



# Stories of Our Intercultural Living and Mission

SVD Publications



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## Presentation

The theme of the 17<sup>th</sup> General Chapter in 2012 was “From Every Nation, People, and Language: Sharing *Intercultural* Life and Mission,” which implies that our missionary vocation and commitment requires well-developed intercultural skills. Though some of us find it easier than others to live and work in diverse social and cultural settings, having the ability to understand and respond to social and cultural similarities and differences, not everyone easily adapts to a multi-cultural milieu, and the Society, Provinces, and communities need to provide assistance and support to individual confreres, as well as communities, to develop and hone their intercultural skills. If we neglect our responsibility to assist each other in this regard, individual confreres and whole communities may lack the openness and interest as well as the skills they will need for living in other cultures and living together with confreres from other cultures. They may be prone to various forms of ethocentrism, prejudice, and even outright contempt toward one another in our now extremely multicultural communities, as well as toward the people we serve in our ministries. As a result, our intercultural life will not be a sign of the unity of the Kingdom of God and our mission will not be effective.

The Congregational Directions resulting from the 17th General Chapter state that:

“God leads all creation to be reconciled to Himself in Christ, as expressed in the eschatological image of the multitude from every nation, people and language standing before the throne of the Lamb. We feel especially called to this aspect of God’s mis-

sion in our world today because of our *interculturality*, which is our heritage, commitment and mission from the foundation of our Society by St. Arnold Janssen, and a particular gift of God to us. Our reflections on this theme were framed in terms of ‘divides’ in our world today that are contrary to God’s plan for the unity of the human race and all creation, and our participation through ‘bridge-building’ in God’s mission of reconciliation of all in Christ.”

The Congregational Directions encourage us to identify the “divides” in our communities and ministries, particularly as they relate to social and cultural differences, and then address these through attempts at “bridge-building.” We are encouraged to engage with each other as members of the Society to identify and address what divides us in order to improve our intercultural life (*ad intra*), and to engage with those with whom we work to do the same to enhance our intercultural mission (*ad extra*). We strongly believe that our efforts are supported by Christ’s prayer:

“May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you... I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one, as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so perfected in unity...” (John 17:21-23a)

Trusting in Christ’s guidance, we pray to St. Joseph Freinademetz, who is a model and example of our intercultural life and mission.

This short collection of stories and insights gained through them might help us as individuals and communities in this process of overcoming the divides among us and between us and the people we serve and build bridges, enabling the Divine Word to permeate our intercultural life and mission. All of us are also encouraged to use the intercultural resources on the Curia SVD web-

site, as well as consult with the intercultural recourse persons for our regions and provinces.

Many confreres and a SSps Sister have contributed their stories and reflections, and this booklet is edited by Jon Kirby, Alexander Rödlach, and Victor Zackarias. We appreciate Danica Rush for her analysis of the stories. We give thanks to all of them for their sharings and reflections. We express our gratitude to Gustavo Aguilera for translating the whole text into Spanish and to all other confreres who have helped to publish this booklet. We encourage every confrere and sister to read this text and this may help you to share your own stories and reflection in your district/community meetings. We also highly encourage sharing this text with Lay Partners, so that they are aware of the importance of interculturality for their growth and mission.

Wishing God's abundant blessings and graces on all our Confreres and SVD Lay Partners.

Fraternally in the Divine Word,  
*Heinz Kulüke SVD and Leadership Team*



# I.

## Introduction

Lazar Stanislaus SVD and Martin Ueffing SVD define interculturality in the introduction to the first volume of *Intercultural Living* as “the sustained interaction of people raised in different cultural backgrounds” (xxiv). The emphasis is on *sustained* interaction, which implies that it is long-term and that it deeply affects and transforms all involved. In other words, effective interculturality results in reciprocal relationships among people of different ethnic, linguistic, social, economic, and other backgrounds, which affect all involved. As the Society of the Divine Word consists of members of very diverse backgrounds, it is important for us to live together, communicate, and relate with each other in this sense of intercultural living, which can transform us and inspire us to be witnesses of the Gospel as a community and individuals. The Constitutions state that:

“God’s loving grace has gathered us from various peoples and continents into a religious missionary community. As a community of brothers from different nations and languages, we become a living symbol of unity and diversity of the Church.” (Prologue)

Effective interculturality within our community is a hallmark of our religious identity and a symbol of the unity and diversity of the Church. The Constitutions also emphasize that our social, cultural, and other differences enrich all of us:

“A distinguishing feature of our community life is that confreres from different nations live and work together. This

becomes a mutually enriching experience when based on deep respect for one another's nationality and culture." (Con 303.1)

Similarly, intercultural missions to diverse cultures, societies, and worldviews implies the kind of transformative, sustained interaction that can make our mission unique and effective. The Constitutions encourage us to:

"... insert ourselves into the actual situation of those among whom we work. With open mind and deep respect for the religious traditions of peoples, we seek dialogue with all and present the good news of God's love to them." (Con 103)

Thus, as dialogue is rooted in engaging with societies, cultures, and worldviews that are different, interculturality in our ministries is essential for being messengers of the Divine Word. This short volume highlights some areas of our intercultural life and mission through stories shared by some members of the Society of the Divine Word, and one story narrated by a Holy Spirit Missionary Sister. The stories represent just a small cross-section of our experiences of interculturality. All of us are encouraged to identify similar experiences, and to reflect on what these experiences tell us regarding our intercultural life and mission as individuals and communities. The Sacred Scriptures and our Constitutions instruct us to do so. However, we can also be encouraged by what others say about culturally diverse groups. Our communities in many provinces are very diverse and we tend to work in our ministries with people who are linguistically, ethnically, socially, and otherwise different from us.

Joseph DiStefano and Martha Maznevski published "Creating Value with Diverse Teams in Global Management" in *Organizational Dynamics* (29[1]:45-63). The authors provide evidence

that teams that consist of members who are *similar* to each other in ethnic, linguistic, social, and other terms are effective in whatever they are doing. They are effective in their work because they easily understand each other and know how to address misunderstandings, differences, and conflict. This makes intuitive sense and matches our own experience. It is not so difficult to get along with people who are similar to us. But it is very difficult to interact, communicate, live, and work with people who are *different* from us in one way or another. DiStefano and Maznevski recognize this too and argue that diverse teams tend not to be very effective because of these issues. However, there are some culturally diverse teams that are highly effective, even more than teams where all members are somewhat similar to each other. This finding intrigued DiStefano and Maznevski, and they wanted to find out why some culturally diverse teams are highly effective, surpassing all other teams. They discovered that their high degree of effectiveness is the result of their ability to understand and address cultural, social, and other differences. In other words, these teams have a high degree of intercultural competence, and members of these teams exhibit strong intercultural skills. This is something of importance for us as SVDs because our communities are diverse and we minister in cultural settings generally different from our own backgrounds. If we want to be a community that is “a living symbol of unity and diversity of the Church,” and if we want to be effective “collaborators of the Word,” to refer again to the Prologue of the SVD Constitutions, then we need to focus on interculturality, our intercultural skills, and how to hone these skills. In a certain way, Christ is a model for our intercultural competence in living and mission because he “did not count equality with God something to be grasped. Rather he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming (...) in every way like a human being” (Phil 2:5-9). He is the exemplary intercultural expert!

Let's go back to DiStefano and Maznevski. They state that members of diverse teams differ from each other in many important ways: thinking styles, conflict resolution styles, perceptions of gender, notions of modesty, nature of friendship, facial expressions, patterns of handling emotions, arrangement of physical space, conception of justice, notions of leadership, relationship to the natural world, understandings of authority and social status, education, social background, and so on. These cultural differences are especially important for two reasons:

- *First*, cultural differences provide the greatest barrier for positive outcomes within teams. Each cultural group has a specific set of assumptions and norms under which to operate, and different groups within this group may differ in their assumptions and norms. Team members of different cultures come to the group setting with often very different notions of how a group should proceed. Furthermore many of these notions are implicit and held for granted. Their deepest effects on behavior and interactions are usually hidden and difficult to identify and address.
- *Second*, because of the nature of culture, cultural differences also provide the greatest potential for positive outcomes. Culture affects what we notice, how we interpret it, what we decide to do about it, and how we execute our ideas. Multicultural teams have, therefore, an enormous potential to create innovative approaches to complex challenges and a broad range of operating modes with which to develop new ways of implementing solutions. This can make the difference between success and failures.

DiStefano and Maznevski noticed that diverse teams fell into one of the three categories:

- The *Destroyers*: These teams were unmitigated disasters and their members mistrusted each other, guarded information jealously, and took every opportunity to attack members of a different cultural background. Negative stereotypes about each other were common.
- The *Equalizers*: The team members assumed that they are handling differences well and that they are able to resolve issues quickly and to focus on the common goals and outcomes. However, even though they get things done, the performance and outcomes were just average. In other words, these teams were just mediocre. They did not allow the differences to surface and subsequently did not come up with new and creative ideas that would have resulted in good outcomes. They suppressed differences to smooth processes and by doing so compromised the work of the team.
- The *Creators*: These teams went beyond just valuing diversity and explicitly recognized, even nurtured differences and incorporated them into every facet of the group's life and work. They are like a top-performing jazz ensemble. The players all recognize the mastery of the others and understand the potential for synergy arising from their combinations. They develop a constantly shifting dynamic that incorporates innovation into cooperative structures. The result is a highly effective team. The key to success is not the members – they are not better or worse than those of other teams – but in the team's interaction processes: how they understood, incorporated and leveraged their differences.

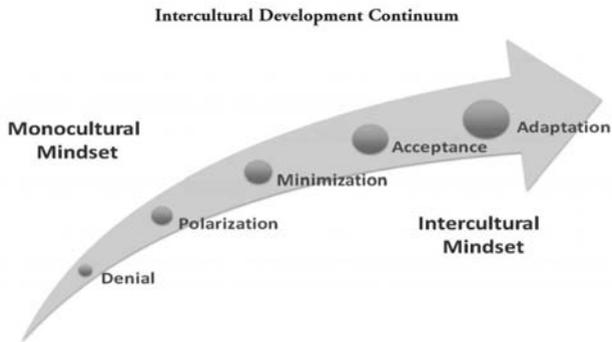
DiStefano and Maznevski categorized the Creator teams' interaction according to the three principles of mapping, bridging and integrating (MBI). The principle of *mapping* requires a commitment to understand why a team member's approach to the team is as it is. Even though it may seem obvious that members have different perspectives, it is necessary to deliberately map these differences as it helps to develop an appreciation of how they affect teamwork. These differences are generally related to personality, culture, reasoning style, thinking style, gender, and so on. Members who assume that they are pretty similar often realize during this stage how different they are on some of the dimensions. However, most teams do not take the time to map cultural differences and therefore cannot address differences objectively. Subsequently, the problems caused by the differences cannot be resolved. This "map" can then be used by the team to understanding its potential. This is the most difficult stage of the process. Often, teams become judgmental and dismiss the way some members' values and approaches as not valuable. This is what the Destroyer teams did. At times differences are ignored and the focus is only on similarities. This is what Equalizer teams did. In contrast, the Creator teams recognized differences and started to acknowledge their potential.

The next step is the principle of *bridging*, which can also be called communicating effectively across the differences to bring people and ideas together. Effective communication is defined as sending and receiving meaning as it was intended. The key to bridging is to prevent miscommunication, to take what members know about each other's differences, and to apply it to adapt their own behavior and thinking. This goes beyond just empathy which refers to getting inside another person's skin, thinking as the other person does and feeling what the other person feels. It goes beyond simply identifying with the other and develops a shared

ground upon which to build a new basis of interacting. Members of the team should explicitly agree on some common ideas about the team, its goals and mission, its approach, and so on. Also, the team should explicitly agree on how to interact with each other. Destroyer teams tend to dismiss or ridicule each other's norms. Equalizer teams tend to avoid conflict by downplaying differences. Creator teams tend to find ways to accommodate different norms for different members.

The final step is the principle of *integrating* what brings together and use differences to enhance our effectiveness as a team. For this to happen, it is necessary to nurture participation of members in order to tap into their ideas, views and approaches. This is much more difficult than it sounds as people with different cultural values tend to subscribe to vastly different norms for participation, such as how to express oneself, in what situations to say something, when to interrupt, how much detail or emotion to add, and how to participate in specific settings. One way of addressing this is to have a moderator in the team who encourages those who are not participating and curbs the contributions of those who tend to dominate, but each team must develop its own technique. It is also necessary to deal with conflict. This becomes difficult when there is disagreement about how to resolve conflict in the first place! The important thing is to keep the task and mission in mind and to find ways to bring all perspectives out and discuss them. Perseverance becomes critical.

In short: *Mapping* describes the differences among members and their impact of those on living and working together. *Bridging* communicates in ways that explicitly take the differences into account. *Integrating* creates team-level ideas by carefully monitoring participation patterns, resolving disagreements, and creating new perspectives.



From Hammer, M. (2012). The Intercultural Development Inventory: A New Frontier in Assessment and Development of Intercultural Competence. Pp. 115-136 In Vande Berg, M, R.M. Paige and K.H. Lou (eds.). Student Learning Abroad, Sterling: Stylus Publishing. P.119.

Milton Bennett and Mitchell Hammer developed a valuable model of mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors that influence how we relate to cultural, social, and other differences and similarities, called the Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC), which can be used alongside the MBI model. This simple model can help us understand how we as individuals and communities relate to interculturality by describing a range of stages associated with certain attitudes and skills, along a continuum from mindsets that are more monocultural to mindsets that are more intercultural. By (1) identifying the underlying experience of cultural difference, (2) predictions can be made about behavior and attitudes, and (3) education can be tailored to facilitate development along the continuum. Overall, there are five mindsets. The first two are ethnocentric as one sees one's own culture as central to reality. Moving up the scale, one becomes more and more ethnorelative in one's point of view:

- *Denial*: Individuals experience their own culture as the only real one. Other cultures are either not noticed at all or are understood in an undifferentiated, simplistic manner. A “denial” mindset reflects less capability for understanding and appropriately responding to cultural differences, such as the values, beliefs, perceptions, emotional responses, and behavior shared by groups. People at this position are generally uninterested in cultural difference, but when confronted with difference, their seemingly benign acceptance may change to aggressive attempts to avoid or eliminate cultural and other differences. Overall, they tend to maintain some distance from other cultural groups and express little interest in learning about the cultural values and practices of diverse communities. They miss and ignore cultural difference. The primary intercultural development strategy for “denial” is to help the individual or group notice and address cultural differences. This process begins with working to help them perceive and understand cultural differences in more observable areas of human behavior, such as clothing, food, music, art, and dance. Then it is necessary to move to more subtle areas, such as nonverbal behavior, customs, and dos and don’ts.
- *Polarization*: Individuals experience their own culture as the most evolved or best way to live. This position is characterized by a dualistic us/them thinking, experiencing the other as a threat and frequently responding to this threat by overt negative stereotyping. Within “defense,” cultural differences are often perceived as divisive and threatening to one’s own cultural way of doing things. The most common strategy to counter the threat of difference is to evaluate it negatively. They will

openly belittle the differences among their culture and another, denigrating race, gender, or any other indicator of difference. Another strategy is superiority that emphasizes the positive evaluations of one's own cultural status without necessarily overtly denigrating other groups. The threat of cultural difference is defused by relegating it to an inferior position. The primary intercultural competence development strategy for individuals or groups with the "polarization" mindset is, first, to help them recognize when they are overemphasizing differences without fully understanding them and to adopt a less evaluative stance toward understanding difference. The values of one's own culture can be affirmed together with the values of other cultures. The second way is to help them search for commonalities.

- *Minimization*: Individuals at this stage recognize superficial cultural differences in food, customs, and so on but they emphasize human similarity in physical structure, psychological needs, and assumed adherence to universal values. People at this position are likely to assume that they are no longer ethnocentric and tend to overestimate their tolerance while underestimating the effect of their own culture on how they perceive and relate to others. In other words, they approach intercultural situations with the assurance that a simple awareness of the fundamental patterns of human interaction will be sufficient to ensure the success of the communication. They tend to be skillful in identifying commonalities that can be drawn upon to bridge cultural differences. When it is not necessary to accommodate different values or practices, they experience a sense of effectiveness in living and learning in the host country. However, those who see that they need to adapt to a

new cultural setting, because they realize that employing a commonality strategy is not enough, increasingly begin to recognize differences. Thus, “minimization” is an orientation that falls between monocultural and intercultural mindsets. Bennett calls it “ethnocentrically multicultural.” The primary intercultural competence development strategy for “minimization” is to increase cultural self-awareness and knowledge of deeper patterns of cultural difference, such as conflict resolution styles, as well as culture-specific patterns of difference. An important way to deepen self-awareness is through a dramatic enactment process, which uses role-reversal techniques, called “culture-drama.”

- *Acceptance*: Individuals experience their own culture as one of a number of equally complex worldviews. People at this position accept the existence of culturally different ways of organizing human existence, although they do not necessarily like or agree with every way. They understand how culture affects a wide range of human experiences and they have a framework for organizing observations of cultural difference. They tend to be inquisitive about other ways of life, reflecting their desire to be informed and not to confirm prejudices. The keywords at this stage are getting to know and learning. “Acceptance” involves increased self-reflection, in which one is able to experience others as both different from oneself yet equally human. An individual with an “acceptance” orientation begins to understand how a cultural pattern of behavior makes sense within a different cultural community. While superficial differences in verbal and nonverbal behavior may have been recognized in earlier stages, the recognition here is at the deeper level of cultural sensitivity. People begin to see

alien behavior as indicative of profound cultural differences and not just permutations of the universal. One of the most dramatic discoveries in acceptance is recognizing the cultural relativity of nonverbal behavior such as kinesics (body language, such as facial expressions and gestures), proxemics (expected physical closeness and distance), haptics (expected touching behavior), and so on. However, they are not always clear about how to appropriately adapt to cultural difference and struggle to reconcile behavior in the other culture, which is considered unethical or even immoral in one's own cultural background. The primary intercultural competence development strategy for "acceptance" is to help individuals or groups to engage in intercultural interaction in order to gain more knowledge about implicit, "hidden" cultural differences and to gain skills in adapting to these differences. In addition, the focus should be on considering what a particular practice and the associated values mean from the local cultural perspective. An important way to gain this perspective is through the engagement processes and dramatic enactments of "culture-drama."

- *Adaptation*: Individuals are able to expand their own worldviews to accurately understand other cultures and behave in a variety of culturally appropriate ways. They have the ability to act properly outside their own culture. Individuals with an "adaptation" orientation are capable of shifting cultural perspectives and changing behavior in culturally appropriate and authentic ways. When "adaptation" is present, diversity feels valued and involved! "Adaptation" bridges across difference and values and engages it. Individuals typically engage people from another culture in deep and meaningful ways while focusing on learning adaptive strategies.

The primary intercultural competence development strategy for “adaptation” is to continue to build on one’s knowledge of cultural differences and to further develop skills for adapting to these differences. Another competence-building strategy is to engage in cultural mediation between two or more cultural groups that are experiencing problems or misunderstandings in order to support more productive relations. The dramatic enactments of “culture-drama” are an excellent way to facilitate cultural mediation.

To sum up:

- The “denial” and “polarization” mindsets are monocultural and ethnocentric in their orientation and reflect the view that one’s own culture is central to reality.
- The intercultural mindsets of “acceptance” and “adaptation” represent a greater capability of shifting perspective and adapting behavior to cultural contexts. They are ethnorelative and intercultural mindsets. Individuals with an “acceptance” or “adaptation” mindset understand that one’s own cultural patterns are not any more central to reality than any other culture.
- In between the monocultural and intercultural mindsets is the transitional orientation of “minimization.” It is not monocultural in its capability but is also not yet fully intercultural in its recognition of deeper patterns of cultural difference and the ability to appropriately respond to these differences.

As an individual hones his or her intercultural skills, the individual moves further up the scale:

- As the person moves from “denial” to “polarization”, the person acquires an awareness of difference between cultures.
- As the person moves from “polarization” to “minimization,” the person’s negative judgments are softened and the person is introduced to similarities between cultures.
- As the person moves from “minimization” to “acceptance,” the person starts understanding the importance of intercultural difference.
- As the person moves from “acceptance” to “adaptation,” he or she begins the exploration into other cultures and develops empathy toward the other culture.

The life of St. Joseph Freinademetz clearly illustrates how, over the years, he moved from one mindset to the next higher one, becoming increasingly interculturally competent and a model missionary for us today.

We have seen how the IDC offers a reliable gauge, process, and direction for achieving intercultural competence. Hammer also offers guidelines for development, namely the Intercultural Development Plan (IDP). But it is directed more to the needs of business and industry than to those of a religious community. Here, “exit-learning” and “entry-learning” offer more intuitive guidance. They are perfectly attuned to the various stages of the IDC continuum and suggest an overall dynamic to the process.

Exit-learning, or “learning to leave,” coincides with the first broad stage of the continuum, dealing with ethnocentrism. Entry-learning, or “leaving to learn,” corresponds to the more advanced stage of the continuum, ethnorelativism or intercultural sensitivity. The task at exit-learning is to reduce the influence of eth-

nocentrism by changing, and discovering how to leave sameness for difference, or what is familiar for the strange and unfamiliar. There are two considerations here: one must learn to recognize and leave the blinders of our first culture and, second, recognize that our first culture does not prepare us for this. Thus, the learning process itself involves unlearning and divestiture. The task at entry-learning is to increase sensitivity by degrees. First, it involves learning to gain access to the deeper cultural content of other cultures by submission to the other. Then it involves change and the right attitude—being willing, ready, and able to change. Here, once more, we must deal with the fact that our first culture does not prepare us to submit to others in order to learn from them, or to be ready, willing, and able to change if we do submit. For us as religious, submission is our attitudinal response to the incarnational process (Phil 2:5-9):

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Though he was God,  
he did not think of equality with God  
as something to cling to.

Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;  
he took the humble position of a slave  
and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,  
he humbled himself in obedience to God  
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Submission is a dynamic process with three requirements: (a) new knowledge, (b) changes in attitude, and (c) changes in behavior. Knowledge is gained from a change in perspective, leading to a more detailed set of frameworks for perceiving and understanding patterns of cultural difference. A change in attitude involves coming to appreciate the perceptions, values, beliefs, behavior, and practices of people from different cultural communities (including

different genders and age groups). Changes in behavior involve the development of skills in one's ability to shift roles and behavior to cultural commonality and difference.

In exit-learning, one must be prepared to leave the familiar things of one's own tribe and begin to remove one's own cultural blinders. The problem is, our first culture does not teach us how to do it. One begins by discovering one's starting point or development orientation on the IDC continuum. One also must know one's personal characteristics and how far they might deviate from what is normative in one's culture, and how they compare with those that are deemed most favorable for successful intercultural relations. Here the online test offered by Muriel Elmer, the Intercultural Competence Scale (ICS), is quite helpful. She posits that the twelve "characteristics" most important for intercultural sensitivity are: Approachable, Intercultural Receptivity, Positive Orientation, Forthrightness, Social Openness, Shows Respect, Perseverance, Flexibility, Cultural Perspectivism, Venturesome, and Social Confidence.

Next, one needs to know what to change in order to submit, and how to submit in order to change. Here one must evaluate one's prior intercultural experiences and make a concrete plan to change and submit with specific goals and progress indicators. The plan should be directed and supervised, and must expand one's self-understanding and one's understanding and repertoire of culture-general frameworks (e.g., egocentric vs. socio-centric and intercultural conflict styles), as well as culture-specific behaviors.

In entry-learning, one begins to submit to the world of the other—their perspective, their viewpoint—and learn from them. In this new dynamic, one increases one's intercultural sensitivity by leaving one's own world in order to learn from theirs. It involves learning to be an outsider among insiders. As an outsider,

one's focus is on their viewpoint and culture. One gains access by submitting. Then one follows them and imitates their customs and behaviors. The issues here are quite different from those of exit-learning, and our first culture does not prepared us for this, either. We prefer our old familiar ways, language, and people. We don't want to leave the familiar for the unfamiliar, and we don't know how to leave and gain access. Furthermore, we don't know the blocks arising from not being a member of the other tribe. Our tasks in this new process are to be ready, willing, and able to change, then to change and submit, and then to follow, imitate, and learn. We follow by entering their world and living not just alongside them, but in their world(s). Then we imitate by behaving as they do and learning to recognize the alarms set off by fully experiencing the anomalies that arise and exploring our unfulfilled expectations—not as occasions to criticize others' faults, but as opportunities to learn how they are different. Then we begin to set aside our old roles and behaviors for the new. Our role-deprivation will be diminished by the satisfaction we receive in successfully taking on our new roles. Our spirituality is also broadened by the new awareness (e.g., rejoicing in the diversity of God's creation).

Leadership has a special role to play in helping a community to develop intercultural competence. Development must be planned. Leaders must be able to assess the intercultural and psychological strengths and weaknesses of the community. They need to grapple with the various goal expectations and personal desires of the community. They have a special role to play in prioritizing, offering guidance, fostering, supervising, and providing human and material resources for their intercultural, psychological, and spiritual development. They need to set manageable and measurable goals, and help the community pursue strategies to achieve these.

Exit-learning and entry-learning are ways of understanding the two very different dimensions of the overall journey toward intercultural competence. Exit-learning must be done at home in one's own culture. One must learn *how* to leave before actually doing so. One learns this in context, surrounded by all the things that need to be questioned and set aside. These include attitudes and behaviors and, among us as religious, one must learn how to leave one's favored spirituality or ways of relating to the unseen world. In the SVD and SSpS, this means that members need to be formed in all the dimensions of exit-learning before being sent out or "missioned." Clearly, this process must be introduced and guided. There must be qualified personnel and material resources for this process, and it might be necessary to have permanent zonal centers. One can only begin the more detailed process of entry-learning, of leaving and learning from the other, when one has the right attitude and the necessary skills. Then one can begin to follow, imitate, and learn from the people who inhabit this new reality that is entered. This kind of learning must be done while one is immersed in the world of the other.

Our members need to be guided through these processes of entering and learning. But the entering is complicated by the fact that interculturality involves entry into more than one culture. Today our members are being assigned to live in multicultural SVD communities within another country or culture that is not their own. The dynamics are the same as with cross-cultural entering, but now they are multi-directional. Their entry-learning is both *ad-extra* to the people of their new assignment and *ad-intra* to the members of their multicultural religious community. These processes need to be introduced and guided. Centers will be needed for this. Material resources and special methods like role-training and the intensified imitative enactments of culture-drama will be needed. Skilled and qualified personnel will also

be needed. The dynamics of exit-learning and entry-learning draw our attention to the fact that our present formation need more emphasis for doing God's mission in today's world. Our congregation is now in the process of trying to redesign them in the light of these processes and with a view toward current and future needs.



## II. Stories of Life Experiences

### 2.1 SVD Communities' Struggles with Cultural Differences and Similarities

**2.1.1 Insights:** In our world today, individuals from very different cultures are living and working together. It is something very new and it is wonderful in many ways. It has great potential for expanding our relations and the quality of our lives. But it also brings a new kind of misunderstanding and conflict, which is very different from any we have ever experienced. It is also much harder to resolve. This is because our former ways of resolving and preventing disagreements, ways learned from our first culture, may be reasonably effective when dealing with conflicts in our own cultural world, but are ineffective and even increase the tensions and conflict when applied to situations in a different culture. Such conflicts regularly occur in our multicultural religious communities without any bad intentions, but they are divisive and can destroy a community by striking at its common purpose or commitment. In a sense, the source of this conflict is already there, even before any actual situation of conflict or disagreement arises. We may be under the impression that we are of "one mind and heart" because we were all extensively and uniformly trained in seminaries, novitiates and houses of religious formation moulded by the Church and our founding generation, but we need to bear in mind that these institutions are each interpreted and conducted differently in different cultural contexts. Our SVD Constitutions, and

our ecclesial structures and institutions, are products of culture. Our present “Church culture” which is based on what Karl Rahner called, “Mediterranean culture,” is still a long way from becoming the “World Church” that was envisioned in the documents of Vatican II. Because of our different cultures in our provinces and zones, we each have different understandings of ourselves and our mission; and of what this means in terms of our commitment, roles, and the ways our Constitutions and our mission are to be carried out. All of this is set by the values, norms, and behavioral patterns learned in our home cultures. We must learn to leave all of this before entering to learn what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell us in a multicultural religious community. This insight is concretely developed in the following story by Fernando Diaz.

**2.1.2 Storyteller:** Fernando Diaz (fernandosvd@gmail.com) is originally from Chile and received a PhD in missiology. He taught at the Catholic universities of Temuco and Santiago de Chile and was the coordinator of the Chilean Catholic Bishops Conference for pastoral ministry among indigenous groups in Chile. Currently, he is the zonal coordinator for Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation.

**2.1.3 Story:** I live in southern Chile in a small SVD community composed of four different nationalities. These include Indonesian, Congolese, Vietnamese, and Chilean confreres. The people of the parish are mostly indigenous. Chilean nationals; German settlers from our colonial past comprise the rest. Ours is the poorest region in a country of two extremes—a few very rich land-owners and a multitude of landless indigenous peasants. Not surprisingly, there are many conflicts involving land, religion, and indigenous autonomy. Although as an SVD religious community we should offer a model of a peaceful and harmonious communal life, we find that intercultural living is a big challenge.

Last year, the person in our community who was in charge of the parish, including the finances, went on homeleave. Due to a lack of communication, it wasn't made clear who would be responsible in his absence. Naturally, this caused a great deal of confusion. When he returned, we called a meeting in which we wanted to express our displeasure and ask him to explain why he didn't leave clear instructions.



Fernando Diaz

In the meeting, everyone expressed his disappointment and displeasure, saying how inconsiderate he was not leaving any clear directions. But this didn't have the desired effect. It seems that the way we expressed ourselves was too direct and emotional. He became very upset and confused. The end result was that we stopped having meetings at all. Every time we asked to have a meeting, he refused to organize one. This, of course, only made matters worse. The lines of communication remained broken and, without any discussion around issues faced by our community, the problems became worse and community relations broke down entirely.

Thinking back on this situation with the intercultural understanding I now have, I can see how things went wrong. We don't

usually give much thought to how our words and actions can affect people from other cultures. In this case, we did not consider the way in which our cultural differences affect the ways we deal with conflictual situations. We Latin Americans are more direct and expressive, and this can easily make those from other countries lose face. I have seen that the Congolese confreres are also more direct and emotionally expressive. We deal with conflicts the same way and have little difficulty resolving them. But the Indonesian confreres are just the opposite. They are indirect and exercise tight control over their emotions. With all these differences, how can we possibly face the conflicts that are bound to arise in our community?

The first thing we need to do is learn more about it. Exploring it a little more we will see that it is not simply a matter of dealing with the conflicts that arise. We also need to modify our behavior in general; for example, when and how to break into a conversation or how to end a discussion. We need to learn how to live together amicably, how to build friendships and maintain harmonious relations. It also means learning how to enjoy each other's company. I have observed that we tend to look outside our community for friendships. We seek recognition and acceptance more among the local families of the parish than we do in our own community. Our relationships in the community, rather than being personal and supportive, tend to be merely functional. There is no communal sharing or interaction. For example, in the daily life of our community, we don't eat together. There is a tendency for everyone to cook his own food—one is eating fufu, another one rice without salt, and I am always in the town eating the local food with my friends.

This breakdown in our community life also affects our ministry. We have no common SVD religious identity or spirituality, and no common ministerial project that should flow from this. We

live together in the same house, but alone. We avoid conflicts by avoiding each other; this only leads to a general loss of interest in community.

I am sure that it is not a matter of any bad intentions. The conflicts that arise in our community are all due to our different cultures and personalities. Personality differences are also affected by culture. They can be recognized and negotiated easily enough in any given culture because the parameters are recognized. But when cultural differences are involved, the parameters are not the same. They too depend on the different codes for their interpretation and meaning. Our first culture cannot teach us this. How then do we begin to discover that the other is working out of a different worldview, a different set of codes? How can we begin to understand our similarities and differences? How can we manage these differences that have been instilled in us by our different cultural backgrounds? This is discovered precisely through conflict—or the source of conflict, which is our unfulfilled expectations.

We tend to think of conflict as something to be avoided, but in many ways it offers the key to achieving a truly intercultural community. This is because conflicts bring our cultural differences to the surface and make them visible. Then we can begin to explore the differences, adapt appropriately, and eventually arrive at an understanding of the different underlying hidden codes. It is important, then, not to minimize our differences or ignore them, but rather to lift them up to see them clearly and adapt our behavior accordingly.

Through a rigorous process of understanding and discovery, communities like ours can strive toward and hopefully arrive at a state where they are no longer only multicultural, but also intercultural. This is not only important for our own harmoni-

ous living in community, it is crucial for our mission today. Only then can we be a true inspiration for our parishes and participate effectively in God's mission to the world. This quest for a true intercultural community amid the many conflicts arising out of our multicultural context is the same quest, whether it be in our region—where the indigenes are in conflict with the settlers—or throughout our entire global village.

## 2.2 Fostering Interreligious Dialogue

**2.2.1 Insights:** Religion is an important aspect of culture, and is a cultural universal across time and space. Religious systems are shaped by, but also shape, cultural realities. Thus, religions both reflect and influence how individuals and communities understand life, who they are, and how to engage with the world. There is a wide range of religious belief systems and practices across the globe that have similarities and differences. Sometimes similarities are highlighted by members of a religious group, but oftentimes the differences are in the foreground and members and their leadership use differences to define who they are in relation to others, which can at times result in exaggerating differences and creating tensions between religions and misrepresentations of one's own religion, as well as other religions. Thus, it is important to cross religious boundaries. Our Constitutions encourage us to engage in such dialogue: "With open mind and deep respect for the religious traditions of peoples, we seek dialogue with all and present the good news of God's love to them" (Con 103). "As missionaries of the Divine Word, we must be ready to recognize the rays of [the Word's] light in the religious traditions and convictions of peoples. In sincere dialogue we bear witness to the fact that the true light has become man and has come into the world in Jesus of Nazareth. At the same time we will be enriched by other people's religious experience and search for

truth” (Con 114). Our Constitutions recognize God’s revelation in other religions and cultures, and that a dialogue with religions and cultures can transform our faith and understanding of God. Dialogue is an avenue to gain a deeper experience of our faith, calling, and ministry and all members of the SVD are encouraged to “learn to enter into fruitful dialogue with other cultures and religions” (Con 507.3). Lazar Gnanapragasam’s story is a good example of such a dialogue.

**2.2.2 Storyteller:** Lazar Gnanapragasam (lazarsvd@gmail.com) was ordained a priest in 1984. He received a doctorate in World Religions from the University of Lancaster in Great Britain. He served as formator, rector, Provincial counsellor, and Provincial in India.

**2.2.3 Story:** I live in Hyderabad, a city with a large Muslim population. My first mission appointment was to Zaheerabad, where most of the residents are Muslim. Another Divine Word Missionary and I travelled around the district lecturing and sharing the message of Christ. We organized discussion groups to engage with people in conversations and faith dialogue, and enjoyed the opportunity to work alongside Hindus and Muslims. Muslim youth regularly invited us to join them in their prayers and religious ceremonies in their houses. Many people ask me how a Catholic priest can ever go to a Mosque or *durgah*, a Muslim shrine, for prayer and worship, especially considering all the negative remarks that we hear every day about Islam and Muslims. Some people are simply curious, while others take a profound exception to my interest in engaging with Muslims, which some called “conversion” to Islam. Some have even questioned my faith in Jesus and ridiculed me as a “born again” Christian.

As my interest grew, I wanted to know more about Islam. I got involved in Islamic Studies and registered with the Hyderabad

Muslim League. In 2015, during the month of Ramadan, I was invited by the Muslim community to speak about Christian-Muslim dialogue. During this event, I dressed as a Muslim Mullah holding the Bible in one hand and the Qur'an in the other hand. To their great amazement, I spoke in English and Urdu but also in Arabic and they asked many questions. The local Muslim TV station called me afterwards a "new-born Christian." When I finished speaking, the *ulema*, a Muslim scholar, placed me in the centre of the huge crowd and "crowned" me with a Muslim turban—a sign of acceptance to their *umma*, community. After this ceremony, I could freely enter their prayer halls and houses. I was allowed to participate in their *namaz*, prayers, and other ceremonies in their houses. Not just men but also Muslim women began to attend our dialogue sessions and we were even able to discuss with all of them the divinity of Jesus Christ. Though the local Catholics did not appreciate this faith dialogue, I found Jesus our Lord in dialoguing and discussing with Muslims.

As a scholar of the Qur'an, my primary goal is to educate and communicate the correct message of Islam and Muslims. Although Islam has grown and the number of its followers is nearly equal with the number of Christians, many Muslims do not correctly understand nor properly represent the Muslim message of "Peace, Surrender, and Obedience to God." I consider it my apostolate to guide Muslims to a deeper understanding of their faith, as well as highlight commonalities and differences with Christianity. Muslims share some of their central beliefs with Christians and their sacred scripture has significant overlaps with the Bible. They believe in Jesus as a "true messenger of God" and as a *rasul*, a prophet, that they hold dear his "virgin birth without human intervention", and that they profess that he is the "Christ" or "Messiah" as foretold in the Bible. They believe he is with God now and, most importantly, that "he will be coming back in the Last Days to lead the

believers against the Anti-Christ.” Even as a priest and scholar of Islam, I am surprised and struck with awe to recognize that Muslims and Christians have so much in common.

One day, in the summer of 2015, a wonderful thing happened during a conversation with a Muslim friend. I asked my Muslim friend: “Do you believe in God?” He said: “Yes.” Then I said, “Do you believe in Adam and Eve?” He said: “Yes.” I said, “What about Abraham? Do you believe in him and how he tried to sacrifice his son for God?” He said: “Yes.” Then I asked “What about Moses, David, John the Baptist, and Jesus?” He said: “Yes, I believe they are God’s prophets.” I asked, “What about the virgin birth of our Lord?” He said: “Yes, very much.” My final question was, “Do you believe in Jesus as Messiah?” He said: “We believe in Jesus as Messiah and the Word of God.” When I heard his response, it seemed he is already baptized through this faith, but didn’t know it. The next logical step was for him to get baptised. I feel blessed that I was the one to do it for him. What for an incredible experience for me a missionary priest of the Divine Word! By the time he was ready to be baptised by me, I already knew that the truth had come at last and that it was up to me to do my part. I went in front of the altar and found a white carpet and right there I put my head down on the ground, facing the direction that the Muslims pray five times a day, and did my *fajr*, the morning prayer of Muslims. I went upstairs and took a shower with a new understanding gained from my experience with Muslims, that I was symbolically “washing away the old, sinful self and was starting life afresh, a life based on truth and love.”

Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world’s population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Mus-

lims and Christians. The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity. The Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the necessity of love of the neighbour is the common ground between Islam and Christianity.



G. Lazar (in green dress) with Muslim leaders and scholars.

## 2.3 Care for Our Common Home: A Practical Response to Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*

**2.3.1 Insights:** The way we relate to the natural environment is informed by a wide range of cultural values. When we compare and contrast cultural groups, we see a continuum, with some groups on one extreme end that consider the natural world sacred and believe they are entrusted with caring for and using it responsibly for the benefit of all creatures, and groups on the other extreme end of the continuum that perceive the natural world merely as resources to be exploited for short-term benefits. With the increased influence of transnational corporations and their profit orientation across the globe, the latter has be-

come more prominent, resulting in large-scale and widespread destruction of the natural environment. Christianity has drawn from its sacred traditions arguments for both extremes. Christians have engaged in destructive, exploitive behaviour, as well as in movements emphasizing that humans are part of the creation, promoting an understanding that all creation has to be treated with respect because it reflects the goodness of the Creator, and teaching that the whole creation longs for salvation. The SVD recognizes among its four characteristic dimensions also our mission to promote justice and peace and the integrity of creation. Each province has a coordinator who supports and encourages its members to engage with communities with cultural values opposed to protecting and nurturing the environment. Many provinces have started and maintained innovative programs to protect the creation, such as the Steyler Bank, sometimes called SVD Bank, founded in 1964 in Sankt Augustin, Germany, which is committed to promoting the responsible use of the limited resources of the earth through investment in corporations engaged in environmentally sustainable activities. Another example is Divine Word Experimental Farm of the Chicago Province, which engages in sustainable farming practices, raises awareness of environmental concerns, and produces revenue for mission projects across the globe. These are just a few examples of our mission that challenge the cultural values of societies promoting a contemporary cultural understanding of how to relate to the natural environment, grounded in Biblical and Catholic Social Teaching. By doing so, “we promote true human progress... and prepare for [the Lord’s] second coming and the final fulfilment of all creation in Christ” (Con 101). Franz Gassner’s story illustrates a specific aspect of this theme.

**2.3.2 Storyteller:** After ordination in St. Gabriel, Austria, Franz Gassner (franz.gassner@usj.edu.mo) was assigned to a parish

and school in Vienna. Following his graduate studies in Philosophy at Boston College, he worked as formator in Vienna, Austria, and subsequently received a doctorate in Catholic Theology (Social Ethics) in 2012 at the University of Vienna. Currently, Franz is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Religious Studies, University of Saint Joseph, in Macau, China.



Recycling in Macao.

**2.3.3 Story:** The publication of Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter *Laudatu Si'* is widely considered a hallmark of Catholic Social Teaching. In a refreshing way, many concepts related to the environment found their way into official Church teaching for the first time, like carbon, crabs, and coral reefs, or reptiles, rubbish, and recycling, not to mention wetlands, worms, and virgin forests. Pope Francis' clear stance toward what he calls the "throw-away culture" (LS 16, 20, 22, 43) is crucial for understanding the Catholic view of how we relate to the environment. A "throw-away culture" is a threat to the inner life of humans, a "violence of the heart," and a danger to the social and environmental fabric of life on Earth. Pope Francis finds clear and encouraging words to counter the thoughtless habits of wasting and discarding in "cheerful recklessness" (LS 59).

Being a missionary in Macau, I ask myself how to put an end to such a “culture,” especially in societies like Hong Kong or Macau, where political power is in the hands of a few individuals who are not elected by the people and who show a lack of accountability for resources. The placement of recycling bins in tourist spots looks more like an exercise of environmental face-lifting and cosmetics than an ongoing and sustainable plan and institutional commitment for resource responsibility. If you ask local folks whether they recycle, they usually respond that they don’t because they do not trust the government; they observed that the recyclables which they put into collection bins seem to end up in landfills (Hong Kong) or in the incinerator (Macau). My own observations and those of experts have confirmed that this is indeed happening. There seemed to be striking cultural differences between China and Europe regarding the relationship with nature and a sustainable approach to the use of energy and resources. For example, the city of Hong Kong accumulates 3,247 tonnes of food waste from hotels, restaurants, supermarkets, households, and the like every day, while millions of people are not able to meet even their most basic nutritional needs. Inconsistent practices in dealing with energy and resources also lead to an enormous, and quite unnecessary, amount of pollution. For example, in the Pearl River Delta in China, the electrical energy necessary for all kinds of production and services derives mainly from polluting coal power plants or unsustainable atomic energy.

In summary, when we take a closer look at the use, even abuse, of energy and resources, we can see major environmental problems. A possible solution to this problem is recycling and a responsible use of energy and resources. As Pope Francis and many other experts consistently tell us, these can, indeed, be crucial elements in the proper care of our common home and for building a more sustainable world. But what should we do when the socioeco-

conomic circumstances in a given society do not directly support responsible decisions and practices in dealing with energy and resources? How should one respond to the challenges of *Laudato Si* in such a context?

One of my students in the Master's Program in Environmental Sciences at the University of St. Joseph in Macau pointed me in the right direction. During a conversation, he told me that the poor of Hong Kong and Macau are actually increasing the recycling rate in this region of the world, and their efforts have made a big positive environmental impact. They are caring for our "common home" in an outstanding and very practical way by privately collecting recyclables and selling them to those companies that need them as resources. They are actually the ones moving toward a culture and an economy that is producing no waste and pollution. They turn out to be the pioneers of a more sustainable way of life and a new world order.

But how can my own collected recyclables reach those poor people on the street, when the public garbage collection system does not work properly or cannot be trusted? One way is to bring recyclables, such as aluminium cans, directly to the poor, such as an old lady on the street, as I do every week in Macau. The old lady collects and stores them. She then sells them to companies to make a living. Another paradoxical way is to put the recyclables *not* into the public recyclable bin—because in that case the resources might end up in landfills or be burned, and thus be wasted, but to put them in a bag on top of the recycling system, as the photo shows. By doing so, the bag containing the recyclables will soon be taken away, collected by the poor but entrepreneurial recyclers of the city.

Addressing other poor people who engage in similar activities in South America, the so-called cardboard people (*cartoneros*)

and recyclers (*recicladores*), Pope Francis said in a video message to recycling workers in Argentina: “We are living in a throw-away culture where we easily discard things, but people as well. You recycle and with this two things are produced: an ecological work, which is necessary, and on the other hand, a production that promotes brotherhood and gives dignity to one’s work, you are creative in your production, but also creative in caring for the earth ... recycling is not only ecological—which is something great—but also productive to everyone else. And be conscious that food should not be wasted, because there are children who are hungry.”

In summary, through the efforts of poor recyclers, societies are able to transform the wastefulness of our society and can at least partially give way to a “spirit of sharing.” These poor are the avant-garde and shareholders of a new world order of an economy that produces no waste or pollution. They are not only reducing the energy needed and the air pollution caused, which is about 95% in the case of recycled aluminium cans, but they also counter what Pope Francis calls the “mental pollution” caused by the “throw away culture.” It would be good to learn from them and collaborate with them to counter unsustainable habits.

## **2.4 Opportunity for Deep Cultural Learning: Public or Private Transport?**

**2.4.1 Insights:** Pope Francis urges his ministers to have the smell of their sheep about them. This means living as closely as possible to the people. After washing the feet of his Apostles, Jesus asks them to do likewise with the words, “Is the servant greater than the master?” As missionaries, the bearers of God’s Word, are we greater than the Master? Like Jesus, we must be servants of the people. But doing this in another culture requires more than meets the eye—two things in particular: living in such a way that

the people are recognizable to us and we to them. But these do not come naturally. They must be learned. Our lengthy education, our degrees and the esteemed trappings of our clerical role do not prepare us for this. Rather, they put us in a privileged position, a notch above those we are meant to serve. The blinders of our first culture and our Westernized clerical culture keep us from recognizing and appreciating our sheep, and they make us unrecognizable as servants. As a result, our mission often becomes making them smell like us. The first step in addressing this, is “exit-learning” or “learning to leave.” It means learning how to detach ourselves from any expectations connected with our roles that might interfere or prevent us from entering into their world. Learning this disposition must be done at home in one’s first culture or in the context of initial formation. Second, we need to learn how to be recognizable to our sheep, to live like them and smell like them. We can only learn this from them, in their world. This is “entry-learning” or leaving to learn. It involves three things: we need to submit to them, imitate them, and follow them. It is all about learning how to be recognized as a servant in their world, not ours. In this story, Phil Gibbs explores his experience of gaining access to his people in Papua New Guinea, while on the road. See if you can follow his steps of entry-learning—submission, imitating, and following.

**2.4.2 Storyteller:** Philip Gibbs (gibbs199@gmail.com) comes from New Zealand and has been serving in Papua New Guinea since 1973. He has a doctorate in Theology and a post-graduate diploma in Anthropology. At present, he is Head of Department of Governance and Leadership at Divine Word University, Madang, PNG.



Phil Gibbs

**2.4.3 Story:** With the exception of the capital city Port Moresby, there are road links to most places in Papua New Guinea. The roads can be rather rough and dusty, and sometimes there are landslides or collapsed bridges, but that is life in the land of the unexpected. With road transport, there are two options: private or public. Most parishes have a vehicle, as do SVD communities, so private transportation is an option for us. The other option is to travel by public transport; usually a fifteen-seater van or twenty-five seater Toyota bus. They are known as PMVs, public motor vehicles.

These two means of road transport present missionaries with an option. How would one choose between using a private vehicle or travelling by public transport? A private vehicle has the advantage of independence. With your own vehicle, you can leave when you are ready and you can stop wherever you want on the way. Within reason, you can bring other people with you or carry a load of supplies. The main disadvantage is the cost of running a private vehicle—not only fuel, but registration and repairs. Public transport is less costly if you are travelling alone and you don't need to carry a lot of goods. But one must be flexible because there are no fixed schedules and public buses usually leave for their destination only when all seats are filled—which might take several hours, touring the town as the driver and his assistant look for potential passengers. Besides the relatively low cost, there are other advantages to using public motor buses. One has plenty of travelling companions and one doesn't have to be overly worried if there are problems on the road, such as landslides, because the driver and his assistant will find a solution—perhaps helping you to transfer to another bus on the other side of the landslide or broken bridge.

When I have a tight schedule I tend to use private transport, but if time is not an issue, then I am favouring travelling by public

bus. It is a great way to meet people. At the beginning of long trips, the driver's assistant will introduce himself, tell of the "rules," such as not smoking in the bus (not always followed) and for people chewing betelnut to spit the juice into small plastic bags provided, and that if people need a comfort stop they should tell him. Often, he will finish with a joke or two to lighten the atmosphere before proceeding to collect the fares and haggling with those trying to get a reduced fare. If the driver does not have the radio blaring, fellow passengers will introduce themselves or make public comments on matters of communal interest, like the state of the road or lack of funding from the government. This is quite different from the atmosphere in public transport these days in many other countries, where individual passengers seem absorbed with their smart phones!

After the hour or so it took to fill the bus, I thought we were away, but no, just out of town there is a stop at a roadside café or market for people to buy food and drinks. The fried lamb flaps smell delicious but I take a pass on that and go for a banana instead. Back inside the bus, fellow passengers feel sorry for me eating so little and offer me a bunch of peanuts still in their shells or a hard-boiled egg also in its shell. With typhoid so prevalent, they may know that I prefer food that is not handled but protected inside a skin or a shell. If the café stop is also a comfort stop, then women go in one direction and men the other and disappear into the long grass lining the road. Be careful where you place your feet as someone was probably there before you!

A bit further on comes the provincial border check for alcohol or weapons and ammunition, or in some places for betelnut. Everyone gets out of the bus and waits while security check under the seats and poke at our bags. I hear that sometimes they do find what they are searching for. One time I saw them apprehend a woman who was carrying a bottle of rum. The bottle was con-

fiscated and I presume it went as a contribution that night to a party at the security point. There are also the random check-points set up by police who check drivers' licences and try to find something amiss with the bus or the driver's papers so they can levy a fine. Fridays seem to be the favoured time for that. Private vehicles are stopped also, but seem to pass through more quickly.

As a shared experience that brings people together, I think that all of this has an intercultural dimension. For people from an egocentric orientation, the dramas on the public bus might seem a little bizarre and a waste of time, but from a sociocentric perspective, which is typical of Papua New Guinea, this is all an interesting slice of life and the isolation of a private vehicle may be considered a bit sad and the sort of thing that outsiders or prosperous businessmen do.

Personally, I think that private transport is important for efficiency, but travel by public transport is fitting for us as missionaries because it gives us a chance to meet and dialogue with different people who we would not meet otherwise. If "interculturality" involves learning from one another and appreciating difference, then from my experience I think that the option of public transport is an opportunity to be recommended.

## **2.5 Serving People on the Move: Migrants and Refugees**

**2.5.1 Insights:** Although there are more than 1,700 language/culture groups in Africa, many of the culture-general dimensions are the same. Their cultures are group-centric, high-context, high power distance, feminine, low uncertainty avoidance, and short-term/present and past oriented. People in the global north, however, are just the opposite. They tend to be individual-centric, low-context, low power distance, masculine, high uncertainty avoidance, and long-term future oriented. As a result,

missioners from Africa (and other places in the global south) may consider themselves well equipped to work as a missionary in the global north. Africans often say, “All we have to do is learn the language!” And because many have already learned several languages before being missioned, this is not considered much of a problem. But because most of the culture-general dimensions between the global north and south are so different, they will experience a great deal of difficulty if they are not properly prepared. In addition to the conflicts that will arise because of these cultural discrepancies, their culture-based conflict styles, or the ways they deal with the problems, are also quite different. Instead of helping them solve the problems they will meet, their different conflict styles will very likely increase the tensions and throw fuel the fire. Africans, following their conflict style, tend to respond to disagreements indirectly and in emotionally expressive ways, whereas Northern Europeans tend to be direct and emotionally restrained. As increasing numbers of our missionaries from the global south are being sent to the global north, many if not most of these culture-general categories will be reversed. Most missionaries from the global south are not aware of these differences. Patrick Kodom, who is from Ghana, is an example of this. In Patrick Kodom’s story of his experiences as a missionary to Europe, many of the conflicts he has experienced (e.g., direct thanks in Europe vs. indirect thanks the next day in Africa) could have been avoided by a good exit-learning program in Ghana and a good entry-learning orientation in Europe.

**2.5.2 Storyteller:** Patrick Kodom (pkodom@icloud.com) was born in Ghana and is currently assigned to the Central European Province. He received a degree in pastoral ministry for migrants and refugees and currently works as coordinator of pastoral ministry for refugees and migrants in the Diocese of Feldkirch, Austria.

**2.5.3 Story:** I come from Ghana in West Africa. In my Akan culture, greetings are important when we first meet people. The Akan have elaborate greetings that include specific ways of shaking hands with others that even depend on the direction you are going. When I began working in a refugee camp near Vienna, in Austria, one of the means by which I could easily establish relations with the people was greeting them friendly and shaking hands with them. This went on smoothly until I had a big cultural shock and disappointment. I arrived in the camp one morning and, as usual, was greeting people. When I saw a Muslim woman from Chechnya, whom I had seen many times before, my hand reached out to her. However, she simply withdrew her hands from me. I was surprised and embarrassed. In the past I had gone on many excursions with her and her children without any problem. I kept asking myself all day what I might have done wrong with this woman. As I was still pondering over my embarrassment and disappointment, two men came to my office that afternoon; one of them was a translator I knew. The other man, who was the husband of the woman, seemed a bit unhappy. I gave them seats and asked why they wanted to see me. To my surprise the husband of the woman refused to greet me. He came to ask why I wanted to shake hands with his wife. This was a big problem for him and I assured him that I had no reason for wanting to shake hands with her other than just being friendly. I told him that it was normal for me to do so. With the help of the translator, I began to understand that in their culture a man does not shake hands with a married woman, especially when her husband is present. I quickly apologized and assured him that I will not disrespect their culture in future.

In the Akan culture, there are different arrangements when it comes to eating at home. Women eat in groups separated by age, men eat together, and adolescent boys and girls eat in separate

groups. For this reason, there is no opportunity to say thanks to the cook while eating or to praise the cook for how well she or he has prepared the meal, as is commonly done in Austria. While working as a missionary in Austria and being assigned to a parish, I was invited once in a while by parishioners to have lunch or supper with them. I honored most of these invitations but never said anything at table to the cook. This behavior of mine offended many people without me knowing. One day a woman gathered courage and asked me why I am **so ungrateful and never** say thanks when I am invited. I explained to her what is done in my culture and added why I always called the following day to say “thank you for yesterday.” For them it was too late; for me, however, that was the right way to express my gratitude. This is another way that cultural differences cause misunderstanding.

Still another way involves eye contact. In my Akan culture, it is not polite to look directly into somebody’s eyes. We Akan make such contact off and on. One needs to learn how to balance both. Failure to balance it well can lead to problems. If I would do



Patrick Kodom with refugee children.

something wrong, causing my mother to reprimand me, and I looked straight into her eyes when she was doing this, I would be doubly punished. And so, when I came to Austria, I was always careful not to look into people’s eyes so as not to be branded impolite. But according to the Austrian culture, this was the opposite. Not looking people in the eyes rather meant being impolite. Again, I needed someone to tell me about it before I could learn and adjust myself.

I will like to end with another cautionary tale of cultural difference. In the Akan culture, one should not address people simply by their first names. Individuals should always be addressed on the basis of their age and their relationship to you as a family member. Therefore, someone from a generation older than myself will always be addressed as mother, father, auntie, or uncle. Those in one's own generation are always addressed as brother or sister, and so on. This difference affects my relationship with the refugees. It also affects relations with people in my parish. Since those who come to church are mostly elderly people, I always call the women "mother" and the men "father," or more affectionately as "mama" or "papa." As time went on, I started hearing rumors in the parish that I am feeling very homesick. I did not know where this was coming from, but I soon found out that people assumed I must be homesick, because I was calling so many people "mama" or "papa." They felt strange and assumed that because I missed my parents I was looking for mother and father substitutes. On the other hand, I also felt strange when small children from the nursery school addressed me to my face as "Kofi," "I felt disrespected and said to myself, "since when have I become classmates with them?!" But with time I came to understand that in Austria, this is considered normal and respectful behavior.

## **2.6 Good Development is Good Evangelization**

**2.6.1 Insights:** Corporal works of mercy, caring for the widow and orphan, the sick, the dying, and the oppressed, are at the heart of the Gospel and have always been the work of the Church. In the golden era of mission, roughly 1860-1960, missionaries from the global north preached in both word and deed to peoples of the global south. Along with churches, they built schools of all sorts, primary and secondary, orphanages and nursing schools, technical and agricultural centers. They cared for the sick with hospitals, clinics, and healthcare centers, and for the oppressed with credit

unions, wells, and boreholes. An inseparable part of these institutions of mercy embedded in the culture of these missionaries—a culture born of Descartes and nurtured by the industrial revolution—was the firm belief that their way was not only the way of Christ, it was the pinnacle of civilization. It included an egalitarian, individualistic outlook, and a will to take charge, to plan, succeed, and prosper. The “development” theme became indistinguishable from the Gospel. The form was the message. Northern Ghanaians called Christianity “get your eyes opened” (to the wonderful things of the global north). Vatican II alerted us this was not the message of Christ (the wonderful things of God). But the institutions of mercy encouraged the distortion. Missioners of our time are confronted with the task of fostering a new kind of development—one rooted in the Gospel but built on local cultures with local people. They must foster deeds of mercy within the fabric and lives of the people. In this story, Jon Kirby explores the tensions at work when a new missioner tries to build institutions of mercy on local foundations.

**2.6.2 Storyteller:** Jon P. Kirby (zanyeya@gmail.com) was born in Canada, grew up in the USA, worked for many years in Ghana, and is currently assigned to the United States Western Province. He has a doctorate in Social Anthropology from the University of Cambridge, UK, and is the founder and former director of the Tamale Institute of Cross-Cultural Studies in Ghana. He offers training in interculturality, psychodrama, bibliodrama, and culture-drama for intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

**2.6.3 Story:** Education is important for the people of Africa. In many ways, their future in the modern world depends on it. The people in Northern Ghana used to say it opens your eyes to the modern world. But they said that of Christianity too. And in 1976, when I went to Northern Ghana from the South, where for many

years I was in charge of dozens of schools, I was more interested in connecting Christianity with the culture of the people than as a link to the modern world. I wanted their faith to be rooted in their own lives and symbols. I had already seen that neither the school curricula, which was based on the British model, nor the teachers, who in the North were often Muslims, were able to do this. As a result of this, I promised myself to stay out of school work. By this stage, I had also learned that for any development effort to succeed, it must belong to the people.

Then in 1980, the elders of a small village in my area, called Sangbana, came to me asking for help to establish a school for their children. At this time, Ghana was financially bankrupt. The government was no longer able to pay teachers' salaries, so the schools throughout the region had collapsed and many teachers had left Ghana seeking better jobs. I wanted to help them but was conflicted because of my previous experience. Nevertheless, wanting to show my support for them in general, I reluctantly agreed to help—but only as a facilitator.

First, they said they needed a building; so I said, “why not build it yourselves as you do your compounds of mud and grass”—and to my amazement, they did so. Every large extended family in the village came together in a *pawreni*, a traditional practice associated with farming through communal labor. Then they said they needed teachers, which, of course, also included teachers' salaries. There were many unemployed teachers in the nearby town so I said, “why not hire them.” And as for salary, pay them with foodstuffs, which also taps into the traditional marketing system of bartering—and they did so. And, to my amazement, the teachers agreed. Then, they said they needed school supplies, which were unavailable in Ghana because unscrupulous politicians had sold most of these supplies to neighboring Togo, where the market women were using the

pages of the English textbooks to wrap groundnuts in. So I said, “why not cross the border and buy them back with guinea fowls,” which were worth more in Togo than in Ghana—and they did so. They soon had all the schoolbooks they needed. Finally, they said they needed the school to be registered. I initially balked but agreed to see some friends in the school system. Then, another surprise! The supervisor of schools readily accepted the offer but cautioned that they would not be able to send teachers for a while. But this didn’t affect us at all.

The greatest surprise of all, however, came when, after they completed the school and it had been running for a week or two, the same village leaders came to me and, following the traditional manner of thanksgiving, brought me bags of foodstuffs. On behalf of the whole village, they thanked me profusely for “what I had done.” I was completely flabbergasted. I felt utterly humbled because I really felt that I had done absolutely nothing.

But thinking about this over time, I began to realize a very important lesson. My North American, highly individualistic cultural view of things always stresses the importance of doing. I knew that people should own their development projects but I didn’t know what this really meant. Ironically, my reluctance to jump in and take over, which is my normal North American self, accidentally led me to this important discovery. I had made the wrong promise. It should have been to stop “doing” and to start really listening to the people and “being” with them. They know what to do and how to do it far better than I. But sometimes they just need a little push, a little encouragement.

The government did eventually come to their assistance. But, from then until now, it always was their school. It belonged to them, and throughout those tumultuous years when the government schools deteriorated, theirs steadily improved. People

came from all around to enroll their children, and my teacher-catechists not only had a good job, they also had an unexpected influence on the people's faith. It was a wonderful success story for development—but also for mission. Today, Sangbana has a thriving Christian community in an island of traditional believers and Muslims. Good development is good evangelization.

## 2.7 Mission to the Social Margins

**2.7.1 Insights:** In this story, Seraphine Kpakpayi has a problem distinguishing the “good poor” from the “bad.” Coming from a group-centered society in West Africa, he enters another such society in Latin America and encounters people at the margins. His experience of African slums and extreme poverty does not tally with what he experiences here. From his Christian perspective, those who are most in need are the most deserving of his and the Church's assistance and it is surprising to him that they don't come for it. He is told that the “bad” drug addicts often come to the mission for help but not the “good,” the “real poor,” because they are honor-bound not to beg. He rightly concludes that ministry must seek them out at the margins. But a little cultural training would have been a great help. In group-centered cultures, which are to be found in most of our missions in the global south, even though the people are poor, they care for their own. In strongly socio-centric worlds, the marginalized and those at the periphery are the “bad” social outcasts, thieves, murderers, and other miscreants who have brought dishonor to the extended family, clan, or village. The same was true of medieval Christendom, where they were excommunicated and giving them help was a crime entailing the same punishment. But the multicultural anonymity of large cities offered them refuge and succor without social sanction, leaving only their individual consciences as a moral guide. In the global south today, this extreme cultural contrast—*islands of strong individualism in an ocean of group-*

centeredness—is much stronger than it used to be. So those who are marginalized and impoverished unjustly, through no fault of their own, are indistinguishably thrown together with the social outcasts—the “good” wheat with the “bad.” But the “good” have a conscience, whereas the “bad” do not. Culturally speaking, then, Seraphine Kpakpayi’s problem is a direct result of the general uncertainty caused by the mixing of individual-centered culture with group-centered. Missioners need to be equipped with these understandings before being missioned.

**2.7.2 Storyteller:** Seraphine Kpakpayi (serafinoverbita@yahoo.com) was born in Togo and his first assignment was in Ecuador. Currently, he works in formation in Togo and is the mission secretary of his province.

**2.7.3 Story:** In the fall of the year 2000, I left Togo in West Africa for my OTP experience in Ecuador. After few months of language learning, I was assigned to one of our three SVD parishes forming a belt around Guasmo del Sur, a slum area on the outskirts of the second biggest town, Guayaquil. The SVD community responsible for the parish of Santo Hermano Miguel, where I was stationed, was both ‘intercultural and intercontinental,’ including four confreres from four different continents: Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. Yet in this diverse community (‘ad intra’), I felt welcomed and at home. The local community (‘ad extra’) was also welcoming, but some social situations made me nervous. Violence was common between small gangs, the so-called *pandillas*. Drug addicts often came asking for help but became aggressive when they did not get what they wanted. Coming from a relatively peaceful society, I found these two conflict situations very difficult.

One distinctive feature of Santo Hermano Miguel vis-a-vis the other two SVD parishes in Guasmo was that it had a small out-

station named after Saint Martin de Porres, I guess because of its predominantly Afro-Ecuadorian descendants. These, I often felt, were on the 'outskirts of the outskirts' of that society. During my first contact with this particular community, after my older confrere introduced me as coming from Togo, Africa, a young adolescent girl asked me 'is it true, brother, that the situation in Africa is so bad?' I wondered how, living in such a difficult situation, this girl could still be compassionate and empathetic to other people elsewhere.

As people in this outstation faced economic hardship and other forms of marginalization, it was no surprise that they often came to the parish house for help. As it often happened, some of the stories they told us were not true. But we were unable to accurately judge their genuineness. Discerning who really needed help and who was trying to abuse our trust was sometimes a difficult exercise.

One day, the Legion of Mary brought to our attention a case of an elderly man who was widowed, living without a family, just a few blocks away from the church. He worked so hard to take care of himself that this left him physically disabled, prematurely half-bent. The house he lived in was like an abandoned ruin. The roof offered no protection against rain, sun, or wind, and whenever we visited him, the house was flooded. Despite the fact that he lived in such a densely populated area, the man was like someone surviving at the periphery. After having tried to help as much as we could, one question kept bothering me. Given the genuineness of his needs, why did this man never come to the parish house asking for help? I found myself asking why do people stronger and healthier than him come to us for help but not him? And I will always remember the words spoken with conviction by another confrere to answer this: "the real poor do not come to our doors." These words have had a lasting impression on me.

What this confrere tried to convey was that the poor hold on to their dignity and that begging is their last resort. The dignity of earning what they eat is the last thing of substance they can cling to. It also means that if we wish to help the poor, those in dire need of support, we need to reach out to them and find them where they are in their homes, and on the 'existential peripheries.'

## 2.8 Missionaries to the West

**2.8.1 Insights:** The "work" of the missionary always depends on the training, abilities, and capacities of the missionary and the needs of the people being missioned to. This is the theme of Avin Kunnekkadan's story. As a veteran missionary from India, he felt out of place and unable to adapt his many gifts to his multicultural urban situation in Belgium. He experienced role-deprivation and was unable to find new roles to mollify this. He had the emotional support of his confreres but found little guidance. After instinctively taking some time to be with the people, especially the people he connected with—immigrants who, like himself, felt isolated and estranged—Avin Kunnekkadan found his new role meeting their needs as a chaplain and intercultural facilitator. Without any special direction, he was fortunate to be able to move from a sacramental ministry of doing to one of being with the people and experiencing their problems. Finally, he discovered interreligious dialogue and ecumenism and found a place in international student chaplaincy. His work in intercultural and interreligious relations now offers us a model for mission in the urban centers of the global north. But culturally speaking, the journey would have been made easier for him, and it would not have ended in failure for his Indian confrere, if at home in India they had learned how to leave their first culture and all the roles associated with it and how to submit themselves to the people of their new context in order to learn from them. This psychological and emotional leaving is called "exit-learning." And his proc-

ess of finding and learning new roles suited to his temperament and training, as well as adapted to the people's needs, would have been greatly facilitated when he arrived by receiving special training in "entry-learning" or leaving to learn from local people. This learning process can be greatly facilitated by culture-drama techniques and enactments including role-training. Mission today absolutely requires these two training processes.

**2.8.2 Storyteller:** Avin Kunnekkadan (avinksvd@yahoo.co.uk) was born in India and ordained in 1992. He has a licentiate in systematic theology and a doctorate in Indology. Avin worked in a pioneering mission in India, taught Indian philosophy in India, and served as National Director of the Peace and Value Education Center Hyderabad. -Later, he worked as an international student chaplain at several universities in Netherlands. At present, he is the provincial superior of Netherlands-Belgium province.

**2.8.3 Story:** There was a time when the SVD province in the Netherlands and Belgium doubted the future and continuity of the SVD presence there. Today there is a new "spring." The province has opened its arms to missionaries of other cultures and countries, which has led to the formation of intercultural communities. This story is about my experience being a missionary from India to a church in Western Europe that experienced significant difficulties due to secularization and the task of pioneering an intercultural mission

The ways of God are different! As soon as I got my mission appointment, I brought out my world atlas to see where it was, and I was surprised to find that it was so small. I wondered about my living with Europeans, but I soon found that the Netherlands is a microcosm of the whole world. People from all over the world live there together in peace and harmony. Interculturality is a reality in almost all the cities in the Netherlands with different nationalities,

different age groups with diverse talents, and diverse cultures. The cities, especially, are a multicultural mix, a rainbow of races, nationalities, and culture groups. In our province, the elderly confreres are Dutch or Belgian, but the 14 young confreres are from seven different cultures.

In the past, SVD “mission” meant Europeans going out to the “poor,” often non-Christian, countries of the global south. Today “mission” also includes Europe. The arrival of new missionaries in NEB has initiated an ongoing discussion of the scope of mission in Europe and on the nature of intercultural mission.

Formerly, European missionaries arriving in my country, India, had to learn our cultures. Today, we younger missionaries from all around the world must adapt not only to the cultures of Europe, but also—both in our SVD houses (‘ad intra’) and in the wider community (‘ad extra’) —to the many other cultures that surround us. I was a veteran missionary when I left India for the Dutch-Belgian province, but was surprised at the great differences I met. There I had a clear identity within the institutional church, there were clear job expectations, and my profession was respected. Here I had no status, the language was difficult, it was cold and rainy. I felt helpless and had to begin learning like a child. I did not know what to do as a religious missionary priest. I felt lonely, lost, and without a clear description of what I was expected to do. More than once, I asked myself, “why did I come to join this province?”

The situation became worse when my colleague decided to return to India as he could not find a ministry meaningful to him. To be frank, I felt that I did very little that fit my understanding of what a missionary does. I did ‘work’ like cooking and cleaning, the laundry, and other housework that in India was not regarded as important.

Gradually I learned that the missionary challenges in Europe are not the same as those in my home country. I began to feel that being a missionary meant being close to the people, especially the poor, the strangers, and faith seekers. It mean listening to them and sharing their concerns. Gradually, I began to value the new missionary challenges and I learned to appreciate the missionary apostolate of presence.

My perseverance and prayer helped me to survive the new challenges and adapt to the highly secularized society, where the churches are old and gray like the few people in them. I missed many things from my old life—working with the youth, the music, singing, and the lively liturgies. But I took time to study and read, to analyze the situation, and to understand the people. Seeing things from their perspective and walking in their shoes helped me understand the Incarnation.

I learned that being a missionary religious priest in secular society means you are there for the people “from the kitchen to the altar.” During my integration into Dutch society, I became aware that the Netherlands had become a “test laboratory” for the future church in Europe. I found the various initiatives within and outside the church compelling. I participated in various activities and missionary movements and joined secular organizations. Slowly and steadily, I discovered interreligious dialogue, ecumenical services, and diaconal work. I got involved in the international student chaplaincy work at universities. In all of this, the SVD community supported me. Eventually, I became active in the International Student Chaplaincy, which is a true intercultural community of more than 45 nationalities.

I now have an Episcopal appointment to serve the intercultural students ministry of the Parish of St. Catherina of Alexandria. I serve the intercultural and international students at the Institute



Avin Kunnekkadan with Catholic international student community.

of Social Studies), the Institute for Water Management, and Delft University of Technology in The Hague and Erasmus University in Rotterdam. As an international student pastor, I developed contacts with students of different religions, cultures, and nationalities. The actual program of chaplaincy consists of Sunday services, Bible study, ecumenical services, interreligious dialogue and meetings, spiritual counselling, and visiting students. My work with students involves encounters with Dutch culture and society, art and creative expressions, trips to spiritual and cultural centers in Europe, weekend and annual retreats, meditation and yoga, and national and local conferences.

My work is intercultural and often inter-religious in nature. In church services, we sing songs in many languages and follow different church traditions. I help them to see the importance of different ways of life, other ways of thinking, and other ways of believing. We engage in fruitful discussions about such issues as population growth, the one-child policy in China, marriage in the 21st century, female genital mutilation, euthanasia, gay issues, and marriage. In the Interfaith Sharing Group, we talk about Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt, faith and science, religion and technological advancement, and living with or with-

out religion. This is true intercultural mission and I am proud to be part of what will soon become a model for mission work everywhere in the 21st century.

## **2.9 The SVD and the Media Ministry: The Challenge of the Digital World**

**2.9.1 Insights:** The SVD, due to its name and because of its mission to get the word out about the Word, has from its beginning used the available media to reach out to individuals and communities of different cultural and religious backgrounds. Arnold Janssen was one of the early promoters of the Catholic press and media apostolate and initiated several magazines, such as the “Kleiner Herz Jesu Bote” (Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart of Jesus) and the “Stadt Gottes” (City of God). The Congregation for Religious, in its decree approving the SVD Constitutions, acknowledges that “[t]he founder saw in the printed word a powerful means for evangelization, and his sons wish to follow him in this by utilizing the various communicatins media in the service of spreading and deepennng the faith and of making the whole church aware of its missionary task,” In addition to various print media, many provinces ventured into other media, such as producing sets of slides on various themes, radio programs, and video documentaries. During the last few years, the world of mass media has dramatically changed across the globe. Only hyperboles like “media explosion” or “media revolution” are adequate to describe the dynamic technological developments in the print and electronic media, and the effect of these new modes and patterns of communcation on the human experience and cultures. As never before, newspapers, magazines, comics, movies, radio, and television inundate us with messages and images. Far more than just providing entertainment and news, the media influence events and ideas, determine tastes and choices, and establish cultural beliefs

and practices that influence many. Following our founder's emphasis on evangelizing through media, our intercultural mission needs to establish a presence in the currently influential media that both represent and shape various sub-cultures with which our mission needs to engage. Mike Manning shares his experience with various media and inspires us to identify where we live and minister the media relevant to the people we serve and want to reach.

**2.9.2 Storyteller:** Following his ordination at Techny Illinois, Mike Manning (mikesvd@aol.com) has worked in the Western U.S. Province as high school teacher, vocation director for Divine Word College in Epworth, Provincial, pastor of a Parish, and then many years working in mass media. He has an STB in theology and an MFA in theater. At present, he lives in San Bernardino, United States.

**2.9.3 Story:** If Jesus were walking our world today, given the digital revolution, where would he be and what would he do or say? I believe he would be in Hollywood as a member of the Writers' Guild, anxious to tell his stories to as many people as possible. This is in line with both Matthew's and Mark's statements that whenever Jesus was talking to crowds of people, other than the private sharing with his disciples, he only told stories. The Apostle Matthew writes that "[a]ll these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables. He spoke to them only in parables." Of course, we would also find him worshiping his Father in churches, synagogues, and mosques. He'd spend a lot of time on skid row with the homeless and immigrants. He'd be a frequent visitor to hospitals and mental institutions. Oh, yes, and he'd be known to local prostitutes. But then, we don't have to imagine Jesus being transposed to our present world. If Saint Paul's contention is true, we who are the Body of Christ are the actual presence of Jesus in our world today.

My beat as an SVD priest in Southern California has been the media world. With the image of Jesus wanting to reach many people with his message, I have tried to use both religious and secular media outlets to make Jesus present. During the past 40 years, I've done thousands of TV interviews with people of faith. I've taught an equal number of Bible lessons relating Scripture to the challenge of Christian living. I've aired weekly programs on the worldwide Trinity Broadcasting Network, Mother Angelica's Eternal Word Television Network, and the short-lived Heart of the Nation Network. I've worked with Protestant evangelists who aired programs on the United States television channels NBC and CBS. For nine years, I was a monthly participant in an inter-religious dialogue on KABC, a radio station in Los Angeles, called "Religion on the Line," which brought together a priest, a minister, and a rabbi to answer any and all questions posed by callers for two hours on Sunday evenings. More recently, I worked with a rabbi and an imam to do nine ten-minute interactions on relevant topics for YouTube.

I've been able to bring a Christian dimension to issues that arise by being a guest on the international cable news networks. I was a guest with Larry King on CNN 22 times. I've gotten my two cents in with Nancy Grace about five times on CNN's HLN Network. When Pope Francis came to the United States, I had a three-day slot on the Fox Business Channel. Films, television programs, and commercials are influencing millions of people. In line with Pope Francis's call for priests to "smell like the sheep," I've become a member of the Screen Actors' Guild. I've gone on quite a few auditions for films. A couple of them involved parts for priest. For some reason, I never seem to be priestly enough! I'm developing the art of being rejected. However, I did land a commercial for Hormel Pepperoni.

I share all of this not as a statement of pride or a desire to bolster my insecurities. My hope is that you, my fellow missionaries, will risk saying “yes” when the inspiration and opportunities arise to share your faith and love for Jesus in the world of mass media, along with your vitally important presence in the pulpit and classroom talking to live audiences.

Seek out educational possibility both in workshops and in higher education. When I started in media, being present was an arduous and involved process. Today, with YouTube, Facebook, apps, and even six-second “Vines,” a service to share short videos, you can connect with vast audiences. With “Periscope,” a video livestreaming app, you can present a live program to the world without charge by talking into the camera on your iPhone, Android, or iPad. Don’t be afraid to think big. I’ve got to believe that the Holy Spirit will open wide doors for sharing the Good News if we have the courage to say “yes.” I think Jesus’s parable of the farmer throwing seeds (Mark 4:26) was directed to his discouraged disciples whom he had sent out to preach, heal, cast out Satan, and tell stories. He wanted to encourage them that, despite three out of four failures, the one fruitful seed would be multiplied 30-, 60-, and 100-fold.

## **2.10 Christian Mission in the Postmodern World**

**2.10.1 Insights:** Modernity, a view of life characterized by a high level of confidence in the power of human reason, is today being rejected by many across the globe and a new way of thinking is emerging, which has been called post-modernity, which characterizes the way of life and faith of many individuals and communities. For post-modernity, there are no grand, objective narratives that provide a comprehensive explanation of reality, and confidence in the exercise of pure reason has been shaken. Further, post-modern thinking has a profound distrust of au-

thority; particular suspicion is directed toward hierarchical and authoritarian structures and organizations. Post-modernism also implies that no point of view is superior to any other. Each individual is free to choose and pick a worldview and a way of life according to his or her own tastes and interests. Recognition of plurality is essential to the post-modern vision. Many cultural, linguistic, political, religious, and other options exist simultaneously and each individual can choose the understanding of things and the way of life preferred at the moment. There is no such thing as an objective view. The pervasive influence of post-modern thinking permeates whole cultures and shapes the way people understand themselves and their lives. Christianity and our mission are, subsequently, regarded with suspicion because of our belief in the existence of absolute truth and the confidence that it is found in Christ. The question for us is how we can engage with the post-modern world, identifying differences but also common concerns. While there are clear points of dissonance between our mission and post-modernity, we can recognize constructive challenges of post-modernity, which reminds us of the uncertainty and provisionality about absolute truths that are seen in the Bible; for example, when the Apostle Paul says that “[f]or now we see in a mirror dimly.” Similarly, post-modern distrust of authority has its match in the Biblical tradition. Sebastian Maria Michael’s story presents a particular case of our intercultural mission with the post-modern world.

**2.10.2 Storyteller:** S.M. Michael (smmichael2000@hotmail.com) is the Director of Ishvani Kendra, Pune. He is Professor Emeritus of Cultural Anthropology and the University of Mumbai. At present he is the SVD ASIA Pacific (ASPAC) Zonal Coordinator of the Society of the Divine Word.

**2.10.3 Story:** Ishvani Kendra is a National Institute of Missiology and Communications of the Society of the Divine Word lo-

cated in Pune, in the state of Maharashtra, India. It was founded in 1978 by Fr. Engelbert Zeitler, SVD, one of the great pioneers of the SVD mission in India. I have been associated with this Institute from its very inception and am currently its Director. It organizes animation courses in mission and engages itself in research in Missiology, taking into consideration the contemporary socio-political situations in India and the world. The participants who come for our animation courses are mainly priests, religious sisters and brothers, and a few lay persons from India and abroad. One of the things I come across with the participants is that they are strongly influenced by a post-modern thinking and relativizing the Christian mission, leading to a lack of commitment to the mission of the Church in the world today. We realize that today the Christian message is sandwiched between the forces of globalization and post-modern ideas of relativism. Influenced by relativistic thought, many believe that all religions are the same and we should not compare and make value judgments about other religions. To hold that any religion is intrinsically as good as others seems somehow wrong and incompatible with our faith and mission. Post-modern relativism leads to ambiguity, confusion, and lack of commitment to an ideal. This is what is happening to many religious in India, including many participants in programs offered at Ishvani Kendra.

The relativist and post-modern ideas are confirmed and further enhanced by the Hindu Advaitic tradition that considers that reality is One and that many religions give different names to address this reality. Hence, essentially all religions are the same, leading to the One ultimate reality. This conception is expressed in the following analogy. "As all rivers run to the same ocean, so do all religions take to the One Reality." There are different paths leading to the same destiny. Thus, Hindu Advaitic tradition relativizes Christianity as one of the religions among many

religions. This conception leads to consideration of Jesus as one of the *Avatars*, or incarnations, among many *Avatars* of the ultimate. This leads us to understand Jesus as one among many gods in the Hindu pantheon. These ideas influence a good number of missionaries in India and subsequently affect the mission in India, leading to a reduced commitment to Christian mission.

During my animation courses at Ishvani Kendra, I take up this post-modern and relativist problem in my classes. Although the term 'god' is used by different religions, it seldom denotes the same meaning. For example, the moral and ethical implications of the concept of god in Hinduism and in Christianity are widely different. The Christian concept of God implies a certain moral and ethical attitude that is basically different from a Hindu ethical understanding. Untouchability and rebirth are justified in Brahmanical Hinduism on the basis of its philosophical ideas of *karma* (action), *dharma* (duties), and *punerjanma* (rebirth). According to Hinduism, the present birth in a particular caste is a consequence of one's previous *karma*. The present *karma* will influence the future *punerjanma*. Hence, in order to be born in a better status of a higher caste, one has to perform his/her *dharma* according to one's present caste status. This implies that an untouchable in the present birth must not aspire or question his/her *dharma* and perform the menial jobs like cleaning lavatories, removing dead cattle, taking the message of the dead to the relatives, etc., without questioning as his/her *dharma*. This understanding of *karma*, *dharma*, and *punerjanma* gives privilege to the upper caste and undermines the status and dignity of the untouchable caste. Such an understanding is unacceptable to Christianity.

Hence, I stress the urgent need to go beyond post-modern relativism in Christian mission. To demonstrate this, I make the following comparison to highlight the limitations of the post-mod-

ern and relativistic understanding of Jesus in Christian mission. I tell them that I am coming from a town known as Madurai in the state of Tamilnadu in India. This town is built on the banks of the river Vaigai, which has water for only about three months in a year. The rest of the time it is almost dry. The rivers like Ganges and Brahmaputra, on the other hand, are perennial rivers having a steady flow of water throughout the year. The question is, though all the three are rivers, are they the same in their nature and quality? Can we compare Ganges and Brahmaputra with Vaigai? Hence, we cannot agree to the Hindu understanding that *“As all rivers run to the same ocean, so does all religions taking to the One Reality.”* It would mean that if I am in the perennial rivers like Ganges and Brahmaputra, my destination to the ocean would qualitatively be different from my being in Vaigai. This would imply that the nature and quality of religions differ from each other.

There are a few theologians who are averse to considering “Jesus as the unique Saviour.” They are of the opinion that this claim of Christianity will offend other religious groups. I respond to this question by saying that we all are unique in our own way, but we differ in our identity, quality, worth, and value. Thus, Buddha, Mahavira, and Jesus are unique, but the nature, quality, and worth of this uniqueness differ from each other. The uniqueness of Buddha is his enlightened teaching on the importance of silence, his insights into the nature of life as passing, and attachment and giving into desires leads to suffering; these are important and valuable contribution to the whole of humanity. Buddha is a great teacher. Similarly, Mahavira stressed the importance of non-violence for the good of humanity. Jesus is also unique. But his uniqueness consists of not only his life, teachings, and miracles, but also of his suffering, death, and resurrection. Jesus’ death and resurrection stand out as unique. His death and resurrection are the ultimate proof of his identity as divine, marking his quality, worth, and

value. If Christianity wants to remain relevant today, it must re-discover its foundation. It needs to dialogue with the present post-modern world with two-fold attitudes: it is a challenge to openness, but also a challenge to orthodoxy. Living in a post-modern world that does not believe in any absolute truth, we must rediscover the historical roots and foundations of Christianity. Often-times, participants in programs offered at Ishvani Kendra realize that a relativistic and post-modern understanding of Christianity is problematic and we need to develop a deeper understanding of the complexity of religions and cultures in light of our Christian mission to a culturally diverse world.

## **2.11 The Role of Social Media in Our Contemporary Mission**

**2.11.1 Insights:** Today, news travels fast. Not only does it travel faster than ever before, news has found new and innovative platforms to do so. This is most evident in the emergence of several social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. If we want the Good News to travel fast too, we need to find ways to identify the social media relevant to those we serve and to reach out to individuals and communities that otherwise would not hear the Good News. This is the more urgent as these media alter, particularly among younger generations across the globe, the way people interact, share information, and connect. A cultural shift is happening as increasing numbers of individuals integrate social networking tools into their lives. Their world is expanding and narrowing at the same time. They are more connected than ever and multi-way exchanges of ideas and opinions are becoming more common. Research indicates that they are not only more involved with family and friends, but they also have increased their involvement in political and humanitarian issues. At the same time, there is evidence that social media tend to connect people of similar mind- and value-sets but that there

is also a reduced tendency to hear voices and views that are different from our own views and values. Social media have become part of our culture, particularly among some groups, and it is important for our intercultural mission to participate in this culture. Adam McDonald's story illustrates how important social media are to reach young people in developed nations. However, evidence suggests that similar patterns are also emerging in other parts of the world.

**2.11.2 Storyteller:** After his ordination in Lansing, Michigan, in June 2000, Adam McDonald (adamsvd@yahoo.com) served in parish ministry in the Philippines before returning to the United States to serve in various administrative capacities at both the local and province levels. He currently serves as Vocation Director and Vice-Provincial Superior of the SVD Chicago Province.



Adam McDonald with vocation promoters from other religious communities.

**2.11.3 Story:** I first became an intermittent and reluctant user of Facebook around November 2008. The only reason I opened an account was the pressure I was receiving from family and friends who wanted to keep in touch. Almost as soon as I opened my account, I started getting complaints that I was not updating or posting on my page. To be quite honest, I just didn't get the

whole concept of being constantly “plugged in,” of reading the minutiae that people post, and of chatting online with my next-door neighbor rather than simply knocking on his door.

Fast forward to September 2011. I was sitting in the dining room after Mass one morning at Divine Word College enjoying a cup of coffee when a seminarian asked me how things were going with my ministry in the Vocation Office. I immediately expressed frustration at the fact that, in spite of repeated phone calls and emails, I was having trouble securing responses from the numerous young men who’d requested information or had otherwise been referred to our office. The seminarian with whom I was speaking looked at me with suspicion as he asked why I was calling those young people. He went on to tell me that if I wanted to reach young people today I needed to meet them where they’re at—I needed to connect with them on Facebook.

I must admit I was a little more than skeptical! With all of my calls and emails to these young people, I already felt like I was stalking them. But one day, I finally decided to give it a try. There was a certain young man whom I’d been trying to reach and whom I considered a “hot prospect” for an SVD vocation. He’d already visited Divine Word College as a high school junior, but now he was a senior and I wanted to make sure to keep the momentum going so he might consider enrolling the following year.

I’d been calling and emailing the young man repeatedly for about six weeks, but I’d never heard back. I’d left messages on his voicemail, I’d spoken with his mom, and I think I even spoke with his dog at some point, but still no luck. So what did I do? I sent him a private message and “friend” request on Facebook. And would you believe it?! Not five minutes later I had a response; the young man accepted my request to connect, and two weeks later I was

visiting with the young man and his mother in Louisiana. Needless to say, I quickly became a believer—I was converted!

From that point forward, I began to employ Facebook as an essential tool in my ministry. And over the course of the past four years of service on the SVD Vocations Team in North America, my use of social media has expanded beyond Facebook to include the regular use of Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. In addition, tools like Viber and Skype have become useful for their free instant messaging and video chat capabilities!

Although I have not altogether abandoned the “traditional” communication methods of phone, email, and the occasional handwritten note, at present I estimate that some form of social media plays a role in my ongoing communication with at least 80–90% of potential candidates to our SVD community. I don’t have any concrete data to point to how cultural differences factor into the type, frequency, or variety of social media platforms I employ in my ministry, but I’ve definitely observed some general trends.

First, the younger the potential candidate, the more likely that our communication will involve the use of a wider cross-section of social media platforms, as opposed to one single channel of communication. Second, the older the candidate, the greater propensity to desire the use of social media platforms that allow for video chat, such as Viber, Skype, or Facebook Messenger. Third, regardless of cultural background, text messaging accounts for a surprisingly large portion of the communication I have with potential candidates on an ongoing basis. Fourth, in very general terms, I tend to notice that candidates of Asian heritage are more likely to post pictures showing them gathering at celebrations where food is involved or where they are actively engaged in an act of service to another, whereas candidates of African descent seem more likely to post images

and text relating to the teachings of the Church, theological doctrine, and religious men and women donning clerical and/or religious garb, while candidates of Hispanic and/or Latino origin are more likely to share posts related to issues of social justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

The importance and prevalence of social media as an essential resource in the Vocation Directors' toolbox is indisputable. But what's also clear is that, no matter how much of the initial and ongoing communication with a particular candidate may occur using social media, in no way does this replace or supersede the importance of personal, face-to-face contact. In this sense, it should be pointed out that often the most effective use of social media in Vocations Ministry is at the outset of the process of discerning with a potential SVD candidate.

Being available across a wide variety of social media platforms to young people who are discerning is an important and invaluable way of making connections and starting the conversation, but all of these efforts in social media are aimed at directing the conversation toward a personal encounter through a home visit with the candidate and his family and eventually a "Come and See" visit to the SVD community.

Sometimes it's hard to believe just how far I've come in terms of embracing the use of social media given my reluctant beginnings back in 2008, but having realized its effectiveness for promoting the religious missionary vocation across cultures, it'll no doubt play a big part in my future!

## **2.12 Cultural Differences Regarding Roles for Men and Women: Are Women Allowed to Become Catechists?**

**2.12.1 Insights:** Humans are sexually dimorphic, which means that there are differences in the male and female biology. The

question is just how far do such physiological differences go, and what effects do they have on the ways men and women act and are treated in different societies? A review of cultures across time and space indicates that many behavioral differences between the two sexes emerge from culture rather than biology. Culture assigns to males and females and inculcates in them what is expected from them, what they should think and feel, and how they should behave. In other words, culture assigns tasks and activities by gender. Often, there is an unequal distribution of rewards between men and women, reflecting their different positions in the social hierarchy; in many societies, there are major gaps between men and women in areas such as economic opportunities, educational achievements, health, and political empowerment. However, as cultures change, understandings of gender also change. In our intercultural mission, we have to recognize differences in how the people we serve understand the roles of men and women. We need to respect their understanding of the two or more genders—several cultural groups know more than just two genders—and we need to pray and reflect over the Biblical understanding of the role of men and women in society and in the Church. Furthermore, as we determine what to do in a specific case, we have to analyze the implications of our decisions in light of Catholic Social Teaching and its emphasis on social justice and equity for all—for all women and men. Adriana Milmada's story highlights important themes related to this central aspect of our intercultural mission.

**2.12.2 Storyteller:** Adriana Milmada (adrianassps@hotmail.com) is a Missionary Sister of the Holy Spirit from Argentina. Her first overseas assignment was to Oceania, after which she earned a Master's Degree in Intercultural Ministry at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. She now lives in a disadvantaged area of the city of Bariloche, Argentina, where she accompanies young religious sisters in the province.

**2.12.3 Story:** Sharing my faith with people from different cultures and faiths had been a cherished dream long before I joined the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters. After years of formation and working as a pastoral minister in my own country, my dream came true and I was appointed to the mission in Fiji. As soon as I arrived in this island nation, I fell in love with the tropical and exuberant landscape, the friendliness of the people, and the relaxed way of life. Not being able to understand the local language, I concentrated on observing carefully what was going on around me. The Sunday Eucharist was one of the most enjoyable times to do so as I learned to pray beyond words and fixed formulas. The singing was amazing, the reverent silence of adults and children alike was inspiring, and the attendance of many entire families was, to me, a beautiful experience. However, after a few Sundays, I sensed that something made me feeling uneasy. Initially, I was not able to identify what it was. I just felt that there was something missing from the scene in front of me during Mass. After some time of diligent observation, it dawned on me that all the catechists taking part in the liturgy were male. It did not matter what village they came from, Sunday after Sunday all of them were male.

What was the role of the catechists? They were the ones leading the groups that took turns to take part in the celebrations. They were the ones addressing the community before and after the Eucharist. They would organize things at the altar and coordinated the altar boys. They were the ones identifying the villagers to do the readings and the offertory procession. They would also distribute communion. If the priest was unable to come for Mass, the catechist would lead the celebration of the Word. This was the complete opposite to what I was used to. There were no altar girls, no female Eucharistic ministers, no female catechists, and no women at the altar. Women were totally absent from this “picture” I was observing!

After some time, the opportunity arose to engage in a dialogue with one of the catechists whom I had come to know and trust. I carefully asked him why there were no female catechists in any of the villages with which I was in contact. To my surprise, he was truly shocked by my question. God does not allow women to become catechists, he answered, full of conviction. I could see that he felt awkward but he explained to me that in our Catholic Church, women are forbidden from becoming catechists as they are forbidden from being ordained as priests. Knowing that I was a religious sister, he was surprised at my ignorance of what he held as an obvious and general practice. I respectfully pressed on with another question. What would happen if a woman feels God's call to become a catechist or has the charism for teaching or leading a celebration? He was an insightful and profound man. After taking some time to ponder my question, he replied to me: If there was such a woman, she would have two options. If her husband is a catechist, she should support him with all her talents so he would do his best for the community entrusted to him. In case he is not a catechist, she could pray with confidence to God and support her husband in everything he does so he would become one. When I eventually told him that, in the country I was coming from, ninety-five percent of the catechists ministering in parishes were women, he was completely astounded. So was I observing the realities in the church in Fiji. Particularly, as I began to understand that the respective roles for women and men were more clearly separated and delineated in Fiji than in my own culture. There were differences and inequalities in their work, responsibilities, rights and duties, and opportunities, or lack of them, and this was part of their everyday life.

This encounter with the culture in Fiji has helped me to open my eyes to the varying understandings of gender in different cultures. While sex is biologically determined, what it means to be

a woman or a man varies from culture to culture. The spheres of women and men are separated to a greater or lesser extent in all societies. However, as Sarah Grimké put it, they “are mere arbitrary opinions . . . dependent solely on the will and judgement of erring mortals.” In our male-dominated world, however, we can see across cultures and countries how most of these “arbitrary opinions” have resulted in the silencing, discrimination, oppression, and even violence against women.

So, are women allowed to become catechists in the Catholic Church? Understandings, practices, and policies differ from country to country. Yet, this is not the crux of the matter. The key issue is the theological and philosophical foundations in which we base these practices. What kind of faith are we confessing when we ascribe to God a mere human decision? We are forced to ask, in a world where inequality, abuse, and the feminization of poverty are constantly rising, how do our practices within our own communities affect women’s sense of worth and dignity? How do our relationships between women and men reflect the all-inclusive and egalitarian mission of Jesus? What image of God do they portray? Let us remember that one of the first confessions of faith witnessed by the Galatians states: “There is neither



Painting of the Trinity by Maximiliano Cerezo Barredo, named “Trinidad Sao Flix”.

Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).

Our intercultural life and mission provides us with a privileged space in which we can discern the blind spots

that each and every culture has in regard to gender justice. There is no universal role that defines women or men. Intercultural life and mission, thus, challenges us to revisit cultural and religious teachings and practices with critical eyes and open hearts. The patriarchal values, which have influenced so many of our beliefs, theologies, and ministerial decisions, have led us to stray from God's ways. Only when women and men are free to become who they really are, making use of their talents and gifts within our church, will we then witness the fuller vision and life that God wants for all of us.

## **2.13 Leadership and Social and Cultural Diversity: "What would Jesus do?"**

**2.13.1 Insights:** Leadership takes different forms in different cultures. High power distance (HPD) cultures are hierarchical, whereas low power distance (LPD) cultures are egalitarian in outlook. In this story, Tim Norton wishes to try out in Mexico (HPD) a hospitality ministry to gangs that was successful with street people in Australia (LSD). Against his expectations it was successful, but not without a lot of guesswork, serious risks, high hopes, and many adjustments. At first, the parish youth group wanted it, but councilors didn't. They feared contamination of their youth—the good polluted by the bad. Individual-centric societies can mix freely without betraying allegiance to a group, but not in group-centric societies. In Mexico, social interaction is not based on individual choice, as it is in Australia, but on many other factors, and pollution by proximity is a real fear. Tim Norton persisted, but the resistance of the council was finally broken by an appeal from the youth, "What would Jesus do?" They were shamed into compliance but made sure that "elders" went with the children on the project. Here, HPD features again. Authority/power is hierarchical and the presence of elders and

a priest along with the youth guaranteed at least a hearing and some respect with the gangs. The masculine/feminine cultural issue also undermined the project. Feminine cultures are even-handed, selfless, altruistic, and generous. They stress “womanly” qualities like nurturing, love, and acceptance. It is a stretch for a Mexican council (whether men or women) to show too many attributes of a feminine culture. Nor would this be accepted by the very masculine culture of the gangs, who stress “manly” qualities like strength, assertiveness, resistance, power, and control. But, despite their fears, they went ahead. A positive outcome was assured when the “padrecito” was recognized and embraced in each of the gangs. The offering of food and coffee gained their trust and then mutual respect was shown. The Gospel is always counter-cultural, calling us to God’s Trinitarian culture, which is beyond anything we know here. We can only take one step at a time toward this, always relying on what we know as we proceed in fearful hope into the unknown.

**2.13.2 Storyteller:** After working as a physiotherapist for two years after completing university training in this profession, Tim Norton ([nemi.director@tiscali.it](mailto:nemi.director@tiscali.it)) joined the Society of the Divine Word. He worked in parish ministry in Mexico for seven years, prior to returning to Australia to minister in formation and province leadership. He is presently the Director of SVD Courses in Nemi, Italy.

**2.13.3. Story:** For five years, I lived and worked as a parish priest in Mexico City in a densely populated *barrio* of people who migrated from rural areas in search of work and educational opportunities for their families. Like all big cities in the world, Mexico City has its share of social challenges, one of them being gang activity. Groups of boys and young men would congregate on street corners of the parish for companionship. Gangs became possessive of their space and resented members of other gangs ‘tres-

passing' after dark. Cheap inhalants, such as paint thinner and glue, were passed around and guns were carried in plain sight to keep others away. Most people were reluctant to attend evening meetings or celebrations in the parish due to the perceived and real danger from the gangs.

Within a period of two months, I led four separate funerals for youths under 16 years of age who had been shot to death as a result of gang-related violence. At the fourth funeral, I wept bitterly with the parents and friends of the dead youth, lamenting fiercely the fact that we were unable to stop our young people from killing each other.

After the funeral, some parish youth group members asked what we could do to stop the street violence that was claiming the lives of their school-friends. I told them of a team activity I was involved in as a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. We visited the homeless on the streets of Sydney at night offering coffee, sandwiches, and company.

The youth group members became very excited about this idea and wanted to try it. I responded that ideas that work in one place are unlikely to work in another place due to differences in cultural circumstances. They insisted that 'café y tortas' (coffee and Mexican sandwiches) would be a wonderful way to encounter the gangs at night. I said that we could try this only with the permission of the newly formed parish council.

I presented a case for 'Pastoral Activity with Gangs' on behalf of the youth group to the parish council, who responded that they were unwilling to expose their fine young people, *los buenos*, or their pastor to those dangerous gangs, *los malos*. The short answer was 'no.' I reported back to the youth group, who only pleaded that I try again. At the next monthly meeting, I was giv-

en the same respectful response. When I reported back to the youth group members, one fifteen-year-old boy, using some of our catechetical dynamics, said ‘*que haría Jesús*’ or what would Jesus do? One month later, he accompanied me to the next parish council meeting and, with knees shaking, he said ‘*que haría Jesús?*’ There was an initial silence from the councillors, followed by a tacit agreement to allow the ministry to proceed, with the condition that adult parishioners also participate. I was delighted, as were the members of the youth group.

We met at 10:00 pm on a Friday night in the Parish Church—six members of the youth group, three male Cursillistas with a large vat of hot coffee on a tricycle, three female members of the Legion of Mary with 75 tortas, and me. We prayed together, then left the church for the streets. On the first street corner, we saw a group of young men under a street light listening to rock music and swaying in a rhythm that indicated their heavy use of inhalants. Two of them raised guns from their pockets as they became aware of us. As we approached them, I realised that I was alone. I turned to find all my companions under a street light a long distance behind me. I called out to them to join me. They replied that they were scared. I agreed that this was frightening for all of us, but that we had agreed to do this only if we did it together. So they slowly joined me and we went up to the young men with hearts beating quickly in our chests.

One of the young men recognized me and called out ‘*padrecito!*’, Father. He ran to me and gave me an *abrazo*, a hug. All the others did the same—and seemed genuinely pleased to see me. As coffee was poured and sandwiches were offered, the guns disappeared and conversation began to flow. We stayed about 15 minutes with the young men, during which time they warned us of the danger of the other gangs.

Emboldened by the warm welcome we had received, we moved on. Within three blocks we met the next gang, similar to the first. Again I was immediately recognized and was shown respect and genuine affection with *abrazos* from all the young men, although I knew none of them personally. That night we met and shared coffee, sandwiches, and conversations with seven different gangs. The young men said they knew me because I had been active sacramentally with their relatives in first communions, funerals, masses for fifteen year-old girls, weddings, and so on. "Besides" they said "you are the only old, bald white man who rides around the barrio on a bicycle!"

This joint pastoral venture continued for some years. There were regular masses celebrated in the streets, with gang members promising to leave behind the drugs and the violence. It may sound like a fictitious tale, but the streets became safe again at night, which enabled the various parish groups to meet without concern. Surely some of the young men continued to use drugs, but the majority embraced a sense of collective relief that they no longer had to prove themselves to each other as they had been doing in the gangs.

The story has several meanings associated with intercultural leadership. First, the parish council consisted of members with diverse personalities who worked together to make effective decisions on behalf of the parish. Second, two different generational groups, the youth group and the parish councillors, crossed their cultural divide by listening to each other, trusting one another, praying, and taking risks together. This resulted in creative and effective leadership on behalf of the parish. Third, young people from the same *barrio* with different family backgrounds, *los buenos* and *los malos*, reached deeper insight into their respective realities through the development of an intense desire by the youth group leaders to help the disadvantaged. Fourth, I initially believed that effective

ideas from one culture, in this case from Australia, could not be reproduced in another one, in this case Mexico, until I was convinced that ideas can be appropriately modified with significant effect by the people from the receiving culture.

## **2.14 Engaging with Academia**

**2.14.1 Insights:** The SVD Constitutions state that “[o]ur presence in an education institution aims at making it a place of evangelization where the word of God can be heard and its liberating power experienced in one’s personal and social life” (Con 109.3). As one of the main characteristics of culture is that culture is ‘learned’ by and ‘shared’ among its members, the shared patterns of understanding and approaching life and the world of those working in educational settings can be considered a sub-culture in the larger society. And this specific sub-culture can be a venue for evangelization, particularly if it has characteristics that are unfamiliar with and critical of, even opposed to faith, Church, and the liberating power of the Word of God. One way of evangelizing academia is by being an academic and working in academic settings, which makes it possible to engage with academics, school administrators, students, and others. However, agents of evangelization who are also academics can raise questions and concerns of academic integrity, particularly if missionaries are thought to be biased and engaged in proselytizing, which is considered by some to be opposed to basic principles of academic and scientific work. The resulting conversations and dialogue are a specific type of our intercultural mission, which affirms the harmony between reason and faith, builds bridges between both, and calls to be intellectually true to our faith and to academia and science. Alex Roedlach’s story is an example of such an approach that can be called “intellectual apostolate,” a classic Jesuit concept.

**2.14.2 Storyteller:** Following his ordination in St. Gabriel, Austria, Alex Rödlach (roedlach@creighton.edu) worked in Zimbabwe before studying cultural anthropology in Washington, DC, and Gainesville (USA), where he received his doctorate. He is Associate Professor in Medical Anthropology and Psychiatry at Creighton University in Omaha, United States.

**2.14.3 Story:** I am working at a Jesuit university in the American Midwest. Being a full-time faculty at my university includes (1) *teaching* (in my case, courses in medical anthropology and global health), (2) *scholarship* (meaning to conduct research, present at academic and professional conferences, and publish), and (3) *service* (for the department and the school through administrative and committee work, as well as for the larger community and the profession). Recently, I was elected member of the board of the Society for Medical Anthropology, a section under the American Anthropological Association. I frequently engage with students, faculty, and professionals beyond academic and professional activities, and often my core identity as a member of the Society of the Divine Word moves to the foreground when my engagement with them prompts me to share values nurtured by my faith, calling, and ministry in academic and professional settings.



Alex Rödlach with Béatrice Halsouet, a Canadian researcher, and a representative of the Bhutanese refugee community in Pittsburgh at an anthropology conference, discussing refugee resettlement issues.

I regularly attend academic conferences to present papers on my research. A few years ago, I participated in a panel with a Russian anthropologist working in Sweden. She did not know that I am a priest and I did not tell her. It didn't seem appropriate to mention it as the panel's participants did not engage with each other on a personal level. When we met again during the following year at a different conference, we had lunch together. During the meal, the conversation became personal and I mentioned that I am a priest. She looked at me with big eyes and asked how I can reconcile being religious and a representative of a church with being a social scientist. She even mentioned that I would have difficulties being taken seriously in Scandinavia, as many would simply assume that my faith and commitment to evangelization would introduce an unacceptable bias into my academic work. As we continued our conversation, she mentioned that she has had valuable experiences with a priest in Russia who provided spiritual guidance. However, her faith has withered over time and that she is currently not part of any faith community. We talked for a long time—far beyond midnight—about our faith experiences.

In many regards, she is like other academics I met: searching for purpose and meaning, trying to reconcile science and faith, and experiencing ambiguity between their faith and the often banal, trivial, and petty realities of belonging to a Church. Hopefully, my conversations with them positively contributed to their search for meaning, which ultimately is a search for God. However, sometimes I felt that for one reason or another invisible walls cropped up between me and them when they realized that I am a priest. Perhaps they had issues with faith and Church that made it difficult for them to engage with me; but perhaps it had nothing to do with the Church or me being a priest; it might be because of bad personal chemistry between us—we all know people who make us cringe because of some personality trait, perhaps because of my

appearance and behavior. Thus, whenever I sense invisible walls between colleagues and me, I reflect about what I did and said, and I ask the Lord to give me the right words for them.

I recall one incident when a fellow anthropologist greeted me humorously at a conference with “bless me, Father, for I have sinned,” introducing me to one of his friends, who looked critically at me. The conversations with this particular person focused on the shortcomings of the Church as an organization and with a hierarchy. Each topic raised by him seemed like another brick reinforcing the wall between him, me, and the Church. As it turned out, he was raised Catholic but had a bad experience at his parish and felt alienated by some moral teaching that was rigidly applied by the priests he met. Unfortunately, we could not engage in more meaningful conversation beyond just the priests’ sexual abuses and the systematic exclusion of some segments of society from the Church because of some moral teachings. Anything I mentioned seemed just to reinforce and raise the wall between us. Perhaps I was not the right person to engage with him in this conversation. Perhaps God had some other tool in mind to open the heart and mind of this person to faith. Perhaps he was not ready for a conversation about faith.

Overall, similar, conversations about faith occurred frequently at academic conferences and, with some individuals, a long-term spiritual engagement began. Of course, the academic sub-culture is not entirely opposed to faith. It is a diverse sub-culture, with many academics being active members of their faith communities. I remember participating during Easter at seder meals presided over by one of my mentors with a Jewish background, conversations with a Lutheran anthropologist engaged in her community, and even meetings with a colleague who is a follower of Wicca, which is part of contemporary paganism in the West.

The intellectual apostolate also includes current and prospective students. I sometimes say mass on campus for students, including a recent mass expressing solidarity with migrants and refugees. This is often the time when students in my classes who attend the mass realize that I am a priest and start asking questions about work, ministry, and the SVD. It is interesting to me that students compare me with the Jesuits on campus and occasionally express their impression, based on how they view me and my work, that SVDs seem to consider their ministry as a collective calling and a community enterprise, rather than an individual ministry and calling. I am glad that I give this impression, despite being the only SVD on campus, and it reminds me that our Constitutions say “we accomplish our missionary service in a fraternal community” (Con 105).

While communication with current and prospective students rarely reaches a deep personal level, I remember some incidents that became personal. As Director of the Graduate Program in Medical Anthropology, I regularly communicate with individuals who inquire about the program; such conversations occasionally move beyond just talking about the nuts and bolts of the program and become personal. Some time ago, I met several times with an applicant to our program who has worked for years in Malawi as a hospital administrator. As I had been a missionary in Zimbabwe, we had a lot to talk about, including our faith. He was not a Catholic and was critical of our faith and the Church as an institution. We occasionally communicated and, over time, our conversations moved from being focused on just describing who we were and what we do to more foundational questions of faith and life, how to comprehend human suffering in light of a loving and merciful God, and the response of the Church to such fundamental questions. After about a year, I got a phone call from him to let me know that he has decided to become a Catholic and to start this

process with a lengthy retreat. I don't know how much our conversations influenced his decision; it does not really matter; we are only pieces in a larger puzzle that is God's plan.

## **2.15 Evaluations in an Intercultural Formation Community**

**2.15.1 Insights:** Formation communities in many SVD provinces are culturally diverse, which represents challenges as well as opportunities. Research indicates that culturally diverse educational settings can improve critical thinking among all community members, raise their level of awareness and knowledge of cultural difference and similarity, challenge their ethnocentric assumptions, and increase intercultural skills across cultural differences. These are skills essential for missionaries! However, obtaining these skills does not automatically happen by itself, but requires that all members of culturally diverse communities actively and consciously reflect about their communication styles, the manner in which they understand and retain information, and social values that differ from culture to culture, to mention just a few central themes that vary significantly across cultures. The outcome of such self-reflection needs then to be made explicit and shared with other members in order to create an awareness of cultural diversity and how it can positively and negatively influence the formation community. If this is not done, opportunities for learning are missed, individuals may avoid each other, keeping a respectful distance, and can even withdraw into their own ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups, which then act as the primary community within the larger community. As our formation communities prepare our new members for intercultural living and mission, it is essential that they learn the skills to understand and respond to cultural similarities and differences. If they don't learn it during formation, it is unlikely that they and our communities will reach their potential in their intercultural living and mission, and it is likely that

we miss opportunities to be witnesses of the Word. Mark Weber's story is a reflection of some of the challenges experienced by culturally diverse formation communities.

**2.15.2 Storyteller:** Mark Weber (markedweber@gmail.com) is from the state of Iowa in the United States. His first mission assignment was to Ghana, where he served in parish, education, and formation ministries. Later, he worked in formation in the United States and was provincial of the Chicago Province. He is currently the General Secretary for Formation and Education for the SVD.

**2.15.3 Story:** One of the important aspects of the formation process is the evaluation aspect and voting for admission to vows. Constitution 513.3 notes that "Admission to vows has far-reaching consequences. Preliminary deliberations must be supported by prayer, marked by respect and understanding and carried through in honesty and good will. Every effort should be made to reach as objective a judgment as possible." Each person's *Relatio* records the voting for admission to vows by his peers and confreres in perpetual vows in the formation community, along with the individual votes of the formation director and local superior; a more extensive written evaluation by the formation director is also to be included.

In the North American post-novitiate formation program at Divine Word Theologate in Chicago, we would like the evaluation process to include dialogue and to be an exercise in speaking openly and honestly to each other. When I was on the formation team there throughout the 1990s, we had four to five "small communities" or formation groups of about ten *formandi*, each with a designated formator and under the overall guidance of the formation director, the prefect, and rector of the entire house. In each formation group, all peers and perpetually professed members of the group would write an evaluation of each person

applying for renewal of vows. Each applicant would also write a self-evaluation. All members of the formation group would receive copies of the evaluations, and then the group would meet to review each applicant. The applicant would first share his self-evaluation; this would be followed by the group members sharing their perceptions of the applicant.

This evaluation process, speaking face-to-face within a group setting to talk about the applicant's strengths as well as his need for growth as a religious missionary, had evolved in the context of the broader North American style of communication: direct, open, and to the point. In the egocentric dominant cultural context, the individual's honest opinion is valued more than continuous group harmony—indeed, confrontation and robust discussion are valued as a necessary step in communication leading to decision-making.

However, at that time, the majority of the *formandi* had no longer been born and raised in North America. The largest single cultural group was composed of men who had been born and spent their childhood in Vietnam. Other *formandi* came from China and Indonesia, as well as some from Africa, Europe, and Latin America. While the formation community at the time was incredibly diverse, with a predominance of men coming from more socio-centric or collectivistic cultural backgrounds, the formation team was composed of egocentric confreres all from North America of European (white) heritage.

When reading the peer evaluations from many of the Asian *formandi*, my first impression was that they didn't really say anything and were totally useless. While it was obvious to me that a certain confrere in formation really needed to become more responsible in doing his assigned community job of keeping the stairwell clean and tidy, this was not even mentioned in his peers' written

or verbal evaluations. I had to learn to “read between the lines,” noting what was not said as well as what was said. I had to learn to understand coded language—that when reading a passage such as: “his community job is cleaning the stairwell,” this is not just stating a fact, but perhaps implying that he is not really doing it. I needed to grow in understanding that direct confrontation of a student might be acceptable coming from a formator, a superior, or an elder, but it was not appropriate coming from one’s peer.

In the evaluation group meetings, I had to learn to be more sensitive to the need to speak in ways that preserved a sense of harmony in the group. Any observation made to suggest the need for a change in the person’s behavior had to be gently stated in a way that allowed him to “save face”—e.g., acknowledging that the hard work he was doing in studies must make it difficult for him to find time to clean the stairwell. I had to be attentive to very subtle comments made by his peers, and not expect the direct, sometimes brutally honest communication I sometimes thought was needed.

In the process and over the years, the *formandi* also developed greater intercultural communication skills, learning to recognize that communicating in more direct ways, which might be offensive within their own culture, is sometimes appropriate and necessary in an intercultural setting.

As formators, we had to help one another better understand this important dimension of communicating across cultures, and with the help of a truly bi-cultural Vietnamese woman who became a trusted advisor to us, we all learned to appreciate the way communication, both written and oral, is shaped by our cultural background. In an intercultural formation program, the essential component of evaluation for admission to vows can only be effective when we grow in our intercultural communication skills.

What initially looks like a green light could prove to be a red flag.  
What initially seems like someone's inability to speak clearly or  
inability to speak politely and harmoniously sometimes might be  
my own inability to listen with intercultural ears!



### III.

## Engaging With Others in Intercultural Spaces: Lessons Learned from the First Interculturality Workshop in Nemi

**3.1 Introduction:** Danica Rush, a graduate student in medical anthropology at Creighton University and a registered nurse in Canada, analyzed stories from participants at the 2015 Interculturality Workshop in Nemi. The participants were asked to share a personal story of their experience that was particularly meaningful and significant with regard to their intercultural life and mission. The stories were video-recorded and can be downloaded from the internet by copying the URLs below into a web browser and using the following password to log into Vimeo: Nemi2015. These are the storytellers and their stories:

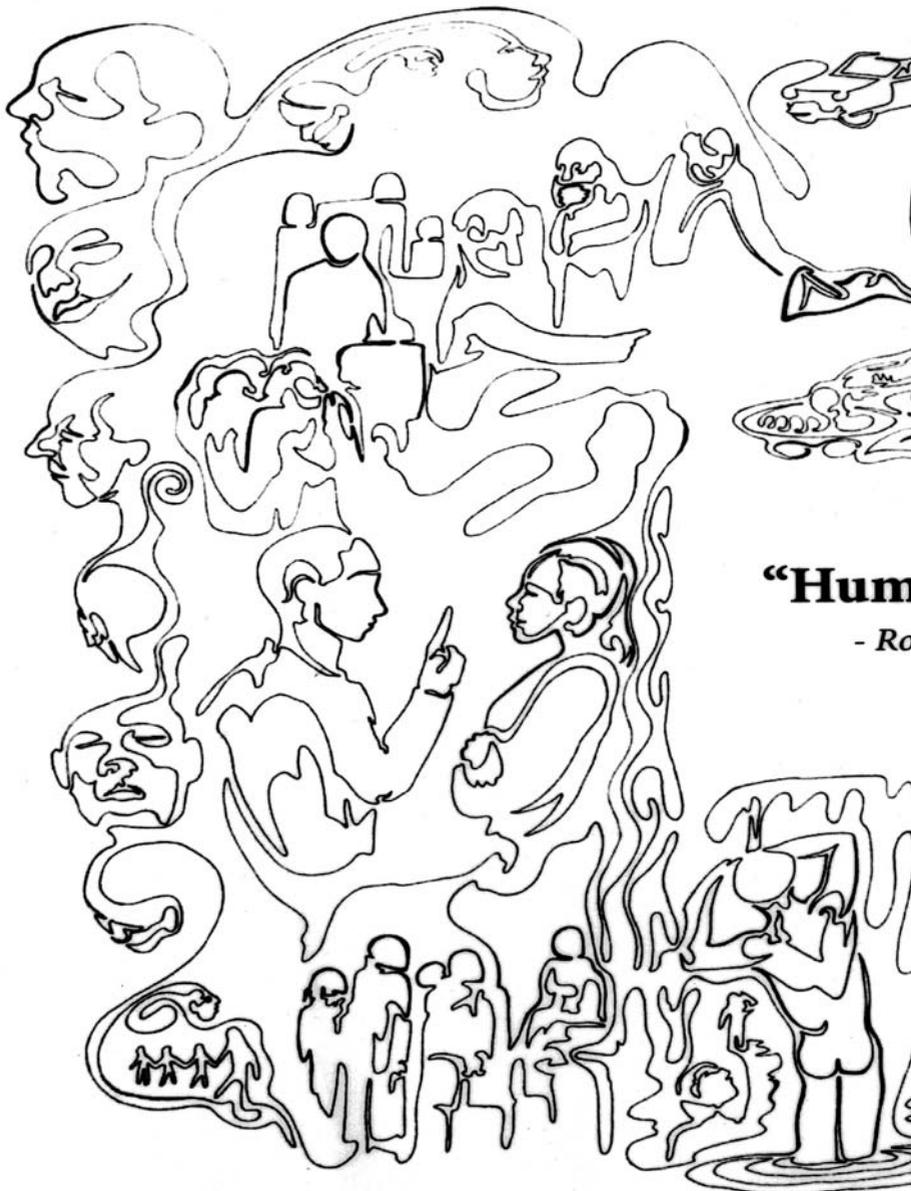
- Adriana Milmada: *Embracing Difference* - <https://vimeo.com/128411548>
- Ashwin Francis Vas: *Clash Between Two Worldviews* - <https://vimeo.com/128441372>
- Bao Trung Tran: *Teacher and Student* - <https://vimeo.com/121989974>)
- Dolores Zok: *Are You Also Seeing God?* - <https://vimeo.com/128447665>
- José Eudes Ribeiro dos Santos: *OTP in Kenya* - <https://vimeo.com/121991268>

- Renato Gnatta: *Body language* - <https://vimeo.com/128427525>
- Roger Schroeder: *The Towel* - <https://vimeo.com/122122417>
- Xavier Alangaram: *Intercultural Conflicts and Sensitivity* - <https://vimeo.com/128430001>
- Tim Norton: *La Violencia en los Barrios* - <https://vimeo.com/122033714>
- Guillaume Bumba: *Shito* - <https://vimeo.com/121990581>
- Roberto Duarte: *Una Luna de Miel con los Zapotekas* - <https://vimeo.com/121991271>
- Mercy Benson: *Laughter and Greetings* - <https://vimeo.com/121991270>

Danica Rush's interpretation of these stories was guided and influenced by the workshop presentations of Father General Heinz Kulüke and the Congregational Leader of the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, Maria Theresia Hornemann, and can be downloaded by clicking on this link: <https://vimeo.com/121995648>.

Danica Rush shared the original stories and her resulting analysis with the Canadian artist Robert Bentley, who then created an art piece entitled "Humanity." Humanity not only visually expresses some elements of the stories but also depicts the abstract complexity of interculturality. He used a single drawn line to create impressions from the stories, articulating that all these diverse and varied experiences are expressions of our common and shared humanity, while underscoring that the different stories form a single narrative of the experience of intercultural living. The artist's drawing does not have a beginning or an end to showcase the connectivity of interculturality; however, our intercultural life and mission generally begins with significant

Robert Bentley's "Humanity" -drawing. After watching and listening to the recorded stories, pause a while and observe this drawing. Do you recognize elements of the stories depicted? Some elements are represented in a more descriptive way than others that are abstracted depictions of the experiences of the storytellers





**Humanity”**  
*Robert Bentley*

events, such as being appointed to a new community, a different province, or an unfamiliar ministry setting. Thus, Danica Rush begins her analysis by examining the conditions in which storytellers first enter intercultural spaces. The following sections are an abbreviated version and summary of her analysis and paper she wrote during her course of studies and presented at an international anthropology conference in Canada.

**3.2 Cultural Doorway:** Within the Nemi narratives, a physical “doorway”—the actual move to a different location, a new ministry, or an unfamiliar community—presented a symbolic passageway between cultures. However, simply stepping through these cultural doors, either physically or symbolically in nature, does not automatically provide one with intercultural understandings. At the time of passage, there is a significant constant in one’s intercultural experience; we are the same person on either side of the door. In time, the intercultural experience can be transformative, but in this initial stage, we recognize that our own culture is carried with us as we step through the door. The sensations of passing through the cultural door can be exciting at first, as one begins a journey. In his seminal article *Culture Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments*, the anthropologist Kalervo Oberg describes the first period of entering cultural spaces as a honeymoon, where “individuals are fascinated by the new.” This honeymoon stage may last a few days or weeks to six months, depending on circumstances, and was echoed within the Nemi narratives, and it was indeed a finite experience, as several of the Nemi storytellers discussed how a shift occurred once the “wonderment” wore off. It is generally at this moment when the desire for cultural guidance rises. One may feel uncertainties about how to navigate within the new culture. Feeling uncertain of how to act within a culturally shared space and creating an inner dialogue was found within the Nemi narratives. Bao’s story provides an example:

The first day of class I was really excited, with my backpack behind me, walking to the class. I heard a lot of noise in the classroom. When I walked to the door, I opened the door and everyone was quiet. Suddenly everyone stood up. I was very nervous. What was going on here? So, I just silently walked on inside the class and looked at my students. The students just stood there silently. Imagine, 30-40 students just standing there, silently looking at me. I didn't know what to do. I was thinking—what should I say, what should I do now. We stood there, I stood there and looked at them and they looked at me. I didn't know what to say. There was a very odd silence there.

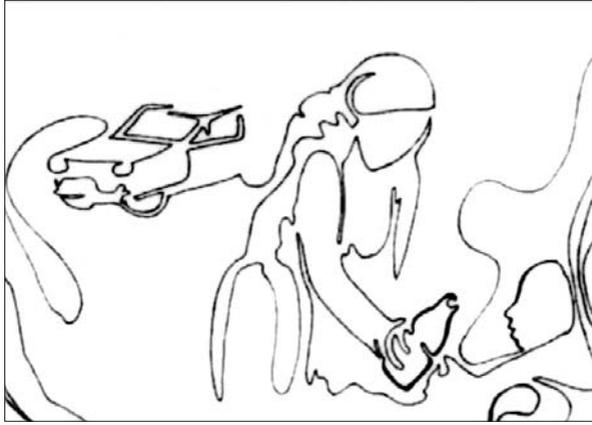


Bao and his students during their first class.

Many of the storytellers incorporated a form of reflective awareness during the period of uncertainty. Bao's story, in which he physically walked through a door, demonstrates how

“surprises” and an unexpected sense of uncertainty occurred on the other side of the cultural doorway. Indeed, the cultural doorway leads toward both new physical and symbolic cultural spaces and separates us from what is known and familiar. A heightened awareness of one’s own movements within cultural space brings forth a sense that the intercultural experience is a progressive journey. Drawing again from Oberg, a mastery of the cultural environment and context appears to be a goal of dealing with uncertainty: “You adapt yourself to water and power shortages and to traffic problems. In short, the environment does not change. What has changed is your attitude towards it. Somehow it no longer troubles you; you no longer project your discomforts onto the people of the host country and their ways.” For several of the Nemi storytellers, retelling their physical movements was given importance as they set out to describe an intrapersonal shift in understandings during an intercultural experience. In a sense, we hear that, although a mastery of moving within the new cultural ecology had occurred, the sense of interculturality remained clouded. Dolores’ story is a good example of this dynamic:

So one day I went by car and came to the border. And I had to wait some time, because she (another sister) had not yet come. So, I was there inside the big car with the air conditioning and was very happy there. Outside there were a lot of people in that heat; African people with their animals and their cars and in this confusion I went out just to try and help. But this was not necessary, they actually did not need my help, they managed their problems very well. But at least I showed them the willingness to help. Then I came back to the car, with the good music and everything and I realized I don’t have water. It was such a heat that without water it would be impossible to stay there.



Dolores receiving water from a young boy.

Dolores' story creates an allegory about moving through cultural spaces. She is presented with two distinct environments, yet recognizes that she lacks a vital element that is required to sustain her in either environment. Looking deeper into these distinct environments, we see that the car is a familiar space, a place of cultural comfort and respite. This theme was also heard within other Nemi narratives and is discussed in the work of Oberg, who wrote, "You take refuge in the colony of your countryman and its cocktail circuit." While it is assumed here that the priests, brothers, and sisters at the Nemi workshop were not likely attending expatriate cocktail hours, other familiar cultural respite spaces were identified in their narratives. This included SVD seminar-ies, housing compounds, a church, community organizations, or personal accommodations. These distinct physical spaces are where our familiar cultural understandings are at ease and they provide a retreat from the new and unfamiliar. However, these familiar cultural respite spaces are porous and eventually are influenced by the unfamiliar around them; lacking vital elements in the larger cultural environment and context will begin to af-

fect the space of refuge. The willingness to engage with others outside these cultural respite spaces brings intercultural understandings closer, as we begin to recognize that the cultural respite spaces provide a falsified cultural experience. In a sense, we are observing culture through a car window and not participating in it. The Nemi narratives teach us that intercultural understanding cannot grow if we only stay within culturally comfortable spaces. In other words, one must set out into new territories if one's intercultural sensitivity is to grow and be nurtured. Setting out physically toward a destination became analogous to larger questions that were asked once the storytellers stepped through the cultural door. Questions of how to respond to others, how can one bring God to their work and how is one to be a good missionary if the new culture is not acquired, stem from the simple question of "how do I move forward?" This intrapersonal questioning is dynamic in nature. The intercultural experience is internalized and processed while, in a sense, it mingles with one's own cultural understandings to form an array of possible routes that are mulled over. Does one acknowledge cultural differences and try their best not to disrupt local patterns? Are there primers for new approaches that emerge from the meeting of the two cultures? The Nemi narratives show us that a continual, reflective internal dialogue about the intercultural experience provides one with the best direction to move forward after stepping into the culture.

**3.3 Reflective Processes:** A familiar physical place brings with it a sense of comfort; we engage with the space in ease as we move across terrains and landscapes that are known to us. As we are able to negotiate through what is physically known, each of us carries an embodied understanding of our own culture that provides a road map for navigating circumstances that involved gender, race, or social positions "back home." To continue this analogy, as much as it can be difficult to navigate unknown phys-

ical landscapes; the navigation of gender, race, or social positioning in an unfamiliar culture can feel uncomfortable when our embodied cultural “road maps” fail to show us how to proceed in a culturally unfamiliar situation. Indeed, there is the creation of a culturally moral dilemma when our embodied cultural road maps fail us and leaves one feeling uncomfortable and uncertain. This uncomfortable sensation not only is felt within us but also can impact those around us. Mercy, one of the Nemi storytellers, describes how an expression of embodied gender (a woman laughing loudly like a man) formed a tension in a lunchroom as she sat with her fellow sisters:

What I realized was that everybody turned and looked at me. And seeing that people were looking at me, I also turned in shock. They were shocked that I would laugh like that, and I was shocked that my sisters were looking at me in this way...after this laughter the sister [who was fond of Mercy] simply moved away from me and she did not associate with me anymore. I started asking myself, “what have I done?”

Cultural understandings of gender, race or social positioning have deep roots within our social network and ourselves. Notwithstanding a genuine need to understand how these factors are understood within the community into which one is stepping, it is also essential to understand how we feel about them. What are our own cultural understandings of gender, race, or social positions? How will we move forward when these two understandings conflict? Again, engagement in critical reflection is a tool that helps one navigate new cultural terrains. The Nemi stories share that times occur in the cultural immersion when one must proceed and act/react without retreating to a cultural respite space to process and develop a plan. The incorporation of recognizing and moving forward from internal and external tensions and how to move forward from a specific moment of

“doing something wrong” or a nagging feeling of “something is not right” is significant at this stage. Reflective skills should be invested in the same way as individuals invest in building their cultural awareness of, for example, how to approach a community leader or acquiring a new language. The coupling of internal understanding of oneself and external understandings of others could in fact be the heart of intercultural sensitivity and would aid individuals as they move forward from either tensions resulting from cultural embodiment or from their internalized sense of “making a mistake.”

**3.4 Moving Forward:** Watching the responses and reactions of others after a “mistake” was made brought the Nemi storytellers an immediate sense of shame for not “behaving correctly.” Within the stories, the timeframes of when a “mistake” occurred spanned from only being in the new culture for a few days to living in the culture for ten years. It is important to note here that, as much as one can try to “learn everything” in either a pre-entry program or informally on their own, it is simply not possible to learn the complex nuances of culture that play out in front of us. Roger describes the reactions of his mentor, Benjamin, and others in his host community after Roger tossed a young, unwed man’s towel over a meal that was about to be shared:

Before I went to Papua New Guinea, I had studied the culture, I knew there were both the men’s world and the women’s world; both were powerful. Both had their own rituals, their own sacredness and everything like that. And I knew that; I had read that there were some taboos between the two worlds. But I didn’t realize that by picking up that towel and throwing it over the food, the women who prepared the food couldn’t even eat it. I felt terrible.... When Benjamin explained this to me, he said, “Now, you’ll never do that again.” And I said, “You’re right!”



Roger throwing the towel.

Roger continued his story by discussing how he and Benjamin moved forward from the experience. By legitimizing the differences, and by these differences being treated as a “dialogue promoter,” interculturality can be created in a shared cultural space. That is not to say individuals should act however they would like, or make no attempt to maneuver in the culture without consequence, but when “mistakes” are made, interculturality is a means to find resolution. Similar to how Benjamin provided a cultural interpretation to Roger, the theme of finding resolution through gaining or seeking out explanation was woven into several stories. A few of the Nemi storytellers describe how they posed questions to better their understanding, while others like Roger had an informal or formal mentor who offered cultural context to better the storyteller’s understanding. Renato’s story exemplifies the common tendency to simply ask questions when one senses a cultural tension:

Even though I was having an uncomfortable feeling, I carried on a bit more. Then I asked a question later on.

Renato's inquiry into what was making him feel uncomfortable turned into a learning experience as he gained understanding of cultural body language. The gained understanding is twofold: we learn about ourselves when we inquire about others. This reflexive process is significant to point out, as reflective understandings are a key point in the interculturality journey. Again, Renato's story is a good example of this process:

And then I realized that the body language, of that culture from Asia, that I understand in my culture as disagreement is agreement [in the other culture]. So the situation was really accepted and understood, but, anyway, was just a bit of discomfort caused by this different body language.

The moments when understanding was gained not only gave the storytellers a sense of resolution, but also served to provide clarity as they navigated through to their intercultural experience. Lacking a sense of closure or understanding can impact one as much as gaining a sense of resolution. Without closure, one may question their performance as a missionary or feel weighed down by the experience of making a "mistake." Feelings of anger and isolation are very real possibilities and linger until resolution and understanding is gained. Jose's narrative is as much an example of how deeply gender understandings reside in ourselves, others, and communities as it is about resolution. When the night became late and there was concern for his female language interpreter to safely travel to her home village, Jose was approached by a community member and was told:

[I was told] without any further explanation that I should dismiss the lady immediately and she should go home. And I felt not very comfortable with this situation because in my culture we are very welcoming of people; we offer our place, our houses, for any visitors.

Jose further shared in his narrative how a lack of explanation left him with a sense of sadness as he negotiated unfamiliar cultural understandings of this event throughout the remaining year he lived in the community. In his final meeting with a supervisor, it was shared with Jose that the actions of a previous priest had left a residual effect in the community. It is likely that the unknown history added complexity to Jose's experience of conflict between cultural understandings. Jose's story shares a message of how the effects of intercultural exchange can linger within us and within communities. It also serves to validate the uses of critical reflection during periods of cultural uncertainty:

Often one or another would come and ask me about the same lady. I would feel unhappy, uncomfortable, and so on. After one year, I was about to go back to Brazil and my director of the program, the overseas training program, he asked me again. I got really annoyed. I had to ask him about the lack of trust and lack of respect in the sense that something had happened more than one year ago and it was still a burning issue; my relationship with others and living in the society. Later on, he explained what really happened in our culture and what really happened in our province.



Jose inquiring about the incident.

Creating a safe space where different cultural perspectives, cultural selves, and moral cultures can meet are at the heart of interculturality as one moves forward in their intercultural experience.

**3.5 Sharing Knowledge:** Several of the Nemi storytellers were initially reluctant to engage in the transfer of knowledge from their home countries to that of their mission work. Community members seeking intercultural knowledge exchange initially approached these Nemi storytellers, who later felt that the experience created new understandings of cultural relationships. In these stories, we hear that community members requested to hear about work done in other parts of the world and were interested in adapting this work to their own community. Adriana's story contains a reference to this dynamic:

They approached me and said, "okay, you are coming from those different places so you must know what to d.o. "Yes, I know how to run a youth group back in Argentina but I don't really know if that will work in this place." I was tempted to say, "No forget it. I have to learn everything from you, you are the ones, I can't really teach you something from a different place."



Adriana reflecting about applying her experience or not.

From these stories of intercultural idea exchange, we hear how community members establish the storytellers as an outsider, a trusted outsider, but an outsider nevertheless. In this fashion, the cultures on either side of the door are deemed distinct from each other, with components of one culture being picked out and passed through the door to be reworked in the other. This disassembly and refurbishing of ideas created a new understanding that was distinct from its roots; it belonged to neither side of the door exclusively. From stepping forth from cultural respite spaces and embracing differences in a meaningful way, communicators dwell in the shared intercultural spaces and begin to draw from each other to form new understandings, echoing in Tim's story:

What consistently struck me about this ministry was that this was an idea that I had brought from another place reluctantly. But the youth group picked up the idea; they re-fashioned it and said, no this can work. We can do this here. And in fact, it had worked in ways that it had never worked in my home country in Australia.

The reluctance on the part of the Nemi storytellers was two-fold. Firstly, there was the sense that cultures are not permeable to idea exchanges, or if they are, it does not work well. Secondly, there was also a sense that culture should only flow one way, from the community to the missionary. However, the communities and the storytellers were able



Tim sharing his experiences.

to move forward through expressions of humility, exploration, and trust. Humility in this context was found in the missionaries accepting the community as the lead in the exchange and through the willingness of both parties to explore unknown discourses together. Neither the missionary nor the community expressed that they knew exactly how to move forward on this new venture. The exploration of new grounds of understandings was being charted as quickly as they were being created. Trusting each other was evident within the stories; the community trusted the words of the outsider and the outsider trusted the interpretations of the community. Together, they translated the original idea into something new, as evident in Adriana's story:

In the meetings, I would share with them the different dynamics in English; they would translate it into their own different languages. Then we would go into each different village and each one of them would be the ones who would call for the meetings and would facilitate the processes. For them, it was something that was absolutely different because they were used to the teacher coming and teaching them everything, including the Church.

Through the stories of intercultural idea exchange, we see how the community first engaged the Nemi storyteller and how humility, exploration, and trust interwove to form intercultural mutuality. In contrast to stories that explored new grounds, several other Nemi storytellers expressed narratives of understanding and meeting cultural expectations. Here again, we see how humility and community positioning of the storyteller unfolded in the intercultural experience. It is worth re-emphasizing here that interculturality is a journey that is initiated by stepping through the cultural doorway. Our embodied cultural navigation systems may conflict with what is unfamiliar as we begin to negotiate new terrains of social interactions. For a few

Nemi storytellers, adaptation into the unfamiliar culture was the theme of their story; the intercultural journey held a sense of successfully understanding and meeting the community's expectations of them. All of the Nemi storytellers were given a broad discussion theme of "share a story about interculturality." As such, we do not learn from these particular adaptation stories if gaining understanding and meeting a community's cultural expectations was an end or transition point in their overall intercultural experience. However, we can see from research that meeting expectations can be a desire of intercultural experiences, but should not be considered the conclusion of ones' journey.

**3.6 Personal Transformation:** A final theme within the narratives differs from those of intercultural idea exchange or understanding and meeting expectations. Several other Nemi storytellers expressed how an act of cultural engagement, initiated by the storytellers themselves, led to interculturality. Within these narratives, we hear of the interlocutors taking it upon themselves to engage in a ritual or interaction that brought to them a sense of awareness within the unfamiliar culture that went beyond understanding how to socially engage. The current trending term for this is "cultural empathy," though other disciplines or religious understandings may have their own terminology for "emotionally perceiving life as another person knows it." In these narratives, the storytellers describe being transformed from an experience that illuminated the human experience of others and of themselves, as Ashwin's story exemplifies:

I worked there for two years and that changed my world view towards commercial sex workers; it changed my world view on who a woman is and how she can feel. It made me more sensitive towards life. When we were in the seminary, we would be cracking a lot of jokes about commercial sex

workers, about the prostitutes, because it was belonging to our city. But after some time, after knowing what the life really is, they would crack the jokes and I would feel out of place. I would feel as if they are making fun of someone who I knew personally.



Ashwin's changing world view.

The attainment of cultural empathy is a remarkable expansion of understanding in one's worldviews. However, the conceptualization of one's outlook on cultures fails to articulate how this occurred. Building one's cultural toolkits and responding to subjective questions that are not derived from personal experience do not account for a transformation of the cultural self. This is evident when one continues to explore the Nemi narratives. Much like the narratives of intercultural idea exchange, we again see a tapestry of humility, exploration, and trust within the stories of personal transformation. Humility in this experience is first the recognition of our cultural self, the accumulative experience of our own narrative; and second, the shedding of this cultural self. This by no means suggests that one must abandon all that is

known, though one must be willing to self-explore the elements that do influence their own cultural selfhood. Roberto's story is a good example of this willingness:

For me personally, this bath [taken with members of the community] represented a “baptism,” a new beginning, a new stage of my life as a missionary where I got rid of some fears, I stripped off a certain type of western cultural “garment”, maybe a Christian garment in the institutional sense, and entering a new stage or dynamic in my own personal life and the missionary community life among the Zapotec. It was a nakedness that was not only physical but also internal, a mental nakedness from prejudices, from worldviews that we often carry in ourselves because of our religious formation, our religious community and social traditions, which are an obstacle for a real cultural encounter, a one-on-one encounter of brothers who are different from each other.

The Nemi narratives about personal transformation teach us to trust in the act of opening and exposing ourselves on a human level, absent from our cultural selfhood, to facilitate an emotional transaction with others that transcends interactions that are dependent on cultural navigation. The sense of mutuality during an interculturality experience can be a passageway for an intrapersonal change as one moves beyond the realm of cultural knowledge and understanding and into that of cul-



Roberto's symbolic experience of the communal showering at the waterfall.

tural empathy and personal transformation. While one could gain sufficient enough understanding to navigate the cultural terrains of relationships, power, or social dynamics, there can be a deeper way to emotionally understand life as known to others and humanity as a whole.

This differs greatly from current literature on cultural empathy, as typically the attempt to be culturally empathetic is taught as a part of a cultural toolkit; a formula that begins with trying to figure out the emotions of others and then responding sensitively to them. For those seeking to independently engage in or prepare others for intercultural experiences, an exploration of Jan Fook's work into a critical reflective process may be beneficial, such as in *Practicing Critical Reflection*, which he published with F. Gardner. Fook's critical reflective process creates meaningful and practical ways to move within the unfamiliar cultural terrains and how to address the sense of a "mistake."

It is hoped that this discussion generates thoughts for further research into the complexity of interculturality and identifies areas for further theory development, and further speaks to the importance of incorporating qualitative and phenomenological methods into the discourse surrounding interculturality. Methodologies of this nature bring forth the thematic branches of interculturality and build understandings that cannot be captured in pre- and post-quantified testing.

**3.7 Conclusion:** Intercultural experiences stay with us. They become part of our own personal narrative and perhaps become a chapter within a community's history. The sharing of intercultural stories that took place in earlier years provided broader reflections on the impact the experience had on the Nemi storytellers, such as Roger:

I sometimes share with my students that when something like this happens there are two extremes that I think we need to avoid. One extreme would be where we are like walking on eggshells; in other words, we are afraid to open our mouths or do anything because we don't want to make a mistake, including language learning. The other extreme would be, you say—that's their problem, it's their culture. I will do whatever I want. To me those are the two extremes. The middle ground is what I would hope to do and learn myself and continue to learn, is to find that balance. To learn from my mistakes, try to do the best but when I make a mistake, trying to apologize and then to move on.

Roger's final sentence implies the need for a critical reflection process that will equip missionaries with a framework within which they can understand their experiences as interculturality develops around and within them.

In conclusion, at the surface the stories may seem to vary greatly from each other, with the simple message of "I was once known as someone from somewhere else" being the only common thread woven through the stories. However, the experiences shared at the Nemi Workshop hold deeper connections to each other. These experiences share perceptions and meanings about relating to others, reflections, and cultural responses as one immersed into another setting. Finally, the stories share a message about personal and community transformations. The overlapping themes in the stories illustrate the dynamic nature of the intercultural experience; we learn about ourselves as we relate to others. These relations can result in deeper cultural immersion, meaningful community responses, significant personal transformations, and a shared understanding of our humanity.

## IV. Conclusions

This issue of *In Word and Deed* offers fifteen stories, as well as an analysis of twelve additional video-recorded stories, that attempt to illustrate some ways of acknowledging and bridging cultural difference. For us as SVDs, they highlight something of great importance for our involvement in God's mission—not only to the wider world, but also in our own culturally diverse communities. Today, in our globalized world, it is essential that we become exemplary intercultural bridges between peoples and living witnesses of the Gospel. This is essential not only for those to whom we are accountable, but also for ourselves, for our own integrity as God's emissaries.

We all have similar experiences that echo these stories, which is why storytelling, hearing, and retelling are such powerful aids to learning. Stories connect with us at many levels—intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually—and they evoke our own stories, which have greater immediacy, stories of our own experiences with people and situations that differ greatly from our comfortable and familiar worlds. Stories bring to mind how we engaged with these worlds, how we succeeded, or more often, how we failed in our bridging efforts. All offer rich learning experiences and, although oftentimes painful and always hard-earned, they are essential building blocks toward achieving greater intercultural competency.

These stories highlight important aspects of our intercultural life, like how we handle our differences of opinion. A peaceful,

well-integrated community life is necessary if we are to witness the peace of Christ in our missionary outreach. Fernando Diaz speaks of his encounter with different culture-based styles of handling disagreements and how these can disrupt community life—even destroy it—if they are not well understood, acknowledged, and adapted to. Some favor the direct approach expressed with strong emotion, whereas others prefer a more indirect communication style with highly modulated and controlled emotions. Differences of opinion and perspective are hard enough to deal with in community life. We must not increase the level of conflict in our communities by ignoring the added disruptive factor of our different styles of handling conflict.

The stories also underscore important aspects of our intercultural mission. Besides learning to adapt to differences of opinion, we may also have to build bridges to other religious values, beliefs, and behaviors. For these, we must dig deeper into the world of the other and be willing to engage their beliefs, material culture, and styles of worship, without losing or denying our own. Here Fr. Lazar Gnanapragasam offers some concrete examples from his own experience. Many, perhaps even most, Muslims, are very much like us Christians in that they have a very shallow understanding of their rich faith. Although quite different, our faiths actually share much in common. So, as Lazar points out, the track toward greater dialogue obliges us first to know and practice our own faiths. Who would have thought that the most important way we can promote fruitful relations and a lasting peace with Muslims is not only by knowing their faith, but also by fully understanding and living our own.

Further, the stories highlight the importance of engaging with deep-rooted cultural understandings and practices, such as culturally imposed gender differences, which offer another area where interculturality can help foster a fuller vision of the life

that God wants for us. Adriana's story compares her experience in Fiji, where there are no female catechists, to her own culture, where the catechists are almost all female. She asks why we Christians do not take seriously Paul's advice to the Galatians: "...there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Her intercultural experience helps her see that the roles assigned to genders by our cultures may indeed be challenged by the word of God. Interculturality gives us the critical eyes to discern the distortions of patriarchal values, especially where they victimize women, so that women and men may be free to become who they really are in God's eyes

Finally, the stories emphasize that our mission also seeks a dialogue with nature itself. It seeks to promote justice and peace and the integrity of creation. Fr. Franz emphasizes our mission to protect and nurture our environment through responsible investments and use of resources, environmentally sustainable activities, and promoting awareness of environmental concerns. Different cultures offer vastly different ways of understanding and responding to these concerns. He cites how we can learn, from the poorest people of the world, ways of recycling that not only respond to the wastefulness of our society but also serve as guides toward a new world order that will never again produce waste or pollution.

Each story exemplifies practical approaches for developing attitudes that are essential for our intercultural life and mission. Wherever we are, the process of interculturality involves meeting difference and engaging it in their terms, not ours. The stories of Fr. Gibbs and Fr. Kpakpayi show us how the intercultural perspective helps us to determine what these terms are and how to adapt to them. Fr. Gibbs points out that, even though riding on a public bus might seem like a waste of time to a missionary with an egocentric orientation and a private car, doing so where

he works in PNG, where the people are socio-centric, offers an “interesting slice” of their life. It offers a chance to dialogue with people he would not otherwise meet. Fr. Kpakpayi’s experience offering food and material help to the poorest people in the barrios of Ecuador shows us that missionaries offering important services to the poor need to know the mind of their people regarding the “rules” for offering and acceptance. He expected the absolute poorest to come to the mission for help, but only the marginally poor availed themselves of this opportunity. Interculturality involves learning from one another, appreciating our differences, and adapting to them. It might require adapting to a socio-centric orientation, which in PNG might mean using public transport, or adjusting to the sensitivities of the poor, which would mean bringing the care packages to them.

These stories involve many more aspects of both cross-cultural and intercultural experiences. Crossing over is not new to us as missionaries. We need only reflect on the experience of our patron, Fr. Freinademetz, to confirm this. At the beginning of his work in China, he rejected the strange sounds, the unfamiliar and repugnant ways that surrounded him. But over time, through his active and prayerful involvement with the poor, the suffering, and the marginalized, he came to see them too as God’s people. He saw God reflected in them and through them so vividly that the heaven he longed for could only be imagined in terms of the beauty, the color, the art, the graciousness, and the virtues of Chinese culture.

What is new to our mission trade now in our globalized era is that a modern missionary must be prepared to simultaneously reach out, not just to one strange and unfamiliar group of people, but rather to many, and all at the same time. This process of inter-relating with a variety of different groups, their worldviews, and behaviors is what distinguishes interculturality from cross-

culturality. Today, it is not something we can choose to disregard; rather, it is essential to our mission. Increasing our intercultural sensitivity and refining our response until it becomes automatic and appropriate is not easy. It will take time and continuous effort. But let us bravely take on this new task of becoming more sensitive to difference, more able to bridge to difference, and more able to procure value from difference, with the same spirit and fervor shown by St. Joseph Freinademetz, our mentor.



