

# CONVERSATIO 2007



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St. Scholastica's Priory  
Manila

Dear Sisters,

I am writing this editorial while in Davao, where I gave the module on Woman and Religion as a part of M.A. Course on Women's Studies which SSC has undertaken in partnership with Assumption College here. Three days before I left, I was in bed with a very bad cold and cough. I could, of course, not find a substitute at the last moment and so even feeling bad, I proceeded. I arranged it so, that I gave the two lectures both in the morning from 8:30-12:00 and assigned the students some reading in the afternoon while I rested. Although this helped, every noon, when I would finish my lectures, I felt so exhausted and actually dizzy that I had to go straight to bed and they would bring me sandwich or lugao. I realized I could not will myself into feeling well, whatever I did. And my insight in all this is that one cannot be in control of one's life or state of health as one would wish to. And when I was giving my lesson on oriental spirituality, the example I gave about the "dancing paper" helped me to understand my situation. The "dancing paper" vignette was told to us by a spiritual teacher and it goes like this: In the Western art of painting, the paper or the canvas where the artist paints on would be fastened securely to a frame so it will not move when the artist draws on it. In Oriental calligraphy, the paper is not fixed but is left free to move. And the artist who cannot erase any stroke will have to draw in relation to the movement of the paper—sort of dance with it. And the teacher said that this dancing paper are the unpredictable or non-controllable factors in our lives—such as getting sick, losing a loved one, accidents, being loved or unloved, etc. etc. And the artistry in life is to take these unpredictable and non-controllable factors and act positively not in opposition to them but in harmony and in coordination with them. So I learned to live with my stuffed nose, itchy throat and dizzy head day by day and now on the last afternoon of my teaching here, I feel quite well and rested.—also thanks to the loving care of the Sisters here, and of their acupuncturist and the luxury of 4 hours of rest in the afternoon. Deo Gratias! Any dancing paper in your life?

Lovingly yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

# STATIO CONFERENCE

## REAFFIRMING OUR COMMITMENT TO MISSION

by Sister M. Hilda Buhay, OSB

### OVERVIEW

In this statio conference, I will touch on the 11<sup>th</sup> General Chapter's concept of the mission and share my personal experiences of missionary life as a consequence of this commitment. Then I hope to present some historical trends affecting it, some general implications and implementations of these challenges, and our role of missionaries in our contemporary world today.

### INTRODUCTION

There is only one gift of Life and it must be appreciated in its integrity. The God of Life cannot be worshiped in a world whose systems create death. Throughout the centuries in the history of the Church, mission work has been the creative struggle against everything that makes life and love impossible. Paradigm shifts in mission are on-going to put the Gospel intact and in context.

I like to go back to the bold moments of our foremothers who pioneered to follow the dream of our founder, Fr. Andreas Amrhein, OSB. It was the time of hard beginnings, of hard sacrifices and self-giving, even risking the lives of our first missionaries. The Maji-Maji uprising in 1905 in Peramiho reaped the lives of Sr. Felicitas Hiltner, OSB and Sr. Cordula Ebert, OSB who fell victims under the spears of the rebels. Soon after, Sr. Walburga Diepolder, OSB was murdered in Nyangao. Closer to our time, Mother Clodesindis Lücken, OSB, offered her life saving the lives of others as she succumbed to the bomb during World War II. The spirit and charism of our pioneering Sisters may have responded to a Pre-Vatican II mission paradigm demanded of their time but nonetheless, like our Lord, they are the grains of wheat that have fallen into the ground and died, bearing abundant fruit for the spread and realization of the Kingdom (Proclaim, p.4). They have lived the value and the vibrance of our Missionary Benedictine charism.

Almost all of us made our Religious Profession in the last century. And therefore we have a first hand knowledge of the many challenges of the new millennium. Mother Irene Dabalus, OSB in her opening talk during the 11<sup>th</sup> General Chapter situated the delegates in our global context. She mentioned "the materialistic, consumeristic, impersonal, pleasure-seeking, market oriented globalizations which have brought about a clash of civilizations." The socio-political scenario painted by the 16<sup>th</sup> Manila Priory Chapter is no less gloomy. The Filipinos are poorer than ever. Many of them go to sleep hungry. In this scandal-weary country, corruption is rampant while extra-judicial killings take place almost regularly. The avalanche of Filipino migrants has not waned. They leave their Eden at home to seek another paradise where there are better paying jobs. Looking back over the last twenty-five years, enormous vitality and creativity were manifested by Church-related groups in the struggle for a just society in this country. There are

indications of a dying-off of such creativity. The questions remain: “Where will all these end? Is there hope for our country and our broken world?”

## OUR MISSIONARY COMMITMENT

The Message of the 11<sup>th</sup> General Chapter is our response to the challenges of our contemporary world that needs healing. We made our commitment, made hard and determined choices, frail and humanly weak as we are before the challenges of the world today. Hopefully it will help us emerge as the vulnerable “little flock”, aware of our limitations as well as of the power of God in our vocation story as a Congregation and as a Priory. It can therefore be the compassionate heart of God in a troubled and fragmented world today.

How grateful I am to be part of the glorious event of the centennial celebration of our Manila Priory where we saw God’s work of love and compassion woven in the span of one hundred years of missionary work.

We were jubilant, even euphoric in our celebrations as we highlighted the Priory’s growth in its mission endeavors; but surely, behind the triumphs were not just the difficulties of hard and small beginnings and of ruined buildings ravaged by World War II. Lurking behind them were painful shifts and transitions in living our charism in order to be relevant to our mission. Our past Priory Chapters, especially Proclaim 2007, were moments of listening, of discernment and purification, of strain and stress, of realizing miscalculated moves, of claiming failures through “distilling” essentials, of taking stock where we were, and what we are called to be and do.



### ***“THE LOVE OF CHRIST IMPELS US!” (2 COR 5:14)***

The message addressed to all our Sisters all over the world by the delegates of the 11<sup>th</sup> General Chapter was opened by a stark but seductive declaration of St. Paul: “*The love of Christ impels us!*” (2 Cor 5:14). This verse captivates the meaning of our missionary call. Mission arises from the heart since “love is the heart of the mission”. St. Augustine says: “Love and do what you will.” There is also a saying that goes: “Find out what you love to do and you will never have to work another day in your life.” Love follows the course of one’s heart. It knows no fear, no tiredness, no burden. It is extravagant, and foolish; it squanders and risks. The climbers of Mt. Everest were interviewed upon their return. They were asked if they were afraid of being killed in the process. One of them answered: “I cannot be preoccupied with the fear of dying. Otherwise I would not do anything. And if I do die, it would be doing something I love.”

“**Proclaim 2007**” takes to heart the reminder of Pope Benedict XVI:

*Unless the mission is oriented by charity, that is, unless it springs from a profound act of divine love, it risks being reduced to mere philanthropic and social activity. Consequently, being missionaries means loving God with all one’s heart, even to the point, if necessary, of dying for Him (p.5).*

The **Message of our 11<sup>th</sup> General Chapter** defines our being:

*Our vocation and the charism of our Congregation impel each one of us to embrace the mission of proclaiming God's kingdom in all activities and in all circumstances through our witness, presence and action. We should realize that we are missionaries wherever we are and whatever we do: in our prayer, work and suffering, in every real way we carry on the mission assumed by the disciples to whom Jesus enjoined "as the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn. 20:21).*

The missionary's relationship with God takes central place and offers a way of recovering more clearly the vertical dimension in mission. That mission is God's work (*Missio Dei*) is clearly affirmed. It is not that we carry out our mission, but rather that we participate in what is first and foremost God's work. The Father sends the Son and the Son sends the Holy Spirit. This renewed focus on the Trinity's activity can become a source of hope for disheartened missionaries who see that what needs to be done seems to be beyond their abilities to bring about.

#### ❖ ***Personal Experience***

Why do I wake up in the morning? "*The love of God impels me!*" (2 Cor 5:14). This compulsion perks me up to be alive and creative; it animates me to be "*a cheerful giver*" (RB 5:16). It is also my shining weapon to combat daily routine, weariness in doing good and being a workaholic, wrapped up with my own self-fulfilling work and projects.

#### ***Mission Assignment in Spain and Portugal (Iberian Priory)***

Half of my consecrated life was spent here in my home country and I could count 20 years of being assigned outside of it (Spain and Portugal). A change of assignment whether here or abroad brings about a refreshing freedom as well as a certain feeling of anguish and adventure: new community, new job, new ambience, new relationships. More so, when the assignment is outside of the country: another culture, another climate, another language, a multicultural community. I sound glamorous to my co-Filipinos when I recount that I was assigned in Spain, emitting remarks such as "*Wow, ay di marunong ka na mag-spanish!*" as if that was the greatest price I could hold on to in being sent to Spain. Doing pastoral work among our migrant people in the local parishes and in being involved with *El Shaddai* and *Couples for Christ* in the various Filipino communities in Madrid, Parla, Barcelona, Valencia, and Bilbao honed my skills in giving seminars and recollections in Filipino. It took time for me to pray like them but soon I did get to experience the exhilaration of raising my hand, swinging my body while singing and uttering *Amen* and *Praise the Lord* during their *Gawain*.

It was also in accompanying Filipino domestic workers abroad when I learned to value *manualia*. Our Barcelona community earned part of our living by doing what Filipino migrants do: being paid by the hour for house cleaning, ironing, tending and accompanying elders. There were times when I would leave the house after Compline to accompany and care for a *señora sola* overnight and return early the next morning before

Lauds. Helpers in the house are not employed extensively as we do here so that we occupy ourselves with the domestic duties aside from our duties in *Centro Filipino*.

Did you ever experience what it is when one cannot communicate? One becomes nobody when one cannot speak the language. I felt impotent. I felt that my wings were clipped even before I could really soar and fly high in what I believe I could do in another Priory. I could not defend myself when I was misunderstood. Neither could I rescue my self-esteem from dropping since I could not assert myself. When I was assigned in Portugal I thought some fluency in Spanish will put me in good stead in speaking Portuguese. Alas, to my dismay, I found it so different from Spanish. My adequate pick-up of the latter all the more complicated and slowed down my progress in Portuguese. These were moments of frustrations and disenchantments that affected me. An Adversity Quotient test would probably give me a low average score.

How did I manage to “*sing a song of the Lord in an alien soil?*” How did I cope? What sustained me? Disorientations usually trigger in me a sense of barrenness. Only after having confronted each issue could I finally listen to what it prodded me to do: “*Let go, surrender ka na kay Lord!*” Yes, it took its toll on me but the sense of emptiness was worthwhile if only to be reconciled with the meaningfulness of such an experience. I have grown to these realizations only after years of a non-stop busy life in Manila. I felt a kind of spiritual dryness—as if everything that I was doing amounted to nothing. It was a constant response to the countless urgencies of my mission. Although it gave me a sense of personal satisfaction, deep inside me I was feeling a void which I could not sort out. While feeling not maximized in another Priory, I could experience how to enter more deeply into my inner resources and thus felt that I was called to embrace this experience of liminality. To disdain this was to run away from the power of the cross and the new life it offered. Sure enough, it stretched me beyond my own ego-trips agenda, expanding my consciousness that I, too must celebrate death.

The international community is a real world of multicultural humans where many more misunderstandings are encountered; ambiguity is never far away, where lost tempers are admitted and found, where failure is acknowledged and owned. Difficult moments in personal relationships usually force me to pray. I think it is impossible to pray over a long period of time, especially with a certain quietude, without having to be honest, to face reality and see it as God sees it. When I think I have been hurt and I pull back from it and pray over it, I consciously evoke the God-life in which I am immersed. I usually find the grace to be humble and even accept the grain of truth there is. *Lectio* meditated and contemplated in obedience to the Word makes the difficult doable and the unattainable reachable.

What was less obvious to outsiders perhaps are the “aha moments” offered by such mission situations and the rich harvest of growing in personal maturity and broad-mindedness. With joy unto tears, I discover the God-image in me, long dormant, in my being: I am overwhelmingly God’s person, flung into jobs (however menial!) and to places of His bidding, following the footsteps of Jesus whose “*food is to do the will of the One who sent me.*” (Jn. 4:34) Joan Chittister describes this insightful experience

succinctly: “We seek to be passionately alive within our faith that we are carried forward by a passionate, forgiving and gracious God.” When bouts of homesickness present themselves I would play *kundiman* songs on the organ and sing *Bayan Ko*. Suddenly, a sensation of well-being captures my heart, touching the Lord or being touched by Him. Filled with loneliness in the absence of loved ones and familial support, suddenly I am surrounded by a powerful feeling of pain and peace, of warmth and beauty: God is there! I feel Him in the depths of my being.

Being in a multicultural community gives a sense of belonging to a wider world where beings are united by a common vision and where each Priory bears responsibility for one another. My world becomes wider and my concerns expand beyond the concerns of my Priory of origin. I grow up in the quality of my commitment and in my ability to pursue new and varied learnings of meanings and values of others.

In the beginning, not speaking with my co-Filipinas in English and *Tagalog* in the presence of those Sisters who would not understand was a major task to tackle. Constant reminders made me react negatively but its frequency (most of the time with irritation!) taught me to be sensitive to others’ feelings, to erase my prejudices, to live a peaceful and fruitful co-existence with Sisters: Germans, Brazilians, Spaniards, Angolans, Portuguese, including my co-Filipinas. Indeed, international solidarity in our mission commitment enabled me to embrace and bless both the lights and shadows it offers.

Consolation of joys and blessings abounded in my experience of working with the migrants abroad. It was an experience sharing their joys and sorrows like Jesus did. These very experiences goaded me to dive onward. Eventually, they became my stepping stones to follow the original mission paradigm of Jesus: ministering in helplessness, not from a position of power and to resonate with St. Paul: “*For it is when I am weak, that I am strong*” (2 Cor 12:10).

### **Returning Missionary**

Already during our formative years, we were taught not to cling to persons, places, and assignments. Our novitiate lessons inculcated attitudes of stability of the heart that will ground us in the throes of change. I can still taste to this day the *agri-dulce* (bitter-sweet) savor in my mouth that came with Sister Mary John’s long-distance call assigning me back to the Manila Priory. The prospect of coming home was a happy one yet I felt being up-rooted from the place where I spent 20 years of my religious life. Loss and grief were evident when I bade goodbye to the places and people I learned to love. When I stepped inside the car that brought me to the Barajas airport, tears rolled out, soaking my handkerchief. It was a feeling of relief of having irrevocably decided on something that was hurting and at the same time potentially full of solace, hope and enthusiasm. It was another invitation to growth. Once more, grace summoned me to receive its gift of a new beginning.

It has been two years since I became a returning missionary. I continue “*Seeking God*” (RB 57:7) in my neighbor across national and continental boundaries. I feel this is where I am meant to be here and now. I thank the Lord for giving me this space and time for

being with my people. There are many more struggles to discover in my neighbor much closer to home: in the elderly in SBH where I had the privilege of accompanying them in their twilight years, in our college students who are insecure, dispossessed of the love they need, captured by the ME culture, in the young ministers of religious formation in IFRS and the leaders of the international students in Asia. Aware of their anxieties and insecurities, they challenge me to listen. These are the poor that present themselves to me now away from the host country of the OFWs. I am happy to share their lives through texting and extending my person and my hospitality when they come and visit, even extending my presence to the families they leave behind.

My commitment to mission has no time limit and there will be no retirement from it. “*I am under compulsion and have no choice...*” (1 Cor 9:16-19). It keeps my heart ever so young and creative to embrace the world since God is love and the impulse of this love is in me. The joy is there each morning when I awake. I not only see it smiling at me when I hear the gong ring for rising, but it beckons me to celebrate life.



**“WE ARE OPEN TO NEW MISSIONARY VENTURES EMERGING FROM THE RAPID CHANGES AND DEVELOPMENTS IN OUR SOCIETY” (PROCLAIM, p. 11).**

Our 11<sup>th</sup> General Chapter opened the avenue to a new understanding of our relationship with the world and how we can become even more truly Missionary Benedictines. “*We live in a world of tensions and our own life is a constant search for ways of living up in creative fidelity to our charism—to be Benedictines, and to be Missionary*” (Message, p.7). Historical trends present in the world affect mission directly, calling for something new and different in the mission and requiring certain qualities in the person of the missionary.

❖ **Historical Trend: Thirst for Sacred and Search for Meaning**

**Background and Implication for Mission**

We see in our world a hunger for spirituality and for transcendence. People are thirsting for the divine and are in search of the absolute. This thirst for God, however, goes together with a secular tendency offering us the opportunity to revitalize our mission by finding new modes of expressing our passion for God. The gift of giving food to those who hunger for the divine and the human is akin to the new spirituality of not just becoming more and more responsible in the fulfillment of a duty, but in becoming more and more faithful in love relationships. Whereas the term spirituality was once often used to imply that a person was other worldly, today, it is frequently considered as a badge of honor as someone will claim to be very spiritual, though not religious “such experience of constantly striving to integrate one’s life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence” (Sandra Schneiders). Self-absorption here is the exact opposite of relational.

Accompanying personal encounters with God in small faith communities is our response to the individual's quest for God and to personal and meaningful involvement for the transformation of humanity. It means not only walking along-side someone; it bespeaks a constant being present to and engaging with the other. *Dialogue* is the response that is needed at present among people who are searching to deepen their own faith and religiosity under the influence of the Spirit.

**Role of Missionaries: to be persons of God.**

If people are hungry for God, if they strive to establish a deep relationship with God then we are called to be persons of God.

Who is a person of God? A person rooted in Christ is what makes one a person of God. *"That nothing be preferred to the love of Christ"* (RB 4:21; RB 7:67-69, 72:11) is a Benedictine optic that guides us towards what it is to become an ideal missionary monastic. Christ-centeredness is at the heart of our Benedictine values. (Proclaim, p.10) and it is for this reason that the 11<sup>th</sup> General Chapter highlighted as priority the deepening of our Missionary Benedictine spirituality. The narcissistic culture and secular values that go along with this spiritual longing will not be devalued unless we internalize in our lives our Benedictine values. As the saying goes: values are caught, not taught. These values will have to be alive in our hearts so we can live and witness to an integral spirituality that will offer them a new orientation in life.

Christ must be encountered by others in our persons: His words, His actions, His attitudes and mentality, His way of being with people, His preference for the poor, His contemplative stance towards the Father, and his passion for the reign of God. Paul, in the letter to the Corinthians identifies those who are sent: *"Clearly you are a letter of Christ which I have delivered, a letter not written with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh in the heart."*

KNOWING CHRIST

A famous actor was at a party and was asked by an old man to do a recitation for them of Psalm 23. The actor said,

"I will do it on one condition that after I have recited it, you will do the same."

"But I am not a professional orator. But if you wish, I shall recite it too."

So the actor recited with all the finesse of his trade and held the audience spellbound. The old man stood up and recited the psalm with a weak wavering voice. But when he sat down, there was not a dry eye in the room.

Then the actor rose and said:

"I reached your eyes and ears, but he has reached your hearts. The difference is just this:

I know the psalm. But he knows the shepherd."

-- Tony Castle

## ❖ Historical Trend: Globalization

### Background and Implication for Mission

Globalization shrinks space, shrinks time and collapses borders as the world becomes a small village today. In such a society, people are interdependent since communication technology offers multiplicity of linkages, thanks to the Internet. It is nothing sort of amazing when one thinks how much information can be put on a single microchip and how more and more events can be pushed in a smaller time frame. Time becomes now the worthless possession of the poor, who have plenty of time waiting to be employed, waiting for health care, waiting for their visas to migrate, etc. To the unproductive old people time is long in coming as they wait for death.

*Universalism* is the response of mission to this trend. People must learn how to live together in daily life, how to deal peacefully and creatively with one another's culture and ways of life. It not only means opening our windows to the outside, but keeping them open so that the mutuality between our Church and other Churches, religions, all sort of movements for the good of God's kingdom is not blocked but continues with unrelenting determination. Through *dialogue* we are called to be in solidarity and become bridges that unite culture, religions and values.

In order to respond to the needs of the different priorities in fulfilling their mission, our 11<sup>th</sup> General Chapter stressed inter-Priory sharing and the urgent need of intensifying international solidarity (Message, pp.11-12). This will mean creation of more multi-cultural communities, more sharing of ideas, personnel, and experiences.

### Role of Missionaries: to be bridge-builders and to witness to a humble simplicity of life

Benedictine missionaries are at ease with being moved easily from one place to another, from one culture to another. Those living in a multicultural community should have a keen awareness of their prophetic vocation, to feel the pain of others and to participate in their struggles. They must know how to celebrate differences while witnessing with joy the distinctive cultures finding unity in Christ. (Messages, pp.11-12)

Globalized economy is behind the negative consequences for the poor and the excluded, generating poverty, and marginalizing culture for material gain. It is not enough just to point out its negative consequences. Our concern for the poor and the marginalized will encourage us to "*an ever simpler lifestyle that rejects the hold of materialism and consumerism*" (Proclaim, p.5). We have to leave behind security and comfort so as to be a "corrective" and a "shock therapy" to the culture of secularism (Metz).

Do we live a simple life? Do we tame our desire to possess? Do we travel light: materially, emotionally, spiritually without clutters? Do we believe that we are enough? Do we believe that God has given us all the necessities in order to work well? Do we persevere when we fail repeatedly?

## ❖ **Historical Trend: The Poor the New Evangelizers**

### **Background and Implication for Mission**

Affluent people are beneficiaries of the good offered by globalization. However for the vast majority of people, both in poor and rich countries, globalization means greater marginalization and poverty. More than ever, our response today requires a willingness to seek and find the presence of God in solidarity with the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized of our world. God's poor are the *anawims*, who own nothing and have no power, but possess a great faith and greater love, as they struggle to change their situation. In the power of their faith and their commitment to love, they struggle to change that situation and to bring about a better world for all. God has chosen them to announce the good news to humanity.

*“The love of Christ impel us, above all, to solidarity with the poor and the oppressed and to have an open heart for their needs”* (Constitutions V, 3). Our past Priory Chapters have recommended creative ways of proclaiming the Good News through the Priory's four-pronged thrust. The recent Priory Chapter mentions not only the materially poor but includes *“street people, immigrants, ethnically branded, morally stigmatized and low-income population.* (Proclaim, p.12).

### **Role of Missionaries: Friends of the Poor**

Those sent to our reach-out communities where the poor are the majority and a good percentage has become conscientized must be friends of the poor and is able to live with them, understand and appreciate their values, learn from their example, join them in their struggle. It is from them that we relearn the gospel, genuine human values, including the ability to live a life of simplicity.

It is not enough to know what makes them persist. For one to change, one must be affectively touched: to ache with them, to long for what they long for. It means deep communion of life, with them. Their life style becomes a way of life, an attitude of mind and heart that permeates one's whole being. A study of the possibility of a pre-novitiate inserted in an urban poor community in Metro Manila is underway so that our candidates are formed in the mission context of our suffering people (Proclaim, pp.18-19).

## ❖ **Historical Trend: New Presence and Significance of Women**

### **Background and Implication for Mission**

The “Woman Question” has been a long-standing agenda in our contemporary world. It is a growing, ongoing, cultural current of social change that is moving rapidly towards crisis today. Missionaries who are aware of the dignity and vocation of women and the long-standing suppression of the feminine in this life, must assume totally different

attitudes in their relationship towards women. They are the vanguards of leading” the world to receive, to accept, to recognize the missing, the necessary, the phenomenal gift of woman” (Joan Chittistter, OSB). Zeroing in on the situation of Filipino women today, news about them feature incidents of exploitation such as prostitution and sex trafficking. Rape, incest, battering and other forms of violence against women give evidence we have not advanced very far in eradicating patriarchy and promoting justice and equality. As I write, I call to mind the many Filipina and Indonesian women I personally know in Hongkong whose voices have been silenced and who continue to suffer so much pain and anguish due to poverty, ignorance and abuse in the hands of perpetrators: their own employers as well as their own family members or relatives.

With the dawning of the women’s movement in the Philippines, Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB is among the vanguards to address the Woman Question. Aside from being an active member of *Gabriela*, she initiated educational endeavors with the thrust on women’s perspective among the school community. Picking up and continuing the challenge, our Priory Chapter encourages the “*use of our human and material resources for the empowerment of women in the Church and society according to the possibilities of the Priory*” (Proclaim, p.12).

### **Role of Missionaries: Partners with Women**

The situation of women challenges us to put our faith into action in response to the many subjugating experiences of today’s women. They challenge us to speak of God’s liberating word to women who are still locked up in their own ignorance, fear, and lack of self-worth. They have to be awakened to their inner experience and what the patriarchal structure of the Church has meant to women. We have to empower them to articulate their own experience as basis for defining themselves. We are all in this because we are involved as women. But as we are involved as women, we must first of all be aware of our own image as a woman.

Have I awakened to my own identity as a Christian woman in the face of a tradition and community that have not generally been receptive to that awareness? Am I still caught up by emotions of fear, anger, hesitancy to relinquish feudal ideas about my identity as a woman? Do I have the same attitudes as Jesus in my relationships with myself, with other women and men with I whom I am working?

## **❖ Historical Trend: Co-partnership with the Earth**

### **Background and Implication for Mission**

The earth has lately emerged into the consciousness of millions of people as the first sacrament of God’s love for its inhabitants, as the womb which gives life and nurtures it constantly, as the partner in the journey of humanity towards the kingdom. The earth is no longer to be considered as an object to be exploited, as something outside the human family. To misuse the earth is to threaten life, to respect the earth and to treasure it as one

of God's greatest gifts is to assure life. At present ,ways of manipulating the earth, using and misusing it as one pleases, exploitation of resources, global warming indicate that we are not acting as good stewards of the earth.. The desire for wealth, the thirst for money, have squandered the most beautiful lands and have contributed to the killing of most animals. In the Philippines alone, less than a quarter remains of our forests. We are faced with saving our depleting terrestrial and coastal ecosystems.

If mission has anything to do with the promotion life on earth and if life is not possible unless the earth is venerated as a gift, then intrinsic to mission should be a strong ecological component. Pope John Paul II advocated the need of an "ecological conversion," so that the work for the welfare of the planet and the people who inhabit it will be supported. Our own Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales strongly reminds us that destruction and exploitation of nature has a moral component: it is against the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment.

Great things happen from humble beginnings just like our Farm House in Mendez. The Columban Missionaries conceptualized the *Center for Ecozoic Living and Learning* in Silang. Advocacy work in this line is not new to our Priory. Recycling and segregation of waste, avoiding water and energy waste, greening the surroundings are some of the tiny steps we have ventured into for environmental welfare.

### **Role of Missionaries: Environmentalists**

Missionaries can become forerunners of the ecological movement and make it part and parcel of mission. They have a sense of veneration for the earth, a deep concern for our environment. They must live a simple life-style, using only what is necessary. Sister Aida Velasquez, OSB is the Priory's contribution among others persons involved in leading us to protect the earth with intelligent love and unwavering care.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the past, like other Congregations, we have tried to keep in step with the paradigm shifts in the understanding and praxis of mission. Today we reaffirm our commitment to mission. In one of her speeches during our celebration of our 2006 Centenary as a Priory, Mother Irene Dabalus, OSB, then the General posed several crucial questions that will have an important bearing on our role in the mission of God, and the mission of Christ today and tomorrow:

*What would we want to hear that we had done in the coming 100 years?*

*That we have shared the treasure of great price with the millions of Chinese?*

*That thriving, vibrant communities of sisters are serving satellite communities of love and peace and promoting the integrity of creation?*

*That we have made good our preferential mission to the poor, left a stamp on Christian education of the moral resurrection of our people?*

*That we have eradicated discrimination in our ministries, empowered women, children, migrants, indigenous tribes and prisoners of conscience?*

*That we have been “sisters of the breakthrough” having contributed to alternative structures to replace the structures of militarism, corruption, extra-judicial killings, the rape of the environment and abusive power in leadership?*

“The love of God impels us” (2 Cor 5: 14) to address these challenges, not from a position of power, but acknowledging our vulnerability and our keen awareness of our need for grace, the enabling Spirit, whose gifts surpass our hopes and desires.

### ***For Group Sharing:***

1. Why do you wake up in the morning? The quality of your motivation conditions your commitment to mission. What is your dominant motivation in doing well in your mission work?
2. Considering the historical trends present in the world today and the corresponding demands on being a Missionary Benedictine today.
  - What are your experiences of growth and transformation in your missionary life?
    - \* in terms of values, attitudes
    - \* in terms of behavior, perspectiveWhat is your experience of God?
  - What are your experiences of darkness and healing in your missionary life?  
What is your experience of God?
3. From your concrete experiences, whether in the local or the foreign missions, what do you consider as the important characteristics and role of a missionary?

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