequalities, miseries, and the scourge of a pandemic. Some of us feel more secure in the safer parts of the boat, others in more vulnerable sides. Has the hope for a transformed people that began 500 years ago been realized today? The answer is “no” if by transformation we mean a completed reality. But if by transformation we mean the ongoing journey towards a consummation that only the Lord can bring about, then, the answer is “yes”. This boat still sails! It refuses to be disheartened by the turbulent sea! because hope is in everybody’s heart. Because resurrected life has been found stronger than death. We have been assured of a future inheritance that no despot can take away and no pandemic can destroy! that is Living in Hope!

# MOVING FORWARD: THE CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES AFTER 500 YEARS



*By Sem. Manuel J. Sapitula*

The COVID-19 pandemic somewhat added a somber tone to the festivities relating to the 5th centenary of the coming of Christianity in the Philippines. This setback, however, does not lessen the importance of this momentous occasion in the history of our people. The seed of the Christian faith was planted 500 years ago on our shores in a truly serendipitous manner. According to some historians, one of the reasons for the Magellan expedition was to find the “Spice Island” (Moluccas), but rather than sailing eastward, they sailed westward. Established religious orders in sixteenth-century Europe dreamed of Christianizing the great empires of China and Japan. In both instances, they did not know of the existence of what is now known as the Philippines. The Philippines was not in their plans.

But the course of events that led to the evangelization of the Philippines shows us that God has a plan. Centuries of Christianization, of successes and setbacks in the work of mission, brought us to where we are now as a Christian people. The Philippines has the third largest population of Catholics in the world, following Brazil and Mexico. The Philippines is also one of the hubs of theological education in Asia, evidenced by the number of Catholics from other Asian countries that study in our theology schools and faculties. Most importantly, the Philippines is now a missionary-sending country: Filipino priests and lay missionaries are deployed in many parts of the world, bringing Christ to individuals and communities.

**"The fifth centenary of the arrival of Christianity presents an opportunity for the Church in the Philippines to craft pathways of moving forward. A lot of energy is currently being devoted to mission. This means, for me, being more fully rooted in the one mission of Christ while being fully inculturated in the joys and hopes of the Filipino people."**

Being inculturated also means to be able to exercise a genuinely prophetic ministry. The vision of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines of a “Church of the Poor” continues to challenge our institutions and ministries not only to serve the poor, but also to see Christ through the eyes of the poor. It is in this spirit that St. Vincent de Paul referred to the poor as “our masters”, because their perspective is the best platform to understand the salvation of Christ. Focusing on the mission also means that the Church in the Philippines commits fully to divesting itself of power and privilege, and ecclesiastical clericalism. Purified from useless entanglements, the Church can fully focus on the work of ministry and mission.

The Philippine Church will be, in due time, judged by what it aspires for. I pray that the work of Christ be its only aspiration as it crafts its place in modern Philippine society.

# THE PHILIPPINE CHURCH at 500:

## EXAMINING THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE EARLY MISSIONARIES

*By: Sem. Erlan Olano Marcalam*



Christianity arrived on Philippine soil on March 16, 1521 through the Portuguese navigator Ferdinand Magellan. His arrival can be interpreted as a sign of God's providence, his journey, however, ended

in the famous battle of Mactan. After many years, the Spanish colonizers returned to the archipelago with some missionaries. They brought with them the Gospel and an untiring zeal for saving souls. The first five groups of missionaries to arrive in the Philippines were as follows: Order of St. Augustine (OSA)-1565 known as Augustinians; Order of Friars Minor (OFM)-1578; the Franciscans; Society of Jesus(SJ)-1581 the Jesuits (technically and canonically); Order of Preachers (OP)-1587, the Dominicans; and Order of Augustinian Recollects (OAR), or Recolletes. Subsequently, other missionaries followed these included the Congregation of the Missions (CM) or Vincentians in 1862. These early missionaries labored hard to bring Christ to the ancient Filipinos. Today, after five hundred years, it is good to look back to their major contributions to the Catholic Church in the Philippines.

The first and most obvious major contribution was religion in the form of Christianity. The early missionaries introduced Christ to the locals. Through their preaching and hard labor, many of them gave up worshipping their wooden gods and goddesses and asked to be baptized. Fr. Gabriel Sanchez, SJ, one of the first Jesuits assigned in the province of Bohol, was deeply moved at seeing the huge number of locals baptized in his mission area. It must be noted, though, that even if there were many locals throughout the country who freely welcomed the faith, there were others who resisted.

The second significant contribution was the church buildings. The early missionaries were great engineers. Throughout the country, they built churches mostly made of bricks, coral stone, and wood. The Basilica de Santo Nino de Cebu is one example of such engineering genius by the Spanish missionaries, specifically the Augustinians. Seeing these century-old churches now, one is amazed by how they have been able to stand the challenge of time.

Education was the third vital contribution. According to historical records, the Jesuits were the pioneers in providing formal education to the Filipinos. After some time, the Order of Preachers, known as the Dominicans, followed. They were the first teachers who taught not only the Christian doctrines but also science and liberal arts. Indeed, they were instrumental in shaping the minds of the youth in those days. As a matter of fact, Jose Rizal, our national hero, studied under the schools managed by the Jesuits and the Dominicans. Worthy of note also were the Vincentians who took the task of the formation of the Clergy. The Vincentian missionaries assumed the care of the seminaries; Naga (1865), Cebu (1867), Jaro (1869), Vigan (1872). At this time the formation of local Filipino clerics became the major ministry of the Vincentians.

**Religion in the form of Christianity, the century-old churches, and formal education were among the major contributions of the early missionaries to the Catholic Church in the Philippines. After five hundred years, it is good to remember and thank them for all that they have given to us.**







# Juana

## LEADING THE PEOPLE

This painting is entitled “Juana Leading the People”. This is a Filipino version of the painting “*La Liberté guidant le peuple*” (Liberty Leading the People) by the French artist Eugène Delacroix, which depicts the July Revolution of 1830.

Inspired by the *La Liberté*, “*Juana Leading the People*” portrays the significance of the celebration of 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines. “*Juana*” does not only symbolize the pious Filipino women since the Spanish colonization. It also refers to the wife of Raja Humabon who was baptized and was given the Christian name “*Juana*”. The image of *Juana* in the painting portrays our motherland who trusted in the Faith and embraced the many good things the Spaniards shared with us. At the same time, this Faith sustained her efforts in the resistance to injustice and violence perpetrated by the colonizers. The GOMBURZA for example, is one form of resistance which inspired other revolutionary forces. The reading of the Pasyon (Pabasa) for Reynaldo Ileto is another example of the Faith giving rise to revolution.

On the right side of the painting a priest is seen holding a crucifix. This shows the significant role of the missionaries, the clergy, and the religious in evangelizing and building the nation. On the left side of the painting, the youth, laborers and farmers are depicted. These sectors represent the masses who also serve as the hope of the Church and the nation. The ground and background symbolize such challenges as natural calamities, disasters and the social and political complications throughout the years. Amidst these challenges *Juana* leads the people forward, resilient and victorious, towards a future filled with hope. The Black Nazarene procession in the upper left-hand part of the painting symbolizes God’s unfailing presence in the midst of the Filipino people’s struggles and celebrations.

God is always with us. ***Mabuhay ang Pananampalatayang Mapagpalaya!***

By Sem. Rogene F. Dela Cruz





# Let's talk Mary

## AS OUR FIRST AND MODEL MISSIONARY

By Sem. Adah Audu



I know it would surprise many to hear me say that Mary is our first and model Missionary. This is because traditionally we understand missionaries as those who are commissioned through some official Church rites and sent forth to go into the world and proclaim the good news of Christ. In the case of Mary, since she was not officially sent forth (at least in the usual way that we know), for some she is not popularly known as a missionary. But permit me to say here that Mary is not just a missionary; she is the first disciple of Christ and the perfect model missionary of her Son Jesus. The gospel of Luke 1:26-38 and 39-56 narrates Angel Gabriel's visit to Mary and Mary's visit to Elizabeth her cousin. Angel Gabriel visited Mary and announced to her that she would bear a son who will be called Jesus. To this Mary freely consented to by her YES (*fiat*) when she says in vs. 38 "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word". It is this very YES of hers that made her Mother of Christ (carrying within her the presence of God), and in a sense the first disciple and ultimately the first Missionary of her Son Jesus. She demonstrates this by going out to the hill country of Judea to proclaim God's greatness and goodness to Elizabeth her cousin.

**In St Vincent School of Theology (SVST), we recognize this fact of Mary's exemplary missionary competence. This is why we are formed as Missionaries to go out into hard terrains beyond borders to bring the good news and make God's love known and loved not only like the legendary St Vincent De Poor but also like Mary the first Missionary.**

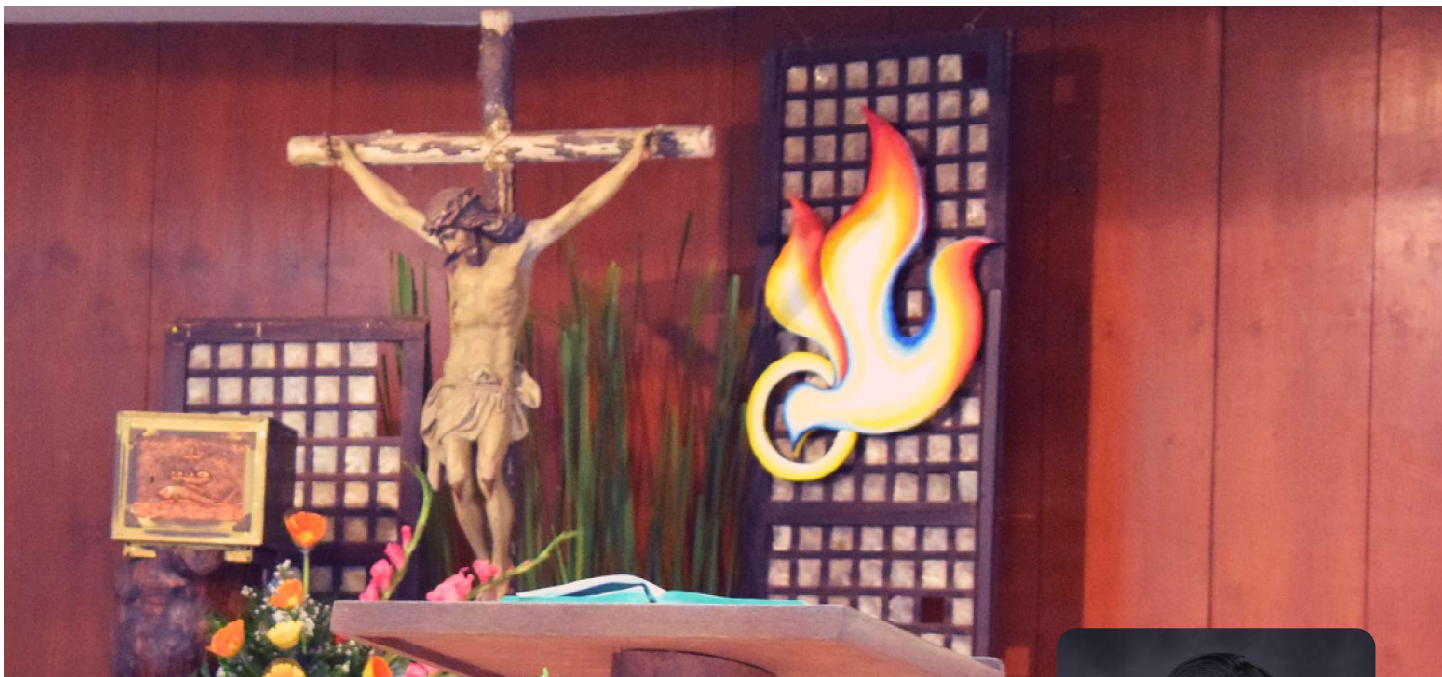
It is in this spirit that we shall now examine the life of Mary and uncover her exceptional missionary qualities.

First, Mary as a missionary carrying Christ in her womb personally bore witness to and reflected Christ to others. As missionaries, we must know that we bear Christ to others, and so our words and deeds must be in tandem with the indwelling of God within us. Through us, Christ himself mysteriously evangelizes in ways that we can't even comprehend. It was this indwelling power of His presence in Mary that when she arrived at her cousin's house Elizabeth, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy.

Secondly, the mission is not selfish; it is charity in action, it is about going out to the other, it engages, moves, and even uproots us. This is exactly what Mary did on receiving the grace of being the Mother of God made flesh; she went out "with haste". She did not selfishly keep the gift to herself in her comfort zone but rather went out to a remote area, to Elizabeth who needed real help. Mary responded concretely in charity by rendering the practical service of bringing Jesus in her womb to Elizabeth. This hastening of Mary is noteworthy particularly for us missionaries because any delay would mean missing opportunities to announce the Gospel and opportunities for our brothers and sisters to hear and be moved by God's love.

Lastly, Mary on arrival in her cousin's house, speaks prophetically through her wonderful Magnificat which is essentially the proclamation of the greatness, presence, and action of God in her life and the world. She proclaims this confidently as a strong believer who has experienced God's goodness and whose life has been transformed by it, hence she wants others to come to know and experience it too. This is a strong reminder that an important part of the mission is also proclamation, and this proclamation is essentially announcing what God has done in our lives in particular and in the world in general. A proclamation that indicates our resolve to, like Mary, stand with the poor and those in the margins of the society.

**Mary does mission by her personal life, her presence manifesting God to others, her charity in action, and her humble prophetic proclamation. This year of *Missio ad-gentes* in the Philippine Church is the right time to learn from her.**



# The Holy Spirit: “Soul of the Missionary Church”



BY CRISTINE B. AMONTOS

Mission in the twenty-first century is taking a paradigm shift. The contexts where we are in are massively changing. In the new situations of mission today, multiculturalism is waving before our faces. Multi-religiosity is adding to the context of mission. The influx of socio-economically different people is another reality in contemporary times. The new contexts are realities that demand a change in our understanding of mission and how we do mission today. With the same facts, *Missio Spiritus* emerges as a paradigm shift in mission theology. From the sense of mission as *missio ecclesiae*, theologians and missiologists enlighten us to approach mission as *Missio Dei* or, more specifically, as *Missio Spiritus*.

The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father (*Ad Gentes*, no. 2). What is the role of the Holy Spirit in mission? The “primary agent of mission” is the Holy Spirit (*Redemptoris Missio*, no. 21). It is the Holy Spirit that continues the mission. We might have new forms of mission that we think and believe are most effective, but without the Holy Spirit’s inspiration and action, all new forms of mission are nothing. The Holy Spirit directs missionary

endeavors among the people. We learn from the Acts of Apostles 1:8 that witnesses to the ends of the earth receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. Thus, the Holy Spirit is the soul of the missionary Church. *Missio Spiritus*, as a new paradigm of mission theology, fully acknowledges the significance of the Holy Spirit in mission. This new paradigm clarifies the truth that we missionaries are empowered by the Holy Spirit in doing mission today. With His empowerment, we are refreshed and re-directed to engage in *Missio inter Gentes* which employs dialogue as a mode of mission. *Missio Spiritus* underscores the value of dialogue as a mission and as a way of doing mission (Sawit 2017).

As we approach the Year of *Missio Ad Gentes* in 2021, or better, as *Missio inter Gentes*, we must allow the Holy Spirit, the very soul of the missionary Church, the principal agent of mission, to guide, enlighten, and empower us in all of our missionary initiatives.

# MISSIO AD GENTES

## TODAY IN THE LIGHT OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

By Sem. Ian Dacayanan, CMF



How can the Church do its mission today? How can the Church give hope to a suffering society? The Vatican II document *Missio Ad Gentes* (1965), on the Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, has challenged the church "to reveal and to communicate the love of God to all men and nations..." for this "remains a gigantic missionary task for her to accomplish." (AG no.10) This invitation is directed to all "the Christian faithful, having different gifts (cf. Rom. 12:6), according to each one's opportunity, ability, charisms and ministry (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10) must all cooperate in the Gospel." (AG no.28)

But even before Vatican II one of those who have championed this missionary mandate was St. Vincent De Paul in the 17th century. As founder of the Congregation of the Mission, he spelled out the goal of his fellow missionaries in the following way: "to make God known to poor persons; to announce Jesus Christ to them; to tell them that the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (cf. CCD: XII:71). This invitation was not addressed only to the Vincentian family who embraced his charism, but also extends to all Christian faithful, calling us all "to be associates and sharers in the plans of the Son of God." But how can this be done? How do we do this mission in our context today? Does it mean all of us have to go out to mission territories? How is *Missio ad gentes* relevant today in the light of St. Vincent De Paul's call? PCP-II helps us respond: "The answer cannot be abstract." Bevans and Schroeder (2005) say that "if to be church is to be in mission, to be in mission is to be responsive to the demands of the gospel in particular contexts, to be continually "reinventing" itself as struggle with and approaches new situations, new peoples, new cultures and new questions."



*Missio ad gentes* in our context then, is to go out of our comfort zone and stand for justice -to fight for human rights, for the dignity of workers, the welfare of voiceless and marginalized. It is to fight for peace, to protect human life against extrajudicial killings. It is to promote dialogue among cultures and faith traditions, and it is to fight for the integrity of creation -Mother Earth, "to care for our common home" (*Laudato Si*), where everyone can live in freedom, dignity and in harmony with one another. To do all these is to harken to the mandate of *Missio ad gentes* and to do as St. Vincent would have done considering that to do these is to stand with the poor who are always the victims.

To do *Missio ad gentes* in our context in the light of St. Vincent De Paul's mandate is to put our faith into action and be mindful of the weak and vulnerable in our society.



# ATTEMPTS OF DOING MISSION IN POLILLO ISLANDS

By Fr. Joselito Sarabia, CM

I used to travel a lot in the past but I stopped, tarried and preoccupied myself for 4 years now in Polillo Group of Islands, Quezon. I heard only about Polillo during typhoons and rejected every invitation to go there because it was a faraway island at the rim of the Pacific Ocean. When I agreed to visit the area, I was thrilled crossing one island after another using a small boat. The clear waters, white sands, lush mangroves, and rock formations along the coastlines fascinated me. What moved my heart the most were the people who gathered for an evening Mass, without electricity and a sound system. Mothers and kids would light candles at the side of the altar. Officials offered bananas, camote, alak, kebit, ocrá, avocados, and lukban. It was their first Mass in many months. That was my first encounter with the poor and marginalized community of Polillo. I told them then that I will return, stay longer, and see what we can do together.



From that day I started to see what I could do for them. On my first return trip, I brought books, medicines, groceries, and rosaries. These were symbolic of my concern for the community: education of the young, health of vulnerable groups, food for the hungry, and appreciation of the sacred. There is so much scarcity in the Island and the people used to express them, but got almost nothing both from the local government and the Church. There are no doctors or nurses. Only during barangay fiesta would politicians, priests, and catechists visit them.

Next, I noticed that there was no electricity in the Island, and even phones are useful only as cameras because there was no telecom signal in the area. So I decided to set up 4 Vincentian Kacific Satellite Internet Stations. Here my patience and fortitude were tested to the extreme. We traveled even at the height of heavy rains, strong wind, and crazy waves. We experienced engine troubles at sea, being disembarked and loaded out of the disks in the wrong location, and sailing back at 9PM in the dark of the night. When others would want to just go and return another day, we continued walking, fixing, and hauling our equipment until we have connected the phones of students to the internet. It is a joy for us to see families having video calls for the first time with their loved ones in Manila or abroad. It is a source of satisfaction to know that medical workers are able to refer cases to doctors online. It is a breakthrough for us to see how quickly farmers and fishermen are able to sell their goods using the Internet. It is a good development that now local officials are able to send the first reports of disaster impact to Provincial government agencies. Then people started asking us how to contribute to the project. Kacific company offered 7 more Satellite Stations to us. Out of this Internet for the Margins project, we are able to give Internet grants to students and teachers, and now have a sustainable source of funding for feeding programs for kids and the elderly.



This year as the Philippine Church celebrates the 500 Year Anniversary of Christianity in the Philippines. I ask myself, why am I in Polillo? It is about my self-expression as a Vincentian Missionary to create experiences of Kingdom blessings especially for the poor. It is my choice to continue the mission of Jesus, the evangelizer of the poor, and the liberation agenda of my Ordaining Bishop, Julio Xavier Labayen, OCD who was the beloved Bishop of the Prelature of Infanta and Polillo. I work, speak, and enjoy to convey God's care to all. I take upon myself the challenge to go beyond what is ordinary and evoke others to transform lives and systems in the islands. Our big dreams can start anytime and are created every day. Like what researchers found out, grit is the best predictor of long-term success even in difficult situations. Best results come about thru mental clarity and focus, passion, and moment-by-moment choice to persevere to pursue the goal beyond breakdowns. It is being unstoppable and responsible about the future we want. They say, "*Nasa tao ang gawa, nasa Diyos ang awa.*" Polillo experiences reminded me of my mentor, Fr. Bebot Carcellar, CM, who said "*Ang Diyos ng awa ay gumagawa sa mga taong tumataya.*"

As we celebrate the 500 Years Anniversary of Christianity in the Philippines. I would love to wonder what 500 gifts are in Polillo Islands and what 500 possibilities of graces Polillo can give to the nation and world. The list could include: 500 bantay-dagat, 500 organic farmers, 500 young catechists, 500 Island works of arts, 500 containers of Virgin Coconut Oil, 500 bags of Palm Sugar, 500 sacks of Banana flour, etc... #missionaryattempts #giftedtogive #PolilloMission

# THE JOY OF MISSION

BY SR. ROSA HLAH LAEI &  
SR. CLEMENS NAWPHAW TA AYE

As Vincentians, we encounter many people in the mission areas where we serve. The joy of doing Mission means for us that we are happy to encounter the poor not because we help them but because we are taught by them.

In our apostolate area, we have experienced being with people of different lifestyles and personalities. From the older people, we have learned to be open, to be contented with what we have, and to be generous. These older people are happy with what they have and where they are. They are kind and open to us; they share their stories honestly and warmly.

Moreover, we learn the value of trust from young people. Since there are different age groups in mission places, we also encounter the young. Many of them lack possessions, and some feel hopeless about their future, but what we learn from them is to be courageous and eager. We admire these young people's enthusiasm to do something with courage, even though they often could not accomplish what they want to do because they lack resources.

Additionally, we also learn from the children the value of simplicity and of being happy. The innocent children are happy despite their family's difficult situation. They make us experience and understand more the Gospel in which Jesus invites us to be like children who are innocent and pure of heart.

In doing Mission, we experience joy in different ways, since we learn something from everyone. We also experience happiness in realization about ourselves. Being with the people around us, we become part of them. Whatever they feel we feel too, and wherever they are, there we are with them.



# My Challenging Mission Experience in the Philippines

B Y S R . G R I N I Y A J O S H I , S S C C

As an Indian Missionary arriving in the Philippines for the first time, I began my one-year weekend ministry in Bagong Silang in June 2019. My task was to teach children with special needs and to help in distributing milk and yogurt to elementary school children. Every night I would stay with one family, which surprised me because I was only a novice.

I was happy but I was concerned about how I would do it. I did not know the language, the people, the food, and their lifestyle were totally different. The most difficult was traveling alone and Bagong Silang was far. I welcomed the challenge because I knew that God would teach me many things. I needed to experience whatever God gave me. It was a wonderful gift and I felt that I could do it with the Lord if I tried my best. Thus, I began my ministry with this desire.

It was my first experience traveling alone. I was not used to pain and I had fever for some months. I struggled because I did not know how to speak and mingle with the people. I often felt rejected because no one wanted to take me to their home. They were concerned with what food to give me, where to let me sleep and how we would understand each other. They were embarrassed that they were poor and were shy to have me in their home. Every day I prayed to Jesus to help me to learn their language, their lifestyle, and how to mingle with them. I cried while asking this grace. Each week it was a different family and I found that difficult.

Eventually, with God's grace. I started to open myself to them. I told them the story of my life and God's love I encounter. I began to go beyond myself at the center and workplace in the school. They too began to be comfortable with me, and the ladies also started to share their stories with me. I listened to their struggles and stories. I tried to come early to help them with chores because I wanted to be with them. I started to share my faith and God's love with the families. I prayed for them. I helped them in cooking, I ate whatever they gave me, and I slept with them on the floor.

As I reached out to many families, they began to enjoy my company. I was happy but I felt that something was missing. I was too busy and tired to pray. I felt I was going far from Jesus, and I knew that without God I was nothing and I could not do anything. I was not able to balance my prayer life, studies, ministry, and community responsibilities. I got sick with dengue and I was in the hospital for ten days. I was very sad and I asked Jesus what he wanted from me. I had no more energy to stand, how could I begin my studies, ministry, responsibilities. I felt helpless and tired of my life and I needed to talk with someone. I search for answers. I discovered in the hospital that I needed to rest and just be with the lord. So, I spent my ten days with the Lord, reading some spiritual books given by Sr. Agnes. I experienced God's love in all my sisters who took care of me. When I came back to the house I continued to rest but slowly began my responsibilities.



All said, prayer is my strength and I know without God nothing is impossible. Our God is a wonderful God who loves us unconditionally and who knows what we need in our lives. I learnt many things from the families; I became a good listener. I was able to understand their pain and tears and what they are going through. I was able to experience God's love in them. I learnt how to balance my prayer life, study, ministry, community life, and responsibilities. I learnt how to travel alone. My sister's love and prayer life inspired me and helped me to grow and learn. My true desire to work for his glory. Still, challenging for me, but now I had trust in the Lord. I did my best and God did the rest.



# A CALL TO THE VINCENTIAN POPULAR MISSION

By Sem. Dominique Gapayao

Pope Francis, in his message during World Mission Day in June 2019, emphasized that we, as baptized Christians, must have a relationship with God that is not simply private, but always in relation to the Church. In other words, every baptized Christian is called to share in Christ's mission. That mission is our response to God's love.

One such opportunity for us to share in Christ's work is the Vincentian Popular Mission (VPM). Inspired by St. Vincent de Paul's work in 1617 in Folleville, France on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, he was called to administer the last sacrament to a dying man. After three days, the man died peacefully. This experience spurred the first Popular Mission (a Mission for the People). Vincent de Paul and Madame de Gondi found a way to avoid the possibility of eternal damnation: they organized a popular mission in Folleville (Vincentian Encyclopedia). Today, here in the Philippines, we have 8 to 10 different popular missions every year.

Each of these Popular missions hold for at least three weeks across the different remotest parts of the Philippines. In these missions, Priest, Religious, Seminarians, and the Lay faithful are commissioned and sent out in groups as missionaries to different mission areas where they give catechism to both children and adults, hold masses in the chapels, and administer the sacraments to those in need. These missionaries go from house to house for Dialogue of Life and eventually organize house blessings for the people.



Personally, together with other SVST students and associates, I had the opportunity to join in the 2019 popular missions in San Carlos, Negros Occidental. This was held between May 23 to June 13, 2019. We were divided and

in groups to three rural mission stations in Negros: Urban, Medina, and Katiclan. Here we were housed with generous families and for three weeks, we were able to discover ourselves, and the things we could do for the greater glory of God. We went out of our comfort zone to see God at work in these communities. Although it was difficult, doing the mission was a blessing for us missionaries and the people were generally happy to see us as such they did their best to welcome us.

So this year 2021 as the Philippine Church dedicates it to *Missio ad Gentes*, we are all called to remember how two thousand years ago, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us". How this Word showed us the way to the Father and taught us the greatest commandment, which is love, and through this, He commanded: "as the Father has sent me, so I send you..." (John 20:21) We as Christians are called to always respond yes to this call of Jesus to go and proclaim the Gospel. Though it is a road less traveled, it is still the road Jesus wants us to take. Not for ourselves but for others who want to know Jesus and receive Jesus in their lives.



# DIALOGUE IS STILL POSSIBLE: MY ENCOUNTER WITH IGLESIA NI CRISTO

BY SEM. ADAH AUDU, MMMP

For the first time since my arrival in the Philippines, I had the rare privilege to engage in a dialogue with members of one Christian denomination and one major World Religion. As part of our requirements for the course Ecumenism and Inter-religious dialogue, my group chose *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (INC) and Islam. The task was to interview and gain an understanding of them.

Our choice of the INC met a lot of warnings from friends and colleagues. They said we shouldn't enter an INC Church because they were exclusive, anti-Catholic, secretive, and we wouldn't come out alive, or if we did, we would have been transformed into INC members. While all of these warnings instilled some initial fear in me, surprisingly there was something in me that pushed me to go ahead. So instead of being scared, I became more curious to know more about this group, why they were so controversial, and why there were many rumors about their practices and *modus operandi*.

My partner and I went there on one fateful Sunday evening without any appointment, since we didn't know anybody to contact. At the gate of the Church, contrary to what we had expected, we had an enthusiastic reception from the INC members we met, with all wanting to listen to us. In fact, they went out of their way to make us feel welcome by offering us coffee. Details of what we discussed will be a discussion for another day. I surely didn't fail to ask the hard and controversial questions. The visit turned out to be a success, a turning point from our initial negative presuppositions about the INC.

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**One significant note from our conversation was how the INC, just like the Catholics also consider themselves Christians, followers of Jesus Christ, and as such also engage in humanitarian work. This for me is a major uniting factor.**

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So when we came back to class to present our report, many classmates appreciated our work and realized that a dialogue with INC Church members was not only desirable but necessary.

What does this whole process say to me? From our privileged interview with INC members I have come to realize that dialogic conversations are achievable even between people of different religions or denominations that are so often depicted as being in conflict. While I had always thought a more centralized formal religious get-together would be more fruitful and less suspicious, I have come to realize that personal one-on-one visits, gestures of affection and friendship, override official postures in interfaith conversations. It is little wonder that official centralized interfaith dialogues sometimes do not always live up to their objectives. They merely consist of a series of official meetings, paper presentations, eating and drinking without deliberate follow-ups. These efforts, in most cases, do not move a step and ends up with nothing happening. For me then, effective interfaith and denominational dialogue should be more personal. Indeed, weeks

after we met, Senior Minister of the INC, Bro Dan Cortes and I are still very good friends and we sometimes eat out.

Consequently, I think genuine dialogue should fundamentally be an exercise in open-mindedness and willingness to learn about other denominations and faiths that are different from ours. It should be geared towards promoting better understanding of the other. This should always be our goal because it is only through this that a new world can open up, and we will get a better glimpse of the other faith and discover surprising similarities between our faith tradition and theirs. This is important because today we live in an ever-shrinking world so that we cannot continue to use our differences as a reason to separate them from us.

“

**We cannot continue to claim ignorance of other religions; we must try to read, listen, and interpret things through the lenses of others to enhance our sensitivity, compassion, our service for humanity and most importantly, our relationship with God.**

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# FROM HINDUISM TO CHRISTIANITY

by Sr. Griniya Joshi, SSCC

My name is Griniya Joshi and I come from India. I grew up with my parents and grandmother. I have two brothers and two sisters. My father is a farmer and my mother is a housewife. I am the eldest daughter in a Hindu family. When I was small, on Saturday Sisters of Mother Theresa used to come to my village to distribute medicine to the sick. They would give everyone, including Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. I was inspired by their lives because they served everyone. I too wanted to do good things for all but did not know how. Once when I was seven years old I was playing with my friends outside of the church and happened to enter the Church for the first time. I was inspired by the priest's homily; it was about the mustard seed. He also prayed for all the people, and I like it the most.

I started to go to church on my own and prayed as a child. I would pray to Jesus. I felt that my prayers were answered by God and that I was growing in His love. Soon after, I went to study in a Catholic school and I stayed in a boarding house. I stayed in different places for seven years each year was different. I often felt alone and only Jesus was with me all the time. I experienced him strongly being alone. I struggled a lot and experienced God's grace in my life. The school, the teacher, studies, different places, and different people were all new to me. These struggles made me come close to God, and I experienced him strongly. For seven years, I prayed to become a Catholic. I took my brothers and sisters to the church, and I taught them Catholic prayers. My parents started to come to the church, and I began to teach them prayers too. We all became Catholics in 2009. We all experienced God's grace in our family and in our lives.

After experiencing Jesus, I wanted to do something for Him. I had a dream that I wanted to spread God's love and to start a group where ordinary people with no habit or vestments were working and serving together according to their talents. When I completed class 12 I came back home and told my parents about it. They said I was too small to do that and they suggested I join the female arm of the SSCC congregation because my brother had joined the male arm. But I did not want to become a sister. I prayed to Jesus not to force me; I cannot give my life forcefully. I cried and prayed, and then finally I told my parents that I would join only because they were encouraging me to and if I did not like it I would come back home.

**“AFTER EXPERIENCING JESUS, I WANTED TO DO SOMETHING FOR HIM, BUT I INITIALLY DIDN'T WANT TO BECOME A RELIGIOUS SISTER”**

- Sr. Griniya Joshi, SSCC

I went to the SS.CC congregation. When I saw Sister Rose I admired her for the way she spoke and gave a warm hug to me. Her life was an inspiration for me. I also experienced all the sisters' love for me. We were indeed sisters who would do all kinds of work, wherever, there were people in need. I was really surprised that all I saw in my dream was here. I strongly felt that this was my place.

I thank the Lord for not being forceful with me. This life has become my own choice and I am very happy because, it was what I wanted, and I got it. God's way is wonderful for me and I admire His work in my life. I am happy whatever comes. He knows what to give and how to give. Now I am a novice and my brother is going to become a priest after two years. My parents are very happy and they have great faith in Jesus. We experience many graces from God in our family and continually experiencing many miracles too in our lives.



## WHEN COVID 19 STRIKES...

BY SR. DARYL JOY V. ALMONIA, DC

"I can't taste my food anymore!" My brother said a few days after he told us he had the flu. My blood ran cold. Ageusia, or loss of sense of taste, can be one of the telltale signs of COVID-19. COVID-19 seems remote when seen on TV or social media; so it doesn't affect us. But when it slithers into your home it becomes a nightmare. COVID-19 hit my family.

First we contacted people that could help. My brother got himself tested and was confirmed positive. He was then room-quarantined and given medication, with strict instructions that if he could not breathe he had to go to the hospital. And we waited, continuously monitoring him while praying that it would be over soon. A few days later, he started to get better.

Unbeknown to us, his wife developed flu-like symptoms as well, and she was 7 months pregnant! By the time we found out, she was already having difficulty breathing and was

getting worse by the day. Our fears escalated. How could she be brought to the hospital with my brother unable to drive, hospitals full and ...would she come back alive with the baby safe?

***"Fear can be paralyzing! At this moment, we can not do anything but bend our knees, bow our heads, and come before God silently, as no words could describe the helplessness, terror, and desperation we feel to save the people we love."***

Isaiah 41:10 says, "Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you..." True that fear immobilized us, but it was also at these moments, when everything seemed hopeless,

that God providentially intervened. God mobilized people. Family and friends who learned about our situation prayed and assisted. Soon there was an available room at a distant hospital and an ambulance was provided for my sister-in-law's transport. Although her pneumonia was progressing, the doctors and nurses were able to proficiently manage her condition. Finally, she was released from the hospital, the baby safe, and were reunited with her husband and two kids after weeks of isolation.

COVID-19 brought complications in our family; however, it was then that the goodness of God and the people around us shone. Neighbors and friends, instead of stigmatizing my family, brought food and provisions, reaching out to assist even with the distance. This event brought a message of hope and goodness of a God who loves and never abandons.

Pahingi Po Ng Kunting talong  
Pangbili lang Po Ng Pagkain  
Wala Na Po kaming Hanap Buhay.



## Poor Nena: Uncertainty under Coronavirus

By Milo Nanquil

The Philippines is well-known as one of the countries that implemented the longest lockdown to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, the situation has not improved. Many structures, individuals, families across the country have been greatly affected. But who are the most affected?

Ordinary poor Filipinos. They have lost their source of livelihood and have to endure living in tight spaces, poor conditions, unable to go out to scout for food for their families. Many take the risk to disobey the stay-at-home orders by the government. *"Hindi kami takot sa virus, mas takot kaming mamatay sa gutom,"* (We are not afraid of the virus, we are more afraid to die from hunger). These are words often heard on the streets from these poor Filipinos who have to disobey the lockdown orders.

Here's the story of Nena, an eight-grade student in a public school in Pampanga. Nena has to help her mother every day, peddling the fish and vegetables they get from the market. After this task, she goes straight to a cafeteria where she earns thirty to seventy pesos a day. In the evening, with the help of a kerosene lamp, she spends five to seven hours accomplishing her school modules. Despite these double efforts, they hardly survive. They have to budget three hundred to five hundred pesos for the ten members of their family

*"Yung kita konti lang po kase inutang lang sa 5/6... Hindi rin po kami nakakuha noong unang bigayan ng ayuda, yung sa ikalawa naman po, hindi ko lang po alam kung anong nangyari. Dahil po doon sarili nalang po namin ang maaasahan namin. Kaya nagsisikap po ako, hindi kase nakatapos sila Mama kaya sobrang hirap po talaga. Gusto ko po kaseng magkaroon kami ng banyo, kuryente, at maayos na tinitirhan,"* (We earn very little because we have 5/6 loans... Financial assistance from the government, has not reached us, I don't know what happened. We can now depend only on ourselves. My parents have not finished their school; that's why life is so hard. I have become more persistent, to provide for our family. I want us to have a bathroom, electricity, and a nice home). This story of resilience in the midst of crisis is no longer new, our hardships and hurdles brought by different calamities are often romanticized by media and the government itself. But government has no proactive programs and long-term solutions for each of these problems.

Nena's story doesn't only unveil to call for sympathy towards the marginalized sector. It invites us to respond in the need for charity and action. Thus, this kind of experience also mirrors the necessity for the government to take such initiative to propagate programs that would best benefit them, especially with regard to livelihood. This is crucial more than ever now during this pandemic so that the marginalized sector won't have to suffer this way. On the other hand, we ordinary Filipinos with different capabilities, should also take the lead and be of help. We can raise awareness, gather donations for charities, and encourage voluntary service while we all wait for the government's action to be executed.

# COVID 19: Time to Strengthen Faith in God

By Sem. Rogene F. Dela Cruz

In this time of the pandemic, it is not only a must to strengthen one's immune system to fight the virus. For us believers, these trying times also invite us to strengthen our faith in God.

COVID-19 gave us a terrible description of sickness, joblessness, hunger and death. These tough realities of human life are intensified by isolation and the seeming hopelessness from the reality that the only thing certain aside from death is that there is no cure for COVID-19 yet. I believe no one would like to die of COVID. This is why many people still strive to move out from darkness in order to see light.

We Christians believe that it takes a strong faith in God to move from despair to hope. If we wish to strengthen our faith, it is necessary to ask ourselves, "How do I understand faith in God in these trying times?" As God's own people rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, let us try to understand the concept of faith for the Hebrew people and how it is relevant for us today. The word "Faith" is embodied in the Hebrew term, אמונה (Emunah). According to Jeff A. Benner, the "Western concept of faith places the action on the one you have faith in, such as "faith in God". But the Hebrew word אמונה places the action on the one who "supports God". Faith is not knowing that God will act, but rather that I will do what I can to support God." This concept of faith was made clear in Exodus 17:12 where Aaron and Hur held up Moses' hand holding a staff in order to defeat the Amalekites. Faith is not only trusting God that in moments of despair will make everything good and pleasant. In this context, faith as "Emunah" is not the faith of Moses who held up the staff trusting in God's mercy and saving action. It is the faith of Aaron and Hur who "support" Moses in his endeavor, which is also an act of supporting God.

In this time of the pandemic, it is good to learn from the "faith" (Emunah) of Aaron and Hur which is also modeled by the faith of those who give support for the needy. Their faith does not only lead to a personal relationship with God. It also urges one to actualize God's promise of liberation and salvation for all, especially in these trying times. Jesus Himself models this kind of faith. John 10:10 puts it beautifully: "I came that they

may have life, and have it abundantly." Our faith strengthens the faith of others even if it is limited and weak. In the Facebook post of Fr. Danny Pilario on Sept. 26, he shared the story of Maribel, one of the beneficiaries of Vincent Helps who live under the bridge.

Maribel shows that her own poverty is not a hindrance for her in helping those in need. She even shares her *ayuda* by cooking food for those who merely pass or sleep under the bridge. In her letter thanking Fr. Pilario, she writes, "*Dahil po sa inyong pagmamalasakit nagpupumiglas ang aming mga talukap sa pagtunghay sa liwanag na mula sa nalikha po ninyong siwang ng pag-asa.*" These words clearly express the faith that was being strengthened by the faith of another. Faith has a ripple effect because it always seeks to do something in order to support the work of God. Understanding faith as Emunah answers the question, "How do I strengthen faith in God?" Faith is not only strengthened in prayer by trusting and knowing that God will make a way for us. Faith is also strengthened by responding to the call to do what we can to support God.



# IN FEAR, YET WITH GREAT JOY!

BY SEM. KEMPEE LLORICO, CM



During my 2-month hospital duty as a reliever nurse for Covid-19 patients, I let all my feelings and emotions sink into me. I was confused and did not have the words to describe those terrible feelings! Then by chance I came across the gospel on the Octave of Easter Monday, and it began with the line “In fear, yet with great joy!” This described the feelings of the first women who witnessed Christ’s Resurrection, as they received the mandate to spread the Good News! Those words clarified everything for me.

When I was first called to join the hospital staff, I felt fear, dread, and uncertainty. The threat of infection was too great. I was assigned to the Recovery Ward where Covid-19 patients were going through rehabilitation. On my second day, a patient suddenly felt weak, had breathing difficulty, and her pulse was becoming feeble. The doctor pronounced her immune-compromised with Covid-19 symptoms! Inside my head I screamed in fear—what I feared most was right in front of me! I barely managed to compose myself so that I could attend to her well, but she started crying, was inconsolable, and so was her mother. It was a difficult time for me too, since I could not comfort her, and even had to hurt her every time I injected medicine into her. Two weeks of this ordeal thankfully ended, because she started to recover. Soon she tested negative of Covid-19. My joy at her recovery was great, as I looked at her once-pale face become rosy, and her eyes bright and energized.

Just as I thought it was over, I started feeling ill, with body aches, diarrhea, and fever. I was given some medication, went through a swab test, and could not do anything but wait. In the meantime, my novitiate community in Angono boosted my confidence with their prayers—prayers that proved effective, because after only a few days, the symptoms were gone, and I went back to work. A week later, I received the result: NEGATIVE! All my fears vanished, and were replaced with an immense joy, knowing that someone’s life and mine were saved—by the Divine Healer!

I was once very ill, and the Lord healed me with His love. Now I wish to share this blessing through humble service to others. Since I have been praying fervently every day to give thanks to the Lord, I feel driven to action and mission—I wish to share in Christ’s healing ministry. I am but His “small and fragile vessel...malleable and formable” enough to carry out “His will on earth as it is in heaven.” I have done very little as yet; there is much work in the battlefield of the pandemic, but the fight is not really ours; it is the Divine Master’s call.

I look forward to the end of this pandemic, the day when we will all take off our masks and reveal our smiles. No longer will distance separate us; our hugs will be tighter, our relationships closer, and our faith in God stronger. No more fear, only great joy!



On March 15, 2020 the Duterte administration imposed a total lockdown on the whole of Metro of Manila. I was then residing at St. Vincent seminary when the world seemed covered with fear and worry due to the sudden rise of COVID-19 cases that had started taking lives. This sad reality opened me to a call to service which brought me to the realization that courage and faith were needed in responding to God's call to service during the pandemic.

As a seminarian and a medical technologist I came to realize that God had prepared me in this profession so that I could use it at this time of the pandemic. This was why I took the opportunity to volunteer at the Lung Center of the Philippines. Here I was able to practice patience, humility and charity. Working here brought me the fulfillment of doing charity with those who needed help. I used this opportunity as a hospital worker at the Lung Center to extend help to parishes, priests, and friends who needed RT-PCR results and medical advice. I did all of these during the weekdays, and on weekends I came back to the parish where I joined my parish priest, Fr. Robert Reyes in visiting the parishioners, especially the sick and the elderly. I also partook in the parish feeding program for the needy. This period was indeed tough for me, but in spite of the fatigue, lack of sleep, and academic requirements, I was able to manage my grades and passed all my subjects.

I offered all these services for more than 8 months and shortly before I returned to the Seminary, God inspired me to initiate a swabbing center for priests and religious missionaries. The PDDM sisters approved of this initiative, and their superior Sr. Anthony, without hesitation, endorsed the project to her community. I was also privileged to train two PDDM sisters with medical backgrounds to continue the project; Sr. Lilibeth and Sr. Cherry were the beneficiaries. On January 25th the feast of the conversion of St. Paul, Bishop Ongtioco of the diocese of Cubao blessed the swabbing center. It is now operating and giving service to priests and religious who need RT-PCR test.

In general, as a seminarian and a medical technologist, responding to the crisis in my own way has taught me humility, patience, courage, and trust in God. These are all virtues I learned from St. Vincent De Paul and I am blessed to be in a seminary where I am being trained as a diocesan seminarian with a heart for the poor and the less privileged. To respond during the pandemic is to go out of my comfort zone despite discomfort and threats to my health. It means reaching out to the needy, touching lives, and using my medical training. All of this would never have happened if I had not relied on God, and on the Blessed Virgin Mary to whom I have entrusted myself.



# A CALL TO SERVICE: A SEMINARIAN'S RESPONSE DURING THE PANDEMIC

BY SEM. ARVIN ZARSATA



# CHARITY THRIVES EVEN IN CRISIS

By Fr. Dr. Rolando A. Tuazon, CM

One strong realization during the COVID-19 pandemic is the re-discovery of what it means to be charitable during a crisis. This pandemic despite the pains and death it brought, did help many to rediscover genuine and concrete charity. It is in this pandemic that we witnessed the enormous amount of generosity, courage, creativity, and charity of a lot of people (individuals and groups) who rose to the challenge of allowing the better part of their humanity to take over them.

Specifically, the “Vincent Helps”- the new Vincentian charity network is a brainchild of crisis. This network has become a light of hope for the poor who suffer the most during the pandemic and also during other calamities. The response of people to its call for support during the recent crisis has been overwhelming. All these became possible because people did not allow themselves to be overcome by fear, selfishness, and hopelessness. They have made charity thrive during such crises.

We can, therefore, see that crisis, based on two Chinese characters, represents danger on the one hand, and opportunity on the other hand. Because of that aspect of danger, which takes us away from our comfort zones but puts us on the unfamiliar grounds of uncertainty, doubts, and insecurity, we always would like to avoid a crisis. Yet, we also celebrate the fact that every crisis brings with it, opportunities for us to grow, mature, and become stronger in our commitment to love and serve. Relativizing what we formerly held as absolutes, these crises have made us rediscover what matters in life, i.e, love for others, starting with our significant relationships, and love of God.

Vincent de Paul understood that life is characterized by crises. In response to a complaining missionary, he said: “there is no lot in life where there is nothing to be endured.” This statement must have come from his many experiences of crises in his own life: difficulties in having to secure a good education because of the meager income of his peasant family;



“Every crisis brings with it, opportunities for us to grow, mature, and become stronger in our commitment to love and serve. Through crisis we rediscover what really matters in life, i.e, love for others, starting with our significant relationships, and love of God.”



the experiences of slavery as a result of his captivity by the Tunisian pirates while in pursuit of a big sum of money; his experience of crisis in faith; the difficulties of responding to the many different materials and spiritual needs of the poor for food, shelter, medication, education, molding in faith, and evangelization. In all these experiences, Vincent found creative ways to respond and became a beacon of hope as he allowed himself to rely on God’s providence and open to the movement of the Spirit in his life. He made it possible for charity to thrive in such crises. He was able to do it because he was fully aware of the conditions of the poor; responded with love and compassion in most inventive ways, beholding God’s countenance in the persons of the poor; mobilizing a wide network of charity and collaboration, and following Jesus in His way of love and of the cross in total self-giving to save us. Following Jesus in the way of Vincent de Paul, we are also challenged to make Charity become alive especially during these times of crisis. We can do this first, by getting grounded in the lives of the poor in an incarnational way. As Pope Francis would challenge us, we need to smell like the sheep... to have our hands and feet dirtied... and be willing to suffer with those who suffer in the spirit of love and compassion.... To open the doors of the Church, not so much for people to come in,

but for us to go out and give witness to His love. We recall what St. Vincent said to the Daughters of Charity: “...have for cell a hired room; for chapel, the parish church; for cloister, the streets of the city...” Second, by constantly grounding ourselves in the love and mercy of God. Speaking about the joys that Christian should have, Pope Francis says, “Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved.” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 6). It is our experience of God’s love that urges us to love. Third, by grounding ourselves in a profound knowledge of self through self-reflexivity. Our work of Charity is not a product of our search for our needs and compulsion, but an authentic compassion for the needy, which we do through simplicity, humility, and charity. Fourth, we create a culture of Love through collaboration with those God has inspired to do a similar mission. Finally, that the charity we give witness to is based on the fundamental demands of justice, rooting out causes of poverty toward a more systemic change of the life condition of the poor and society.



# EMPOWERING THE BECS:

## A LESSON FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

BY SEM. GABRIEL G. DAYONDON JR.



In this article, I share my experiences and realizations on the relief program of Vincent Helps. I am privileged to be part of it because Vincent Helps has made me realize that relief programs are necessary and should be integrated into all diocesan pastoral plans. Although most of the dioceses in the country have good reputation in making pastoral plans, there are still a few who have not considered establishing a crisis response program that spearheads relief operations that would respond to any arising social and economic crisis. So even as we attribute our success to the generosity of our donors, volunteers, and leaders who spearhead Vincent Helps, I have seen that the BECs shared in much of the work, because they did not only become recipients of help but also partners and agents in bringing help to the most vulnerable.

As soon as community quarantine was implemented in Metro Manila our seminary was aware of the adverse effects of a lockdown on the lives of the poor. So our seminary community instantly convened to activate Vincent Helps and discuss measures on how to address the needs of the poor. In the beginning, the plan was to cater to a few individuals and families but when the need increased, as did our fund (praise be to God!) the team thought of a new strategy this time BEC leaders and communities were tapped to participate in the relief operation. In the Inang Lupang Pangako the parish priest coordinated our dean Fr. Danny Pilario, and with the participation of lay leaders, came up with a unique strategy of channeling information and relief goods. To maximize the number of volunteers

and avoid crowding, BEC leaders were task to gather information and manage the distribution of relief goods within their respective groups. This strategy was effective because they were able to reach the poorest people in the community. No one was left behind! In another pilot area, the Santuario de San Vicente de Paul the parish priest has partnered with the coordinator of Vincent Helps, Fr. Geowen Porcincula. Again, with the help of BEC leaders, satellite soup kitchens and mobile and online vegetable shops were put up. As the head of the Soup Kitchen Team of Vincent Helps I appreciated that strategy because it solved our manpower concern; we were too few to reach those who were hungry, but when Vincent Helps tapped the BEC leaders, our job was distributed and we were able to reach and serve more poor people.

My experiences during this pandemic have taught me important lessons; one of these is to see how BEC can help the Church. I grew up having a different idea of what the BEC is, and working with Vincent Helps gave me a new perspective and understanding. I thank my Vincentian Formators and teachers; they are indeed good educators because they integrate practical knowledge into different life situations. I hope what Vincent Helps achieved in empowering BECs be replicated in other dioceses. As a diocesan seminarian I believe that if the local Church discovers the real essence of BECs they would understand that these are just not just prayer groups or means to improve parish remittances; more than that, BECs should be seen as a bastion of the Christian values of faith, charity, and service to others. I do hope more BEC can help in accomplishing the pastoral plans of the diocese.



# COVID-19: REDISCOVERING SOLITUDE, COMMUNITY, AND MINISTRY

BY FR. PETER SOLIS, CM

As I write this personal reflection on the Covid-19 pandemic, the spike on infection rages on in several countries, the Philippines included. The last several months have made my own confreres in the Congregation and relatives vulnerable to the disease, not least an older blood brother of mine.

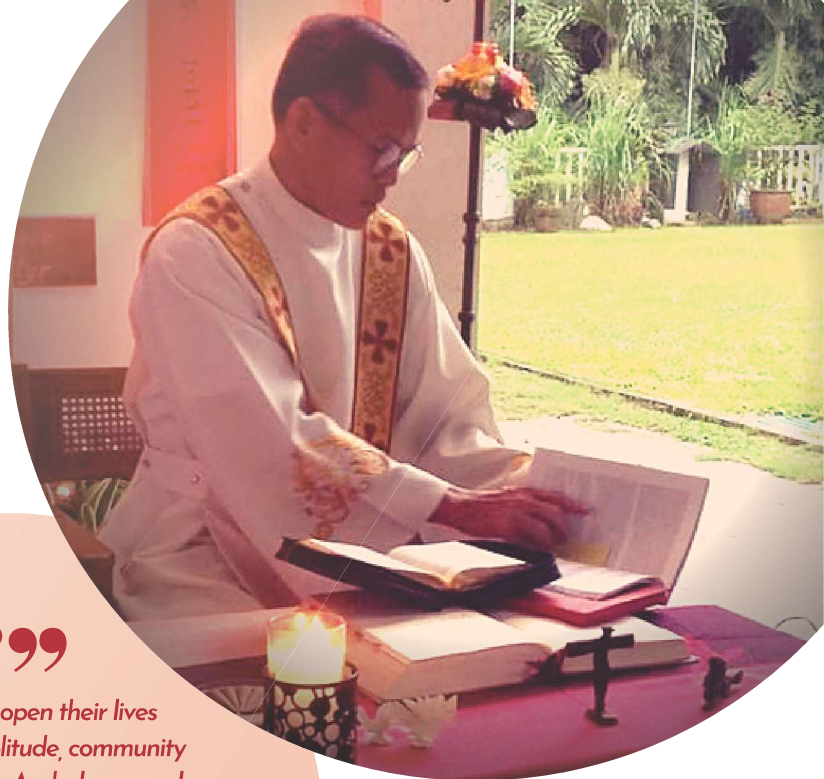
This pandemic brought about fear and paranoia, yes, even loss of lives --- now hitting the millionth statistic and counting! So how did Covid-19 alter my life? What impact did it bring to my personal horarium and itinerary?

My comparatively monastic lifestyle in the Novitiate became even more monastic! I never imagined I could last (and survive!) staying in the house for a couple of months sans commitment and physical movement beyond the compound. Staying indoors and limited mobility would describe my days. The virus scare was real and I thought imprisoning myself in my room was my best defense against it.

And so I learned to make productive if by force, my time in confinement. I read more books. Wrote longer entries in my journal. Prayed harder and re-discovered the contemplative layer of the Rosary. Praying the Jesus Prayer brought out unexpected calm and serenity to my anguished soul!

Accompanying my longer and more frequent engagement in prayer was tilling the soil. Gardening became my welcome therapy. Nature bathing boosted my immunity. My encounter with birds and butterflies, my moments with trees and flowers, and the luxury of gazing at the beautiful sunsets made me see the face of God. It was solitude, pure and simple.

Having the luxury of time basking in solitude led me to re-appreciate community living. Being with the community gathered in prayer harnessed a different force from within. Mealtimes became longer and unhurried. More stories were shared and laughter turned louder! It was easier to strike conversations, ask for help, or gladly walk the extra mile. Henri Nouwen believes that "solitude always calls us to the community."



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*When people open their lives and embrace solitude, community becomes possible. And when people are steeped in solitude and fortified by community living, ministering to the other is a likely consequence, if not a fruitful engagement.*

- Fr. Peter Solis, CM

With solitude and community in place and functioning, I was led to see its likely outcome: ministry. When St. Vincent de Paul wrote about becoming "Carthusians at home and apostles in the field", he was unwittingly describing the marriage of solitude and community, as well as its natural offspring that is ministry.

When people open their lives and embrace solitude, community becomes possible. And when people are steeped in solitude and fortified by community living, ministering to the other is a likely consequence, if not a fruitful engagement.

Such has been my surprisingly moving experience during this pandemic. This crisis helped me better understand what Nouwen saw as the interconnection of solitude, community, and ministry. God does write straight with crooked lines. Ministering to our needy neighbors and reaching out in care to them brought joy to our hearts and to theirs.

Nouwen beautifully used the symbolism of night, morning, and afternoon to emphasize the sequential pattern of the spiritual life, which "begins in solitude at night, moves to community building in the morning, and ends in active ministry in the afternoon." I was one lucky could-have-been-victim-of-Covid-19 who saw this mysterious pattern of God at work in the world, not least in my spiritual life and in the lives of God's own gentle people.

# COVID 19 AND THE SACRAMENTS

by Gideon Harps

COVID-19 has produced a lot upheaval in many areas of our community. Many governments speak of the economic challenges caused by COVID-19. Many people speak about the problems faced by the family socially, spiritually and emotionally. Theology is also heavily affected especially its liturgy. One specific area of concern is the administration and reception of the sacraments.

Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God with the vocation to Love. We are created, crafted and called to intimacy with Him who is Love. The main way we acknowledge and experience His intimacy is through our body every time we are touched by God through the sacraments. The sacraments therefore are God's grace given to us to make us intimate with God. We do this traditionally through human touch. God is present among us in the sacraments where two or three are gathered in His name. In other words, our faith community grows through sacramental graces when we share these together as brothers and sisters. This has been the trait of our Christian faith: touching each other with peace and love.

With this understanding, COVID-19 presents an opportunity for theologians and Catholics to take another perspective of this sacramental grace. Firstly, we are reminded by COVID-19 that sacramental grace is an important part of our Christian life. Our Intimacy with our God through the reception of the sacraments is our right as Children of God. We therefore need to be intimate with our God. On the other hand, to prevent the spread of the virus, we are required to observe social and physical distancing. COVID-19 therefore presents to us an opportunity to revisit our pastoral approach in the administration and the reception of the sacraments. Parents and children feel the need to receive sacramental graces. Parents need to explain to their children the presence of God in their families through the sacraments, that physical contact with Christ is vital, indispensable and irreplaceable. While online Masses cannot replace the face to face Mass, we are called to instill in our children Hope and Love for the reception of Sacramental grace. While ministers and pastoral leaders may not do family visitation, parents and guardians must be rooted to this understanding of sacramental grace to pass on to their children. Pandemic is a time for lay people to practice their priestly baptismal mission in making sure that children never lose touch with the sacraments. Our role as theologians and priests is to provide avenues where lay people have access to faith materials and information. COVID-19 indeed calls for an evangelization approach where the domestic Church is made alive and the whole Christian community continues to trust in the Lord for protection, wisdom and guidance.





## GOING BEYOND **EMPATHY**

BY FR. DR. JOHN ERA, CM

It is believed that empathy is one major hallmark of an effective therapeutic relationship in psychotherapy. When therapists are empathic, healing begins for their clients because a safe space, where acceptance and love characterize the relationship, is established. Carl Rogers and many other person-centered therapists have capitalized on empathy in the practice of their profession – A direct reaction against the traditional Freudian psychoanalytic approach to therapy where therapists are encouraged to be distant and unattached to their clients. After all, a cold therapist can recreate a past cold father, triggering somebody to unconsciously react negatively and bringing out to the open issues from one's childhood past that need processing.

During this time of the pandemic, we are all called to be more empathic to one another, like to those who are suffering from depression and anxiety. Today, there is so much discussion on issues that are adversely affecting our mental health. It is not surprising then why we look for ways and means to combat the stressors that continue to beset our wellbeing. Empathy is a good starting point. However, I would like to caution everyone that it should not stop there. If Carl Rogers believe that empathy is all we need so that people suffering from mental illness, like depression and anxiety, can recover quickly, then, I say, we need to go beyond empathizing.

Our empathy should lead us to action. We need to look for concrete solutions to alleviate the mental health problems of those affected by the pandemic. St. Vincent De Paul showed us an example to follow. While empathizing with the poor during his time, he made sure that he extended his hand by giving bread to satisfy their hunger. Like St. Vincent, we are called to share the bread that will restore happiness and joy to those who are feeling depressed and anxious. Now, let us begin to look for that bread so that we can start sharing them with others.

# WE MUST HEAL AS *One*

By Sem. Joey Balunsat, MS

“When you want something; all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.” This is what novelist Paulo Coelho says in *The Alchemist*. The COVID 19 pandemic brought us painful experiences of fear and brokenness in our family, church, and society. We do not dwell in our fears and brokenness in our family, church, and society. But we must not dwell in our fears and brokenness; we have to free ourselves from the threat of the virus and we can do this only if we desire universal healing. We do not heal individually but universally. We heal as one.

Due to local and overseas lockdown, we are literally disconnected from some members of our family. The absence of these members adds to the family’s pain, the new reality that we have to embrace. This pain, however, must not strengthen our fears and brokenness but must strengthen our care and concern not just with our families but also for our neighbors who are separated too from their families.

In a similar way, the Mass or the celebration of the Holy Eucharist has been affected. Mass-goers can no longer enjoy the face-to-face celebration of the Eucharist, because of health protocols. In this reality, we must not allow the virus to weaken and destroy our faith. As the Holy Eucharist nourishes us and strengthens us, let us also nourish one another by inspiring each other to cultivate love and concern for all those in need. Let us make those around us feel that they are loved and that they belong with us. I believe that making others feel that they are loved is the best antidote for indifference.

Healing is the first goal we want to fulfill in this time of pandemic. The different sectors of the government are geared toward this goal.

Front liners, in different workplaces, are offering themselves for others to be safe, to heal, and to recover from the virus. Thus this shows that when we love others, it is easy for us to sacrifice and do acts of kindness. The heroic act of our front liners in this pandemic is a perfect manifestation that in loving we can think of creative ways to help. Indeed, loving can lead us to more miracles of healing.





# COVID 19 VACCINE FOR THE POOR

*By Sem. Victor Villena*

Today people are in trauma due to the covid-19 pandemic that has brought a lot of destruction to the entire world. The virus has tampered with people's lives, destroyed livelihood, and changed many things socially, politically, and culturally. People are paranoid and troubled with the religious ones asking the mercy of God to pour out vaccines through scientists and experts in order to heal the world and restore things back to normal.

But as the world awaits vaccines the question is who gets the vaccine first? At the moment, medical experts and international world leaders are debating on this. Some argue that the vaccine should be provided first to the poor, the frontlines, and those who are the most vulnerable but cannot afford it. Others hold that vaccines must be given first to the rich and to those who are in power since they can afford it. Recently, Pope Francis spoke from the Vatican in a video address to the U.N. General Assembly, saying, "The poor and the weakest members of society should get preferential treatment when the vaccine for the coronavirus is ready." With this, the pope reechoed the duty of the entire world to always reach out to the poor, the marginalized, and the abandoned, for they are the most vulnerable to the virus.

Based on my experiences and encounters with the poor, I know that life is not easy for them. They live in an unfortunate state, with no proper shelter, no food, and not enough clothes. These individuals suffer not only from material lack but also from exploitation and human rights abuses. This pandemic has made life even harder for them to survive for they can no longer go out to work to find food for their families because of government restrictions. Is it not right then to prioritize the poor first when the vaccine arrives? All our government and world leaders should be reminded that it is their duty to take care of the poor and oppressed in our society. Rich and developed countries should not hoard the vaccine or practice what the World Health Organization has warned us against: "vaccine nationalism". They must come together and join a global pact to share the vaccine with developing countries first where the world's poorest populations reside.



## Closely Connected: COVID 19 and Social Media

*By Sem. Rafael Rivera*



Throughout my College Seminary days, our Formators restricted us from using electronic gadgets and social media accounts. They said that these gadgets may bring us closer to those who are far away but it will also take us away from those standing next to us. Without social media accounts, we are safe from fake news, pornography, cybercrimes, online gambling, political trolls, and the like. Our Formators knew the danger that social media could bring to our intersubjective relationship with our *kapwa* (the Other). COVID-19 pandemic however has ruined the physical presence and meaningful connections and social interactions we have with our *kapwa*. It has constrained us from doing some of our usual day-to-day activities such as seeing friends, loved ones, and coworkers. In this situation then, how do we stay connected while physically apart?

The COVID-19 pandemic guidelines have unlocked the reality of the digital age which consists of new contexts and new ways of connecting. This crisis has forced everyone to enter into a virtual space or known as social media platforms: Facebook, Messenger, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Tiktok, Zoom Meeting, and etc. These platforms have shown their usefulness at this time when many of us are isolated from one another. These media platforms now began to play a significant role in combating depression, boredom, loneliness, and anxiety for they now bring long distances nearer. Today, we are

now using these platforms for our purposes, online courses, marketing, virtual support groups, evangelization, live streaming of liturgical celebrations, keeping us updated with the news, etc. These platforms continuously act as facilitators and multipliers which lead people to find food suppliers, healthcare services, business services, and community services. We thank God for this gift of digital technology. It gathers us together in communion and in actual time from different parts of the world.

Amidst this unprecedented crisis, may we always stay connected by making our identity in Social Media and not Social Media making our identity. Recently, an Italian Teenager, Blessed Carlo Acutis, was the first millennial beatified by Pope Francis and named as the patron saint of the Internet. Let us ask for his intercession to become positive influencers of the Communion of communities through the various Social media platforms especially during this COVID19 pandemic.

# COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

## DURING THE PANDEMIC

BY DR. EMILIANO Q. IBERA III

Every learner or educator these days is compelled to shift to online learning, also known as virtual or digital learning. One may have heard of Blackboard, or Canvas, among the more familiar platforms. Whatever the name, online learning means an internet-mediated learning process. Beyond the proper names and platforms, a more essential focus is everyone's commitment or willingness to engage in learning. I wish to see this shift primarily as a matter that would reveal one's commitment to learn. The question, therefore, is not what platform is the best to use, but one's commitment to learn. A committed learner is open to adapt to changes in modalities of learning. Learning is the main consideration. The media of learning is a secondary concern.

SVST and the Adamson University are committed to learning. As early as March 2020, the administrators were already preparing to shift to online learning for the first semester of the incoming academic year. At this point, SVST facilitated the training of professors in using Blackboard, an online platform adopted by

Adamson University. Young and old professors were committed to learn and use it. Everyone was unfamiliar with Blackboard, yet everyone was interested and committed to learn it. Some professors opted to use other modified online learning platforms. They maximized the use of email and other internet-mediated means. This did not make online learning a lesser undertaking. Their commitment to facilitate learning was there. They recognized the fact that internet mediation would stay a major mode of learning, even after the threat of COVID-19 is over.

If an institution like SVST is maximizing every available method to shift to online learning, then students need to commit to it as well. And we are expecting the same from their Formators and Superiors. A Few months ago, some congregations, and even dioceses, thought of not enrolling their seminarians for this pandemic academic year. One seminarian mentioned that his bishop was considering the option to suspend their

theological education for a year because of the pandemic. Although this is understandable, it is important also to think that no pandemic must impede one's desire for learning. If one is committed to learn, there must be more energy to create possibilities for overcoming every difficulty that comes.

I wish to see student's zealous to learn notwithstanding the limitations that they may face due to the pandemic. I wish to see students seriously engaged in the online classes during this pandemic academic year. This means visible participation in the online classes. This means submission of requirements on time. This means professors learning the thoughts of the students through

textual forms (email, online discussions, and exams). And this means a disciplined imposition of schedules on the students.

Finally, some things are important to keep in mind as we take on studies in a pandemic year. It is important to have the openness to learn, to take every opportunity to enrich the self. As always, cooperation will always have a great role in any learning process. No cooperation, no learning. Moreover, it is beneficial to keep the mind focused on going beyond every difficulty that may come, rather than allow oneself to be crippled by fear. Difficulties are overcome as the mind is trained to think of possibilities.





# Online Teaching: CHALLENGES AND CHANCES

*By Fr. Edprim Gaza, CM*

Distance Education facilitated by the Internet is not new to us, but only a few have subscribed to it for about a decade or so ago. But as COVID-19 significantly marks this year, 2020, the online way of living is the thing, and so teaching and learning have to maximize the use of this technology. This is not to say that my perspective of challenges and chances when it comes to teaching are absolute; definitely, they are not limited to my own experience.

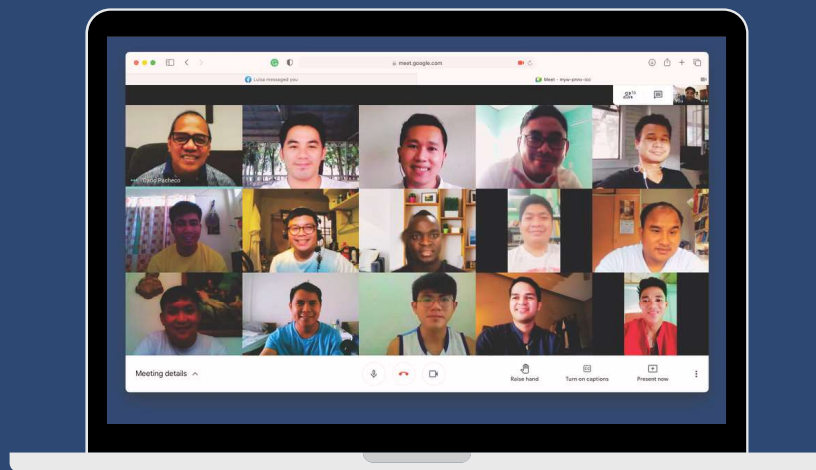
My initial impression is that it is fun. Just being inside the house, one can wear informal attire like shorts instead of pants, since the camera captures a polo-shirt as top-wear which already makes teaching formal and serious. One can have coffee, tea, or other beverages and be comfortably seated on a couch or on the bed--a picture of being simply at home.

For those who are financially com-

fortable, this arrangement may work perfectly. There, however, are many who find online learning difficult because of inaccessibility of all internet connection as well as the lack of the required electronic gadgets. There are teachers and students who do not have an android phone to access the internet. For those who even have but live in remote areas need to travel miles to reach the center of a town where an internet connection is available.

"The challenges I face each time I hold online teaching is my chance to be in solidarity with the Filipino masses".

*- Fr. Edprim Gaza, CM*



Given this kind of academic state, no one can escape from the challenge of how to theologize the situation. In the face-to-face teaching-learning interaction, the daily experiences of the students, whether living with their families or in the seminary, can be a topic of conversation. These experiences may be processed as to how students encounter God in their lives and how they grow in their relationship with Him. The Online method limits this conversation. Many seminarian-students are from poor parishes, and their experiences are essential in theological discourse.

Thus, it is more challenging for students to bring difficulties to online discussions and come up with relevant theological questions drawn from their experiences of poverty, whether caused by the pandemic or by political chaos in the country.

Nevertheless, this current situation can still facilitate learning. For those at home, the challenge is how to enjoy the confines of the house and still create an ambience of school different from that of a home, and avoid losing focus and psychological disposition. This may be another chance to be formed as better persons.

Let us be conscious of those who are in dire conditions who those need to endure poor means of transportation and the scorching sun, just to have an internet connection. This is the general academic panorama of our country today. The challenges I face each time I hold online teaching is my chance to be in solidarity with the Filipino masses.

St. Vincent de Paul is known to many as the father of the poor. His life portrays the image of charity that discovers God in the faces of the marginalized, the oppressed, the suffering, the hungry, the abandoned, and the voiceless. St Vincent believes that God in becoming man dwelt amongst us and felt what it was like to suffer and to be unfortunate. Jesus served the poor in their misery and served as their voice of hope. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and fed the hungry. He gave hope to the hopeless by preaching the Beatitudes and finally saved humankind by dying on the cross, leaving us his suffering face so that we could continue to find him in all those who suffer and are marginalized.

It is in this sense therefore, that St. Vincent teaches us that the image of the poor is no different from the face of Christ. For like Christ, these faces are powerful images that reveal a theological truth, the truth that the reality of God is in the suffering poor. As such for St. Vincent de Paul, the best way we can find God and also find ourselves is to go to the Poor. Going to the poor here demands a deep relationship with them. This relationship is not merely a status but an act of sharing and receiving. We give ourselves that is our talent, time, resources, voice, position, ears, presence, compassion, and love so that we can in return find God and ourselves.

The moment we learn to recognize and appreciate their existence by going closer to them, their faces will give us that sense of healing, as we realize through them our own selfishness and covetousness that hinder us from real happiness. We aim for more, but never have enough. It is through the poor man's empty stomach that we learn to feed our spiritual hunger through our generosity, every smile of gratitude from them reminds us that we have more than enough.

In the faces of the poor, we see hope. This is due to the fact that despite the discrimination and rejection they face, they still choose to look forward, to hope that one day their suffering will end. We can only realize this strong sense of hope from them. Also in spite of this, many of the poor still die unjustly in their suffering and without dignity, a reminder that Christ too died like them in his suffering and so we can discover God in their suffering and in our own suffering too.

Relationship is what St. Vincent de Paul teaches. Going to the poor demands a deep relationship with them, to the point that we can sense them, smell them, feel their suffering and, in the end, learn to forget our own sense of self because we become like them. It is only in relationship that we see the contemporary image of God, the God whose love is expressed in His own suffering.



# EXPERIENCING GOD AND OURSELVES IN THE POOR

by Sem. Charlie B. Olojan, CM





# Encountering the poor, Encountering Christ

*by Sr. Anarie L. Cayag, DC*

As followers of St. Vincent de Paul, the central concept of our spirituality is seeing Christ in the poor, and the poor in Christ. It is our identity. It is a gift received from God which stems out from our life of faith but at the same time an ideal we continue to strive for and assimilate that has to become more palpable in our life as we advance in our vocation. It is a legacy bequeathed by our founders but also a responsibility we have to nurture.

We take as a mandate Christ's words in Matthew 25:40: "Whatever you do for one of these least brothers of mine, you do for me." We believe that Christ is present among the people who live in poverty, and Jesus invites us to respond to Him in their person.

When we encounter the Poor, we encounter Christ; and it is in this school of encounter that we learn more about God, His will, and desires for us, as well as learn more about our own creatureliness and poverty as a person. It is through our faith experiences with them that we learn better what truly is valuable in life and how to set our priorities right.

This way of life is not at all easy. Alluding to Saint Teresa of Calcutta's words, the Poor are Christ's most distressing disguise. Saint Vincent de Paul often advised the first Daughters, "the more vulgar and offensive they are, the more we are supposed to love them." Yet, it is often our encounters with these people that confront us with our own sinfulness and teach us how to be more loving and compassionate. Vincent believed that Christ is hidden in their callousness. It is by our faith-filled reflection of our experiences with them that we become aware of Christ's presence in them. In our prayer, God makes us more sensitive to His presence and movements, questioning us, strengthening us, and pointing out to us the path toward love, justice, and freedom.

# SVST: Not just Your Ordinary School

by Sem. Aldriene Balmes

When I was a little child, my Mom always reminded me that I had to study hard so that I could have a good future. That if I didn't want to live like homeless people begging for money, I should finish my studies to build a good career, and earn a decent salary. However, studying was not easy for me.



I was not a good student back then. The school was not my favorite place. I remember during my elementary and high school days, I never went to the library, and very seldom did during college. I always depended on borrowed textbooks, internet, handouts, and photocopies of certain pages of the books which I could not afford. I copied homework from my classmates and rarely reviewed before examinations. I seldom excelled in class and most of the time I was at the bottom. If my Mom had not promised to reward me with a cellphone if I became an honor student, I would not have studied well. Fortunately, although I got my phone, it was really hard. Competition was tough in school and, since I was weak in the class, I became active in extra-curricular activities just to have good grades. Teachers were considerate to students who were active in such activities. Moreover, I always felt intimidated by teachers especially by Principals and Deans. I thought it was impossible to be friends with them, and ordinary students like me were always afraid of them. Back then, it felt like heaven when there were no classes.

Everything I knew about school however, changed when I started studying at St. Vincent School of Theology. SVST is not just your ordinary school. It is the total opposite of what I knew about my former schools. Here in SVST students are inspired to study hard. I am always encouraged to visit the library and to review a lesson for the next class or to prepare for examinations. I became active in both curricular and extra-curricular activities. The Dean and Professors are so friendly that I felt comfortable exchanging thoughts and feelings with them. The school personnel are also welcoming. They always help us when we get in trouble in class, especially with our grades. Here in SVST, having no class is like missing an opportunity to grow and learn.

Learning in this school is not just confined to the classroom; it also takes place outside the school. I will always remember and appreciate each time they bring us to different sectors of society, dialogue with the people and share stories with them, stories that enrich not only our minds but also our hearts. I learned in SVST the essence of praxis where theology is discerned and must go beyond theory. We are sent to the poor not just for the experience but to apply what we learn in class and thus fully realize the presence of God in the midst of the poor. We in turn also let them see God in us through



our sincere effort to be present with them. I learned in SVST that a theology without praxis is a shallow theology. Obviously, through SVST, school has become my favorite place, where we excel not because we compete but because we believe that the poor we serve deserve the best service through our shared learning. Here in SVST what is important is not really an intelligent mind but a kind heart for the marginalized. SVST truly continues to fulfill the mission of Christ in serving the poor.

Mom was right; I really need to study hard to have a better future, not only for myself but also for the people I will serve. She was also wrong, because the people living in the streets are also my teachers. Through them I become servant which God wants me to be. A Good career with a big income is not the true measure of success; it's the generosity of the heart that measures a man's highest achievements.



## PAUL Senogat

*Dream*  
**TO REALITY**

I am a victim of child abuse. I was beaten by law enforcers and government officials due to a curfew violation. I was eleven years old at that time and from there I know what I want to be. I want to be someone who can defend the poor, that is why I grew up liking and watching the fictitious character of FPJ movies the *"tagapagtanggol ng inaapi"* (hero of the oppressed). I dream to be a lawyer and be a National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) agent. Motivated with this dream I entered law school but something substantial is missing and I can feel that my law school life only sharpens my intellectual skills. It does not however help me to understand the oppressed and the people from the margins.

Just recently, I have met some Vincentian priests and members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Ozamis City. In a very short period of time, they allowed me to be immersed in their community and pastoral works. Inspired by their prayer life and preference for the poor, my eagerness to serve the Church was revitalized. Thus, I enrolled at St. Vincent School of Theology, I was just expecting to learn more about theology that will be helpful in the reformulation of our community in the parish. However, my experience in SVST transcends my expectation and made me realize something profound which brought me to ask questions and reflect. What is faith when it is meaningless to the people? What's the purpose of the truth when the same is insincere to the oppressed? I learned the true value of *Pakikipagkapwa* and practically used the said values in my pastoral and socio-civic involvement. I learned that people should not be a mere object of our pastoral works or maybe government programs, instead, they must be subjects who are part of the self-reflection process and together resolving their challenges.

Certainly, I have learned to see the clear demarcation of a dream from reality and ideas from praxis. My Vincentian education would help me to be a better lay missionary and socio-civic worker and at the end in my little way help the people who are like me who once experienced abuse and injustice.

I remember almost two years ago when we were discussing our expectations for studying Theology of Ministry with Fr. Ginete, I was perplexed that I have no definite pastoral plan at all. Yes, as Laypeople we are already involved in different pastoral ministries like education, social work, BEC organizing, parish work, family ministries, etc.—but these are just activities and, it seems to me, something is still profoundly lacking.

"I just want to be closer to my loving God to know him better and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, where and how best God wants me to serve Him.", I thought. Fr. Ginete directed us to just be open and continue the journey in Faith, through the exciting Theological formation at SVST.

I appreciate how the theological formation was organized and presented to us in a simple and accessible manner. The disciplines are so integrated that whatever vantage point you look at it, it leads to a loving God-- His revelation in the bible, our church history, culture and traditions, in our moral lives, and the day-to-day realities that confront us in our modern living—all points to a God who is in continuous dialogue with humans, reaching us and transforming us.

Perhaps after the theology course, we may have gained a set of knowledge and skills "tools" that would equip us in our pastoral ministries. But what is more vital is that theological knowledge should allow us to be critical in our faith and at the same time deepen our spiritual foundation. Our theological formation should lead us to grow in grace and be holy, becoming like Jesus, growing in love with God, and practicing Christian Virtues and service especially to the poor. This is the essence and fulfillment of pastoral ministry for me, that we may be one in the grace of God (John 1:6-26).

Today, I should say my journey at SVST is a continuous movement from inward introspection of faith and spirituality to an outward missionary kerygma.

**SVST**  
**LAY FORMATION:**  
**INWARD AND**  
**OUTWARD**  
**MOVEMENTS IN**  
**MISSION**

**JUMAR**  
*Balonkita*





**Angelo**  
Sarita

See

Judge

Act

In Saint Vincent School of Theology (SVST), we students are not only grounded in theory, but also trained to do theology on the “rough grounds”, Dean Fr. Daniel Pilario likes to put it. SVST calls this “Doing Theology from the Margins”. Since I joined SVST three years ago, I have had the chance to study theology using the method “See Judge Act”, a framework inspired by Joseph Cardinal Cardijn. This method is studied in class and applied by every student enrolled in SVST.

Our courses require pastoral immersion, and I have had the privilege of experiencing it through the Vincentian Popular Mission in the rural mountains and rough terrain of Negros Occidental. All SVST students undertake this mission once a year across the different rural parts of the Philippines. Students get the opportunity to live out and put into practice the see, judge and act method.

The “Seeing” part is looking, experiencing and analysing the situation. In mission we do some house-to-house visits to facilitate a dialogue with the people, to know them better, hear them, and establish good relationships and camaraderie. To analyse their situation we let them speak and we listen attentively to their stories, put ourselves in their shoes, and let ourselves experience their life. Sometimes we end with mixed reactions: happy, sad, disinterested, neutral, etc. all these feelings express our response to the situation, realizing that, one way or the other, we may have contributed to the system that impoverishes them, or we have not done enough to sympathize with them.

The “Judging” part is where we use theoretical-theological principles to make sense of the situation. The significant question here is: What does our faith say about the situation? What does the Vincentian Tradition say about the situation? We employ the bible, as well as the Judeo-Christian Tradition, as a major tool for discernment and reflection.

The “Act” part is that which bridges the gap between what is happening in reality and what should be happening according to what our faith says. This third part is the action we must resolve to take, either as a group or individual, to systematically change or rescue the situation, bearing always in mind a “preferential option for the poor”.

I am privileged to have this kind of experience in SVST since I too come from a poor family and know how it feels to have nothing and no one to stand by me to listen to my story. SVST no doubt effectively stands by the poor, using the method of Bishop Cardijn as a tool to pastorally minister to the poor. I invite and encourage everyone who is considering SVST as a study option to lose no sleep in joining our community so that they can have an opportunity just like mine to immerse themselves in the people, to be concretely with the people in the peripheries, employing the charisma of Saint Vincent de Paul.

**Joel**  
Mack



“What object do you think best represents you?”. This was one of the questions we were asked as we began our class in Theological Anthropology last semester. The first thing that came to mind in response to said question, was a piece of blank paper, as I intentionally allowed myself to set aside for the time being my conventional way of thinking and abandon my prejudices coming from a particular tradition and individuality, to welcome new ideas and views to unfold as they come, presented as learning concepts in the perspective of the Catholic faith.

I can honestly say that SVST, has been successful in challenging my deeply framed thoughts, beliefs, values, and practices in areas of faith and pastoral orientation, which paved the way towards a guided introspection and many other realizations. Newly introduced frameworks and theoretical concepts have elevated the level of understanding of my personal experiences, the interplay of the individual and society where we belong, in the context of our own realities and circumstances, with great emphasis on actual human experiences.

Frameworks learned served as a magnifying glass in my attempt to see and understand the experiences and realities of other people and have significantly improved my own sensitivity towards the needs and perspective of the underprivileged members of our society, the excluded, or the marginalized. Yes, my default way of thinking has been greatly challenged. Grateful for the lessons learned so far, I can now freely locate and harmonize my views among varied theological perspectives, finding a common ground with other people for a more meaningful exchange of ideas.

Ardently praying that all insights and learnings be translated and manifested into praxis, to demonstrate genuine respect and consideration of others’ points of view and way of thinking, to be open-minded and discerning, striving daily to come closer to what God wants us to pursue in life, for His greater glory and purpose.



## HOLISTIC AND LIFE CHANGING!

By Sr. Sandra B. Pratt, DC

Holistic and life-changing! This is how I describe my experience at St. Vincent School of Theology (SVST). Various aspects of my life have been challenged and have undergone paradigm shifts including my mindset, perspectives, and beliefs.

First, the shift was on my notion of study which was solely for the formation of the mind. I was sent to school in order to learn and acquire knowledge that would prepare and equip me as a Daughter of Charity. But in SVST I have discovered that formation is not only about having a mind but also about having a heart and soul. Its motto, "Doing Theology from the Margins" greatly resonates with Jesus' mission: His preferential option for the Poor – the least, the last, and the lost. The Daughters of Charity shares this mission with Christ.

Secondly, I used to associate school activities with fun and enjoyment. In SVST, however, I experienced something beyond fun and enjoyment particularly, in its three major celebrations: SVST Day, Christmas in the Margins, and Feast of Cultures. SVST Day is a time to showcase the students' talents but at the same time the members of the class to establish and strengthen their relationships in the spirit of camaraderie and unity. Christmas in the Margins has made the birth of Jesus even more meaningful by spending it with our poor brothers and sisters. This activity puts into action what I have learned inside the classroom - a graced moment to see, taste, touch, hear and smell the poor whom St. Vincent de Paul referred to as our Lords and Masters. SVST is an intercultural school. Students come from different countries and regions. I believe that the Feast of Cultures becomes an avenue for the appreciation of the richness of each culture amidst diversity.

Finally, in SVST I have learned and experienced being a servant-leader in its truest sense. I found that leadership is not about power and authority but about being humble, compassionate, and a good listener. Being the Class Beadle invited and taught me how to relate and deal with complimentary sex (mostly seminarians) better without compromising my dignity, principles, and values in life.

I believe that "Nothing is a coincidence, everything is Providential." All my experiences were God's way of communicating with me. Indeed, I felt blessed and privileged to be a part of SVST.

## SVST: A DREAM, A HOME AND A TRAINING GROUND

By Sem. Jonah Mari O. Inoncillo



Pope Francis' Papal Visit in Manila on January 15 to 19, 2015 was significant to me as my first experience of SVST. My co-seminarians and I, from the Diocese of San Carlos, Negros Occidental, were given the great opportunity to go to Manila to witness personally Pope Francis right in our midst, and at the same time, to visit SVST and De Paul House. I can never forget that first time I stepped on the grounds of SVST – it was the moment I had long dreamed of. I said to myself: "Ganahan ko mu-eskwela diri pag theology naku!" (I want to study here when I reach theology!). Yes! SVST indeed became my inspiration to pursue patiently and persistently my philosophy years. Time flew fast and God granted me that dream. By God's grace coupled with my effort, I graduated my philosophy and was recommended for theologate, courtesy of my Formators at SVST. Now, here I am, stepping into my dream, on my third year as a theology student in St. Vincent School of Theology.

Let me share some of my unforgettable experiences in SVST that had affected and changed my perception of life; SVST integrally and holistically re-formed me in these three aspects:

**Mind.** In my first year, I was overwhelmed with the academic demands, on both classroom work and assigned papers. It was a rigid kind of formation of the mind – acquiring skills and techniques in analyzing situations and writing papers. At one point, I was so stressed that I thought this school should not be called St. Vincent School of Theology, but instead be called 'St. Vincent School of Papers'. SVST indeed changed my perception of the world, especially because of its emphasis on the 'see-judge-act' method of thinking.

**Heart.** In my first year, SVST broke my heart. Towards the end, I realized that I really had to be broken, like a 'fragile vessel', with the intention of re-encindling and re-forming my heart into a new one [metanoia]: a heart that feels and loves other broken things; a heart that listens and comforts those who mourn; a heart that seeks justice for those who are treated unjustly; a heart that fights for the sake of righteousness, peace and love – 'a heart that embraces the poor'.

**Hands and Feet.** SVST has also been challenging my hands and feet, "to do theology from the margins". What I know from the classroom had to be acted upon, in service through concrete and appropriate actions, outside its walls. I had to get my hands and feet dirty; I had to smell like the people I was with; I had to reach out and learn from the experiences of the people, especially the poor.

SVST has indeed re-formed me: to have a mind that thinks critically and analyzes ideas and situations (see); a heart that feels and listens justly (judge); hands and feet that reach out and (act) appropriately in and for the service of the poor. This institution, which was once only in my dreams, has now become my home and training ground – forming me into a person who recognizes the unrecognizable, embraces and loves even the most unlovable, and touches the untouchables in both the society and the Church.



# THE PRIVILEGE AND JOY OF BEING IN SVST

By Sem. Edwin Macanas

Four years ago, I was admitted at Saint Vincent School of Theology for theological studies. Since then, I have had no regrets. Being in this school is a joy, a gift and privilege that God has given me. SVST is a unique family with people who have a rich practice in theology. Here I am taught to do theology from the margins, something not commonly found in other schools. I am trained by well-known, brilliant, humble, and grounded theology professors from the Philippines and from other countries, something I have never dreamed of.

Besides its excellent academic programs, SVST partners with different advocacy groups involved in social issues. Students thus experience being in solidarity with the poor. So, if you are looking for new perspectives and views in theology, SVST is best for you. If you are willing to experience theology from the margins and compassion for the weak and oppressed, you belong in svst! Finally, if you are a student who desire to be transformed, then you surely deserve a chance to be in SVST!



# I FOUND MY PLACE IN SVST!

By Carol Daria

I'm Carol, a member of the faculty of SVST. I was attracted to SVST because of its belief in "doing theology from the margins." I was a humanitarian worker before I joined the academe. I love serving the poor and the needy. Every encounter with them gave me a deep sense of joy and meaning in my life. Since I was formed in a lay Catholic community, I live the gospel message by serving Christ through the poor.

It took sometime before I found a place where I could integrate my passion to serve the marginalized and my desire to teach theology, a place where the classroom experience becomes real, where part of the program is to be exposed to poor communities. I found this place in SVST. Here we teach a Theology that is rooted in actual testimonies of faith by the people on the ground. As St. Vincent de Paul said, "Go to the poor: you will find God."



# IN SVST I FOUND HOPE AGAIN!

By Raymond G. De Guzman

I think of St. Vincent School of Theology as an institution that gives hope and opportunities to individuals and families who are in need. Whether these people are in need of money, food, shelter, or guidance and spiritual relief. SVST is always there, doing what is best for them. It was here in SVST where I found hope again after I faced personal difficulties in 2019. I thought then that it was impossible to get back to reality. I didn't want to continue with my studies, I even decided not to talk to anyone but just be by myself. I did not believe that I could start again. But while in SVST, I suddenly felt encouragement and excitement then I said to myself "Hope is everywhere, I only need an open heart and mind to accept myself and start again."



# SVST A CITADEL OF PRAXIS

By Sem. Jonathan Aparicio

As a Seminarian and a student of SVST I often ask myself. How do I apply the SVST slogan Doing Theology from the Margins? How do I become one with the margins? For all of my theological learning will be incomplete and meaningless without engaging in the life of the vulnerable. SVST teaches that doing theology should be done both in deeds and in words as I align with victims of different kinds of injustices. My simple immersion in them enriches my life because doing theology from the margins does not just mean giving them material things but rather it means being in solidarity with them. My life as a student in SVST teaches me that doing theology cannot be learned only within the four corners of the classroom, but rather in praxis.

ON SVST

THOUGHTS





## SVST ACADEMIC SYMPOSIUM ON THEOLOGY AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

By Sem. Victor Villena

On November 25, 2020 the faculty, students and staff of St. Vincent School of Theology had a virtual academic symposium on the theme, “Theology and indigenous Knowledge “. This started at 1:30 pm with an opening prayer led by Ms. Jobelle Javier. Rev. Fr. Roland Tuazon, CM associate dean, then introduced the speaker, Dr. Emiliano Ibera.

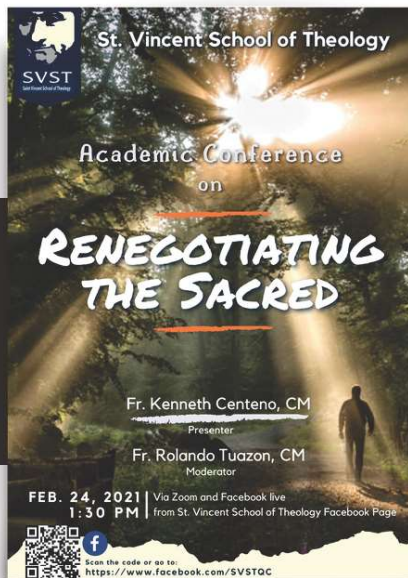
Dr. Ibera III, who recently attained his doctorate from the University of the Philippines, discussed several themes on Theology and indigenous knowledge that covered two basic questions: What is indigenous knowledge, and what does it mean for theology of mission to be grounded on indigenous knowledge?

Dr. Ibera described indigenous knowledge as the unique, traditional, local knowledge that has existed and developed within the condition of a particular group in a specific geographical area, and represents the experiences of many generations. This indigenous knowledge, the speaker added, is a tacit knowledge, not codified or systematically recorded. It lives in the memory of the older generations imbedded in the culture of a particular people, and most often situated in a rural area. This knowledge is transmitted through oral tradition, that is why it is a “agrapha”, meaning no written tradition.

"Theology needs to acknowledge the existence of indigenous knowledge as well as protect this heritage."

Dr. Ibera explained that for theology of mission to be grounded, it should take on a humbling posture in relation to the other. Theology needs to acknowledge the existence of indigenous knowledge as well as protect this heritage. To do this, theology of mission must undertake ecumenical, inter-religious, and inter-cultural dialogue as indispensable to evangelization. The Church and its mission must be present as an ally of the people in their local context and territories. In addition, the Church and its mission must be concerned with the integral salvation of the human persons. She must be of service to the full life of indigenous people. She must stand side-by-side with them, safeguarding them. Above all, the Church must respect the culture and rights of indigenous people. Dr. Ibera added that theology of mission must do the following actions toward indigenous people: learn and understand indigenous knowledge, support indigenous peoples in practicing their own way of worship (other rituals that they value), and promote knowledge partnership for sustainable community development. Above all, it must take the indigenous peoples as partners in achieving development.

The symposium ended at 4:30 in the afternoon with a closing prayer led by Fr Rolando Tuazon CM.



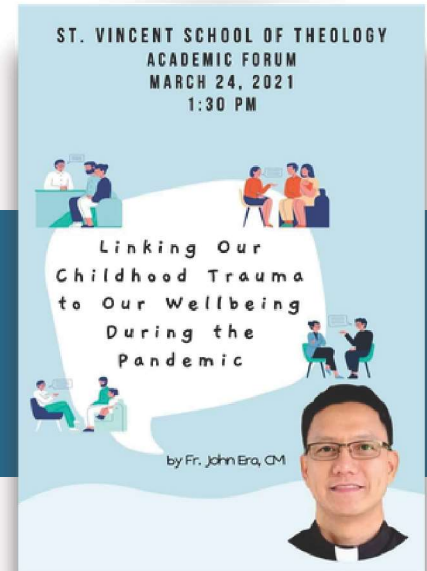
*By Sem. Erlan Marcalam*

# SVST

## 2ND AND 3RD

# ACADEMIC SYMPOSIUM

# 2021



## Mental Health: Total Health

*By Sem. Jufre Ryan Abit Globio*

On February 24, 2021, was the second online Academic Symposiums at St. Vincent School of Theology. The topic for the conference was "Renegotiating the Sacred: A search toward a new way of understanding the Filipino consciousness of God." The speaker was Fr. Dr. Kenneth Centeno, CM, a professor in SVST's Philosophy department and the topic is his dissertation defended at RWTH Aachen University, Germany.

Fr Centeno began by acknowledging that the word 'sacred' is indeed a complex term that is so easily linked only to religious matters. He noted that in western philosophical thought, the term transcends religion and because of its complexity, there have been attempts by Post-modern Philosophers to capture its real essence. This attempt has not yet yielded a definitive answer. Fr Centeno narrowed the term to the local Filipino context where he noted that it remains a challenge to contextualize. He however said that Filipinos believe in the sense of the sacred and relate it to the things that are seen and unseen based on their ancient animistic religion. He further stated that the Filipino concept of the sacred is manipulated with the element of "loob" which is a local term for the "inner self" and the internal aspect of a person's identity. This "loob" he says influences how one views the notion of the sacred.

Fr Centeno went on to explain what re-negotiating the sacred means. He noted that this is a new way of understanding the Filipino consciousness of God. To renegotiate means to negotiate over and over again to modify the originally conventional terms. This re-negotiation is important because it would provide a framework that may help clarify "the ins and outs, the knots and knurls, the entanglement and interweaving of different collocation that pertains to Filipino religious consciousness on God through the analysis of the banal/sacred." In the same manner, it would go a long way in answering the age-long question, "Why do systemic social ills continue to exist in the Philippine society in spite of their fervent religiosity?"

The academic symposium was attended mostly by the students of SVST both in the Theology and Philosophy departments. There were also a good number of Lay people who joined the online forum from various parishes and dioceses in the Philippines.

On March 24, 2021, as the country was rife with a mental health crisis amidst the spike of Covid-19 cases that overwhelmed hospitals and overburdened frontliners, SVST held this school year's third online academic forum: "Linking Our Childhood Trauma to Our Well-being During the Pandemic" the speaker was Fr. John Era, CM, pride of SVST, an authority in the field of Psychology and the current Director for Admission and Recruitment.

Employing the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Score, Fr. Era highlighted the harmful effects of childhood trauma on one's overall well-being as an adult. He explained how traumas make people susceptible to physical and mental health problems that impact various facets of life, such as cognition, behavior, relationships, and ultimately, lifespan.

He advised practical and clinical interventions for the ultimate cure of childhood trauma. Preventive measures start in the family which fosters reduction of stress, building of healthy relationships, and honing of skills. The curative means include practicing a healthy lifestyle, submitting to psychotherapy as the need arises, and deepening of spirituality, among others.

Concluding his presentation, Fr. John Era left the participants with an encouraging remark: "Neuroscience is telling us that our younger years have a great impact on our adult well-being. However, we can find ways to correct that; maybe not better than someone who did not have those experiences, but we can address these unhealthy outcomes caused by our traumatic past."

The forum was participated in by the Philosophy and Theology students of SVST. People from different disciplines also joined: church workers from various parishes and dioceses in the country, professionals from the academe, and people involved in counseling.

# SVST

## ACADEMIC SYMPOSIUM ON

### “EXPERIENCING COMMUNION WITH GOD IN THE TIME OF COVID-19”



*By Sr Aurelia Puspasari*

On the 28th of April 2021, Saint Vincent School of Theology (SVST), held its 4th virtual academic symposium. The symposium was entitled “Experiencing Communion with God in the Time of Covid-19: The Sacraments and their Challenges Today”. The resource speaker was the Rector of SVST himself, Rev Fr. Dr. Manuel Ginete, CM.

Starting the conversation, Fr. Ginete employed the definition of sacrament by Edward Schillebeeckx who says that “sacrament is the encounter between God and Man”. On the basis of this Fr. Ginete raised some questions related to the sacraments during the COVID-19 pandemic, including: “What can we learn from our “sacramental” experiences in this time of COVID-19? How do we relate these to other experiences at this time of the pandemic? What model does Jesus show in this regard? and What lies in store for the future of community sacramental celebrations?”

Fr. Ginete explained how people should interpret faith in Jesus Christ in today’s COVID-19 Pandemic situation by means of worshiping in online form. According to him, online worship, especially the Eucharistic Celebration, remains a form of unity with God since the essence of the Eucharist is unity with God directly as a person. Even though the people do not directly receive communion, the spiritual communion and spiritual union with Christ is still very much valuable and could count as sacramental.

Fr. Ginete went forward to provide a new picture of the revolutionary Church in terms of worship and Church activities. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected the lifestyle of many people, including Church activities. Conditions like this turn out to make the people steadfast in their faith because there is a desire to meet Christ even though not physically in communion in the Church but through online platforms and within the family, through the routine prayer of novena, *oratio imperata* and various kinds of processions that helps the faith of the people and keep them close to God. Also during the COVID-19 pandemic, there were different ‘sacramental’ social services that served as great opportunities for concrete charity and for people to care about each other in line with the spirit of the Eucharist and the early Church’s witness. These social services include the Community Pantry, Vincent Helps, and even the genuine sacrifices of the Front liners.

In conclusion, Fr. Ginete said that, the whole of creation is sacramental, it displays the array of possibilities of communing with God and with one another. If we believe that the revelation in Jesus Christ has irrevocably changed the nature of human existence, then no action, no activity, no ritual will ever be foreign to God’s salvific presence. Neither death nor sin, neither evil nor COVID will ever prevail. All we need now is to open our eyes and behold the marvels of God’s work in us and with us and be so inspired as to commit ourselves to do what needs to be done. That is how we celebrate the sacrament as communion with God and with one another.

# SVST DAY CELEBRATION

By Sem. Nguyen Tien Quoc



As in previous years, SVST Day, in honor of Saint Vincent de Paul, was celebrated by all students, formators, professors, and staff. This year, however, because of the pandemic, the celebration was online, and all the attendees should join in a Zoom meeting. This new experience of gathering actually brought excitement and delight to all of us.

The celebration online started with the Eucharistic celebration presided by Rev. Fr Manuel Ginete, Rector of Saint Vincent School of Theology.

At the beginning of the Mass, Fr. Manuel explained the reasons why this the feast day is held and appreciate its a long tradition. He also mentioned of the prominent virtues of Saint Vincent de Paul, who we honor this day. Then, Fr. Vincent Rabeje, a former student gave the homily. He shared the story of his vocation life and paid a deep gratitude to the school and its professors for generously instructing and guiding him in achieving his priestly vocation. He ended his homily with some advice to students to use their formation time wisely and productively, in order that they could attain not only knowledge in school but also experience in their apostolate in streets.

Right after the Mass, a general assembly was opened by Fr. Danny Pilario, the Dean of Saint Vincent School of Theology. Then this was followed by a message from the provincial Visitor of the Congregation of the Mission, Fr. Gregorio Banaga, Jr. Fr Danny again began with greetings to the entire student body, and the professors, staff. He then presented the changes for this school year, especially online classes. This new way of learning, he said, would be the most suitable for the school to maintain teaching and studying during the time of pandemic, even if there would be many challenges and difficulties for both

professors and students. Fr. Danny also showed deep concern for students in remote parishes with poor internet connection, online classes would be a disadvantage for them. He therefore called for understanding and compassion from the Formators and the professors. Later on, the meeting continued with an open forum for student to voice their opinions regarding their concerns. The meeting was animated with many interesting questions and answers exchanged by the participants.



The most interesting part awaited by all was the entertainment. We first had some games hosted by Bro. James Gorea which we really enjoyed. This was followed by video presentations per year level. Inspired by the theme 'Enteng goes viral (the new normal edition)', the videos predicted the current situations in our daily life during the pandemic. These videos were unexpected and funny. One class, for example, did a tiktok video, another a short video about the meaning of life. Our class, first year theology, made a short film about 'Marvel Hero'. We disguised ourselves as Iron Man, Hulk, Doctor Strange, Spider Man and our great mission was to save the world from the universal enemy, Covid 19.

All in all, this day was very meaningful. It was a time to celebrate the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul and to understand the long tradition of the school with its prominent achievements. Through this celebration, we met and made new friends, even if only online!. We hope that the pandemic will end soon and the school can restart classes normally again.

Christmas at the Margins is an annual activity of Saint Vincent School of Theology. This activity is an encounter with God in the margins of society. It is an awaited activity in school because it is an opportunity to meet new friends.

During this Covid-19 pandemic, accompanied by natural calamities Christmas in the margins is indeed a challenge. Going out is very risky. But as God's people, we cannot simply sit at home and watch people in pain. We need one another even more at these trying times. As such rather than the usual SVST combined Christmas at the Margins in one rural community, this year SVST decided to allow the

celebration in groups across the different parts of the country where its students, associates, and professors reside. This is to ensure adherence to COVID-19 safety protocols and to reduce the cluster of many persons in one place. Montalban, Rizal was one of the several places where the Christmas at the Margins was organized this year. Montalban is one of the communities recently shattered by typhoon Ulysses. The entire town was submerged in water, and the residents were in dire need of help. SVST took the opportunity to help by organizing in this town the celebration of Christmas at the Margins.



# Unbounded Love:

## SVST'S Christmas at the Margins 2020

*by Bro. Joey Balunsat, MS*



Bro. Glenn Cudiamat Del Rosario MSDM, Bro. Joey Balunsat MS, Bro. Ruel Jumao-as SSA, and Bro. Renz Robby Rivera, from the Diocese of Cubao with the support of their respective congregations and diocese agreed to celebrate Christmas in Montalban on December 05, 2020. It was a one-day activity of sharing gifts and relief goods with 500 families. It went well as planned and we were able to reach out to all those in dire need.

The activity showed us that nothing is impossible when we collaborate to help others and to make them feel God's presence in the midst of difficulty and pain. Through the Christmas at the Margins, we made new friends and we exchanged stories of encountering the Lord. Indeed, God was present in each of us. As we reached out to others we further understood the mystery of God's unbounded love.



By Sem. RC Lagamayo, CM

VincentHelps, the relief operation organized by the Vincentian Family, had been flourishing for six months when a new idea arose for deliberation by the volunteers.

Three areas were considered. One: in this pandemic, people were urged to stay home to avoid the spread of the virus. Two: people need to buy fresh, inexpensive, and nutritious food for their families, even if they had to stay home. Three: Informal settlers, the homeless, and poor needed a steady source of income, which they lost by staying home. Thus, EntengDahan was conceived, an online market that would deliver goods to people's homes.

Through the effort of the VincentHelps volunteer team, and a few homeless informal settlers, EntengDahan started operation. Marketing was undertaken by the volunteers with the help of social media. The sorting, packing, and delivery were done by the workers whom we help.

EntengDahan continues today, not to earn profit but to help the needy sectors by training them towards earning a sustainable income. VincentHelps oversees the operation including teaching the workers to earn while they served the community and their own families. Some seminarians are now working with them as guides but with the goal of leaving the entire administration of its operation to them eventually.

# ST. VINCENT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY



## During the Pandemic

