

Springtime in Mission

Phase I - Introduction

Our traditional understanding of mission has continued to change and develop since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Now, with the approach of the new millennium and developments in political, economic and social realities in our world, we are again challenged to reflect upon our experience and vision of mission in order to discern how God's Spirit is leading us both as members of a local community and a universal Church-in-Mission.

The New Springtime for Mission process began with the U.S. Catholic Mission Association, Catholic Network of Volunteer Service, Leadership Conference of Women Religious and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (the Mission Committee). The purpose of this story-telling process was to examine the context in which missionaries minister today. The missionaries who responded to the reflection process articulated a spirituality of mission. Their stories reflect a view of mission that is both hopeful and visionary.

Since these are stories and the impact of stories is of a personal nature, the reflections have also included repeated references to Scripture and tradition as seen through the eyes of missionary experience and pastoral reflection. While the original Springtime Resource looked at the context of mission in its breadth, the responses call us to a new depth of the mission experience.

The collation and analysis of the Springtime in Mission Resource evolved through the six planning principles of the Bishop's Subcommittee on the Third Millennium:

1. Take time to reflect. Begin with a fresh start -JUBILEE!
2. Study the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church
3. Focus on spirituality
4. Bring people together to collaborate
5. Create a hopeful attitude
6. Work ecumenically whenever possible.

The stories of the missionaries are personal experiences, the warm everyday experiences of a people who are called beyond themselves, beyond their country, beyond their language, beyond their religion, and beyond their initial image of God.

This is living in the present moment, this is coming to know dialogue and its influence on solidarity^(* see footnote below) and reconciliation. There is, then, in the missionary experience a Springtime.

This Springtime is an urgent call; a passionate plea. It is the motivation of a people who desperately wish to share their own limited experience of solidarity with God's people who are the poor.

Phase I - Missionaries Longing for a Global Charity

The 140 stories received from missionaries ministering or having ministered in 22 countries articulate an urgency for mission that is radical. The need for mission is founded in the U.S. Catholic Bishop's Pastoral Statement, *To the Ends of the Earth*. "Our gratitude to you, the missionaries, is especially profound. You have left home and family, even risking your lives for the sake of the Gospel to the nations. Moreover, this time of transition has imposed an additional burden: the challenge of adapting your missionary efforts to a new context."

(NCCB, *To the Ends of the Earth*, Washington, D.C., #70)

Some missionaries shared the following about their understanding of mission:

Mission is finding a way to work together.

Mission is universal.

Mission is announcing the goodness of all human beings.

Mission is restoring equality, the equality of our birth.

Mission is a dialogue of life; life is sacred.

Mission is welcoming to all and a radical hospitality.

Mission is to weed the garden if we are to be part of the harvest.

Mission is to go beyond our comfort zone.

These concepts and all excerpts that are in italics come from the compilation of stories collected

This vision implies that we are bridging from a servant model to that of a dialogical model. We have broadened our consciousness to include proselytizing as in the 1950's, advocating peace and justice as in the 1970's, a greater inclusiveness as well as an increase in lay participation as in the 1980's and being agents of Gospel reconciliation on a global level in the 1990's. The missionary in the 1990's is sensitive to attitudes of interdependence and internationality, always moving toward the common good.

"The grace of renewal cannot grow in communities unless each of them expands the range of charity to the ends of the earth, and has the same concern for those who are far away as it has for its members."

(*Ad Gentes*, #37) "To the Ends of the Earth" states, "As we have seen, mission is mutual, not one-directional." (*To the Ends of the Earth*, #35)

It emphasizes, "Before all else, dialogue is a manner of acting, an attitude and a spirit which guides one's conduct. It implies concern, respect, and hospitality toward the other. It leaves room for the other person's identity, his (her) mode of expression, and his (her) values.

Dialogue is the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission, as well as of every aspect of it, whether one speaks of simple presence and witness, service, or direct proclamation. Any sense of mission not permeated by such a dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teachings of the Gospel."

(*To the Ends of the Earth*, #40)

These concepts were at the very heart of the stories shared through this process. Dialogue is a vital characteristic of mission.

Phase I - Sharing a Sense of Gratitude

Missioners strive to enter their immediate and global contexts through the power of prayer, service and transforming relationships. They share an incredible sense of gratitude! This gratitude as described in their stories indicates a lifestyle firmly founded in faith.

For these gifts they are grateful:

For mutually learning and working together
For the celebration of life and joy shared by the
people with whom they minister
For instances of forgiveness and healing
For hospitality - values of both guest and host
For experiences of courage and hope

***For spirituality rooted in sacramental ritual
For sacredness of simple lifestyle
For a deepening sense of the incredible dignity
of each person
For maintaining faith in the face of sorrow***

Missioners indicated vast differences in perspective depending on the areas in which they served. For example, in parts of Africa and Asia ecumenism was a bigger concern than in Latin America. Also noted were some perceptions stemming from their own resistance to change or the influence of their formation before going to the missions. This formation often determined the way in which they were missionaries. In spite of these variations, clearly solidarity has become the integrating force for mission. It is broad and deep, it is long standing and firmly founded in faith. The key concepts of solidarity articulated seemed to address profound and complex needs for reconciliation and action on behalf of the people with whom they minister.

Confronted with the reality that poor people do not have access to resources necessary for survival, the missioners sentiments read:

***Not just poor health; but no healthcare
Not just no food, but no work to provide food
Not just no work, but no rules for salary, rights, life
Not just no rights, but no government to care
New Demands for Solidarity and Reconciliation***

Phase I - New Demands for Solidarity and Reconciliation

Another obvious thread in the faith lives of those who shared their stories is a compelling need for reconciliation among themselves and with those with whom they minister. Reconciliation must be linked to solidarity, however mission in the new millennium is not limited to reconciliation.

The theme of solidarity as expressed in the Bishop's pastoral, "Called to Solidarity", was woven eloquently throughout almost all of the stories shared by missioners. "Solidarity is action on behalf of the human family, calling us to help overcome the divisions in our world.

Solidarity binds the rich to the poor. It makes the free zealous for the cause of the oppressed. It drives the comfortable and secure to take risks for the victims of tyranny and war. It calls those who are strong to care for those who are weak and vulnerable across the spectrum of human life. It opens homes and hearts to those in flight from terror and to migrants whose daily toil supports affluent lifestyles.

Peacemaking, as Pope John Paul II has told us, is the work of solidarity." (*Called to Solidarity*, p. 4)

Missionary activity is reflected foremost by living the present moment in areas of conflict, violence and poverty. These areas are found in the U.S. and any community that is in need of God, or any nation where renewal is needed, spirituality is weak, the human person is not respected.

Missioners continue to see that the United States leads in imperialism of the economy, power, the media and even religions. Some missioners shared their experiences of being in situations where Christianity was mainly experienced as a dominating Western cultural phenomenon.

Most of the storytellers share that they were changed by an encounter with a God who is both transcendent and immanent. The missioners' stories tell of tremendous struggles in faith in the

warmth of a missionary heart and in the passion of a people dedicated to better conditions for the poor.

Their stories claim a certain shift of consciousness wherein the missionaries feel compelled to choose to:

Live with our eyes open
Be world partners
Focus parish education on U.S. mission activity
Create an intentionality about differences and diversity
Hold women as worthy of all positions and places in society
Provide hospitality to immigrants
Articulate the spiritualities that sustain mission
Encourage self-worth; self-acceptance by honoring people's experience
Be intolerant of meanness:
Acknowledging the victims and survivors:
the raped, the forgotten and abused, the suffering
who have no resources
Communicate an ethic of ecology:
"God will not re-create the earth, but will re-create in
us a new stewardship."
Accept the gifts of the poor; name our own poverty
Engage in mutuality
Welcome immigrant integration
Invite one another to go beyond our comfort zone

Phase I - Solidarity

Being in relationship with people who suffer injustices, the missionaries call all people of faith to actions in solidarity:

Engage in advocacy on behalf of the global family; seek human rights and economic justice, land reform and outreach to women and children.

Visit those imprisoned
Stand with the intimidated
Harbor refugees and immigrants
Re-sensitize ourselves to violence
Celebrate the richness of diversity
Commit to dialogue between churches and cultures

Some of the missionaries troubles relate to returning home where they are foreigners in their own countries. Some relate to the overwhelming task before them in a world characterized by globalization and the challenge of faith before the global reality.

"Solidarity is action on behalf of the one human family calling us to help overcome the divisions in our world." US Bishop's Statement, *Called to Global Solidarity*, p.8.

All excerpts that are in italics come from the compilation of stories collected

Phase I - Globalization

Globalization has had both positive and negative impacts on the experiences of the missionaries. They told stories of pain inflicted on the poor by the unbridled power of multinational corporations. Globalization enhances paternalism and leads to debt, corruption and the exploitation of women and children. Economic and political instability caused by unrestrained globalization also results in the tragedy of street children, of ethnic and political conflicts causing yet greater numbers of refugees and displaced people.

The missionaries told of their work in communities where people want hope not cultural optimism, bread not lines to wait in and burial not massacre⁷. In their stories they acknowledged that even while in service missionaries often take so much for granted: running water, cars, comfortable homes, better living conditions etc., and they sometimes are present but unwilling to listen, not open to dialogue, reluctant to compromise and silent when speech is needed.

The missionaries cite several responses to globalization in our world today. They urge us to:

Engage in mission to the U.S.
Recognize the US as most in need of mission
Realize that boundaries are endless; not national
Provide some stability for the young who are caught in instability and rapid change
Reclaim the mission mandate of the Gospel
Be vulnerable in the midst of difference and change
Embrace and accept the richness of cultural diversity Allow the other to have an identity of person, family, culture, country
Immerse ourselves in inter-religious understanding
Allow for emergence of evangelization
Create communities of: Memory
Hospitality
Truth
Connections
Simple Living

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