

17th Annual Meeting of Catechetical Ministers (AMCM)

12th Annual Meeting of ACCCRE

THE PARISH AS COMMUNION OF COMMUNITIES: THE CATECHIST IN THE SERVICE OF COMMUNION AND MISSION

Communion is a very powerful word in the glossary of the Church. When I presided over the Mass of the Holy Spirit last August 1, 2017 in the University of Sto. Tomas, I was reminded that the Holy Spirit is the primary agent of communion. Imagine what happened when the Holy Spirit came down and rested on the disciples of Jesus. In baptism, through the power of the Holy Spirit we have been integrated into the Mystical body of Christ, the Church. In Confirmation through the power of the Holy Spirit, we have reconfirmed this bond of communion with the same Mystical Body of Christ and we have committed ourselves to use our gifts given by the same Holy Spirit at the service of communion in the Church, of humanity and the whole of creation.

Through the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine that we offer in every Eucharistic Celebration become the Body and Blood of Christ. At first glance, communion may refer to the part of the Mass when a believer receives Jesus in the form of bread. The minister says: THE BODY OF CHRIST. The response is: AMEN. AMEN means I believe the bread is Jesus – soul and body, humanity and divinity! We become what we receive... we become Jesus to the world.

The fact is that we who are fed with the same Jesus, are bonded together as one community. In every celebration, the Holy Spirit comes to us to make us one Mystical Body of Christ. This is a constant movement of the Holy Spirit every time we celebrate the Eucharist. In fact this is our ardent prayer in Eucharistic Prayer II:

Humbly we pray that, partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ,

we may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are incorporated again into the Body of Christ after we have been separated from it because of our sins through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the sick. (Maybe we can also say that the Sacrament of Anointing is meant also to prepare us for the full communion with the Triune God and the communion saints in heaven)

Through the Holy Spirit we have Priests, religious men and women, married couples who have been consecrated and have vowed to help in promoting communion in the Church.

In the spirit of communion, may I open this annual assembly with a prayer to the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love.

V. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

R. And you shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit,

**did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
grant us in the same Spirit to be truly wise**

and ever to rejoice in His consolation.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit gave way to the birth of the Church.

Through the Holy Spirit, we have the courage to call God, Father. The Holy Spirit will remind us every thing that Jesus taught us starting from the New Commandment which He called His own: "LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU." Immediately through the Holy Spirit our eyes are fixed on the Blessed Trinity: Three Persons in One God. The Father is Creator who loves so dearly; the Son is the Redeemer who is the Beloved; the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier who is the Reciprocal Love between the Father and the Son. We often end our prayer in the liturgy: AD PATREM, PER FILIUM, IN SPIRITU SANCTU.

In the Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life are we gathered. He is the “anima” of our mission of the new evangelization. And it is to him that we gather to strengthen communion with the Triune God and with each other and with the Church that we love so dearly.

The strongest expression of communion in the Scripture is the life lived by the apostles and disciples as described in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35. This communion of the early Easter people is characterized by common worship, common formation and service. They were of “one heart and one soul”. They listened and bore witness to the story of the Resurrection. And everything they owned was put at the service of all depending on their needs. This is the model of communion that the Church is continuing until today.

Vatican II, defines the Church as a “sacrament and instrument of communion with God and unity among all men”. *Lumen Gentium*, in defining the mission and nature of the Church, speaks first and above all of the “mystery” of the Church. This divine dimension proceeds from the Trinitarian missions of the Son and the Spirit in history: “The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19).... He both equips and directs with hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns with his fruits (cf. Eph 4:11-12; 1 Cor 12:4; Gal 5:22).... Thus, the Church has been seen as ‘a

people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (LG 4).

The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, echo the Acts of the Apostles and Lumen Gentium on communion. “In community a Christian grows in faith. We are called as individuals, and each one must give a personal response. But Christ calls us to form a Christian community. He wants the Church to be “a communion of life, love and truth” (LG 9) “a community of faith, hope and charity” (LG 8). The first disciples expressed this in their own lives. They formed a community in which they “devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers” (Acts 2:42). They were “one heart and mind” and shared even the things they owned so that no one among them was in want (Acts 4:32-35).” (PCP II 89-90).

Let us plunge into the depths of the mystery of communion: first, cultivate the spirituality of communion; second, let us build structures of communion; third, let us propose challenges to enhance communion.

First, let us cultivate the spirituality of communion. Years after Vatican II, St. John Paul II synthesized the model of

Vatican II as mystery and sacrament; as People of God. The synthesis model is communion: that we are called to see the Triune God in the face of our brothers and sisters; that every member of our community is part of each one; that we should not indulge in unhealthy relationships of careerism and jealousy and intrigues. In other words, communion reflects the majesty and power of the Triune God: Unity in diversity; equality and participation and co – responsibility in mission.

In the words of Archbishop Bruno Forte: the church is the Icon of the Trinity. Truly, the icon is the church that beckons people to fellowship with the Triune God. As mystery and people of God, we reflect the beauty and power of the Triune God.

To see Jesus in each of us and in everyone we encounter everyday calls for conversion of mindset and attitudes. To see Jesus in every person is to be animated by the Love of the Holy Spirit. The saints exemplify this attitude. From the martyrs Lawrence of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch and Perpetua and Felicity, the great confessors like Augustine and the Cappadocian Fathers, the scholastics like Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure, the statesman like Henry II and Thomas More, the child saints like Dominic Savio and Maria Goretti, the newly declared saints Francisco and Jacinta of Fatima, to our own Lorenzo Ruiz, Pedro Calungsod and Jose Maria de Manila, the history of the church is filled with men and women, boys and girls who are graced by the Holy Spirit soaked in grace. How blessed are we to have them as exemplary figures of holiness: men and women of communion.

Simply put, a smile on our face makes all the difference in the world when we encounter each other with the Love of Jesus.

It takes a pat on the back, a word of affirmation and encouragement that will brighten our day. Building common ground through dialogue and proclamation is the task of the church. Yes, the church is the sign and instrument of unity among peoples of all races and cultures.

Second, let us build structures of communion. The church is 99% relationships and 1% structures. And structures serve the principle of communion. At the last supper, Jesus did not establish a curia or an organization. Jesus said: LOVE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. The church is strongly relational – it connects people with people, connects God with people and people with God. Even hierarchy is ministerial! It exists to serve communion.

The National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines: Article 451 talks about the bishop as exercising the primary role of leadership and coordination in the catechetical ministry. Leadership and coordination are two words that guide our organizations and ministries in the church. Leadership sets the tone of vision and direction; accompaniment and animation. The catechetical office is the arm of the bishop in his teaching ministry. The director should be guided by competencies and standards of professional ethics and accountability; of support and guidance. I thank De La Salle University Manila, in particular the Brothers of the Christian Schools (FSC) for the generous assistance the past summer in training the directors and coordinators in the effective leadership and management of this important diocesan office.

I am happy to announce that the CBCP in its plenary assembly has decided to have a CATECHETICAL SUNDAY every third Sunday of the month of September when a SECOND COLLECTION BE made in all parishes in the country. It is agreed that The SECOND COLLECTION WILL BE DIVIDED 70% to the diocesan catechetical office and programs and 30% to the catechetical programs of the Episcopal Commission of Catechesis and Catholic Education.

We need to strengthen the support of catholic schools, colleges and universities through the PHILCare or the Philippine Catechetical and Religious Education Foundation. This means 2 pesos per student is to be sent to our ECCCE office. I hope you can remind your respective schools in the diocese: member schools of CEAP.

Two biggest practical difficulties in Philippine catechesis will be addressed by the above: insufficient funding and lack of proper facilities and materials. (NCDP 449) The funding from the second collection and from PhilCare will surely go far in the development of catechesis in the dioceses.

Moreover, structures of communion in the service of catechesis are found in the parishes. The parish priest has a very important role in the life of catechesis. Overseeing pre sacramental catechesis from Baptism, Confirmation, Matrimony and Penance and Reconciliation to the Eucharist, the parish priest needs an “eye” for strict compliance: that good catechesis precedes good celebration. And let me add: good celebration must be followed by mystagogical catechesis.

We still are a long way to looking at the challenge of Pope Francis with respect MYSTAGOGICAL CATECHESIS.

It is noteworthy that the NCDP points to the elements of a catechetical program in the parish.

The NCDP states: For a truly fruitful catechetical program, then, a minimum of organization is needed on the parish level to: 1) support individual catechists in their work. 2) Coordinate the BEC and parish programs and activities; and 3) carry through such work with needed continuity and on-going innovations. Head catechists and/or coordinators, together with the parish catechetical committee, should be the parish priest's chief operating assistants in this essential work. (NCDP 450)

We have launched the National Association of Catechists in the Philippines Last July 27, 2017. Our hope is to start organizing ourselves according to the Ecclesiastical Provinces. I hope that this will help in organizing ourselves in the baranggay, parochial, Ecclesiastical province, regional and National levels.

During our last meeting of the bishops' members and the Technical Working Group of the Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, we were reminded that we are in charge also of the Office for the Promotion of the New Evangelization. Thus we really have to do a little adjustment in our structures so as not to sacrifice this important work entrusted to us.

Our hope is that all these structures will contribute to nourish our communal life among us, with different communities and

movements in the Church, with humanity and the whole of creation.

Third and last, challenges to communion in the catechetical ministry.

The challenge of humility. Let us be humble workers in the vineyard of the Lord. When we have done what is necessary, let us hide and disappear. As the adage says well: DO GOOD AND DISAPPEAR. We have so many catechists who are humble. They do not ask for recognition for their life is one of self giving. "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'" (Luke 17:10)

The challenge of docility. Let us engage in a dialogue with our leaders. From bishops to catechetical directors, from parish priests to parish pastoral councils, let our catechists be agents of renewing our parishes through effective pedagogy. The word most necessary in parishes is coordination – not “lone rangers”. Coordination means working together and walking closely with each other.

The primacy of charity. Let us fill up what is lacking with each other. Let us build on the achievements of others who have gone ahead of us. Let us affirm the past and live present with enthusiasm. Let us not say words that hurt and downgrade, criticize and destroy. Let affirm – affirm – affirm. That is the way of communion.

Let us continue to gaze on the Triune God in this annual assembly. Let us continue to connect with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And at the feet of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, the Mother of the church, I entrust this gathering. I sincerely pray that this meeting be an experience of a new pentecost, a new birth, a new fervor for the mission, deeper communion among us and in our local churches and a stronger and a more effective witness to the life of the Trinity. Mabuhay ang mga Katekistang Pilipino!

San Pedro Calungsod

Our Lady of Fatima

Senor Sto. Niño, Have mercy on us!