



ONLINE SERIES

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'PRESENCING'

NEW EVANGELIZATION IN THE NEW NORMAL?

'PRESENCING' (from Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future As It Emerges*) is a very apt word to describe a challenge presented to us as Church called to renewal in these unusual times.

To add to Scharmer's 'presencing' as deep listening, the two Filipino words 'pagkanaririto' (presence) at 'pagdama/pagramdam' (sensing) describe what we in Bukal believe to be a spiritual and pastoral approach to relevant ministry in these pandemic times. Time and again, we ask ourselves if we were really present and listening (*pagkanaririto*), not from a distance, but from an engaged and immersed way, to the situation around us, especially with the poorest and marginalized among our communities? And from this deep connection and sensing, (*pakikiramdam/ pakikidama sa kapwa*), were we able to sense what God wants to tell us (*pakikiramdam sa kagustuhan ng Diyos*) and where God wants to lead us?

In last week's post, we encouraged everyone that as we enter into the New Normal, let us not lose the lessons of this pandemic experience. *Huwag nating pakawalan ang habilin ng Diyos sa atin sa kanyang pagbisita.* We said that church is the sense of faith of the faithful – *sensus fidei fidelium*, our collective faith wisdom. This faith wisdom is not contained in printed books and passed on through lectures. It is born and matures as we engage faith and life. Hopefully this challenging situation has taught us what it means to be a Church following Jesus in this world. We hope that this unprecedented crisis has sharpened our *sensus fidelium*.

As Bukal, we interviewed some pastoral workers as part of our wisdom-gathering, of building up our sense of faith. We asked them the following questions on the specific topic assigned to them (e.g. priesthood):

1. What has the pandemic experience taught you about the ____?
2. How do you foresee the ____ post pandemic?
3. What challenges and changes in the ____ do you foresee?

In the next three posts, we want to share their reflections on the different areas of church life. In this first post, we start with the priesthood, of the ordained – the clergy, and of the faithful – the BECs. The next post will be on Formation: Seminary Formation, Catechetical Formation and Parish Formation. The last one in this series will be on the different ministries in the church – leadership through the PPCs, the Youth Ministry, Social Action Ministries, etc. We hope that after these three posts on this series 'Presencing', we may be able to give a face or a more practical shape to how would New Evangelization look in the New Normal times.

For the clergy, we listen to Fr. Danny Pilario from the Congregation of the Missions, who is both Theology teacher and learner from the streets where the poor and marginalized dwell. In any crisis, people look for leaders.

A priest is tasked to lead their faith communities. When the churches closed, what did the priests concern themselves with? Was their leadership felt? Or missing? When trials come in life, a dream keeps us going. Was the vision/dream of the church – to be a Church of the Poor – remembered or forgotten? Were those entrusted with God's word spoke when human rights violation, as well as graft and corruption, were being committed?

For the BECs, we have Rowena Daquilanea from the Jaro Archdiocesan Pastoral Secretariat and Bp. Jose Cabantan from the Diocese of Malaybalay and who also heads the CBCP-BEC Office, both leaders in their own faith communities but who also allow themselves to be lead by the simple and ordinary baptized in the BECs. When the churches closed, did the church in the neighborhood, the BECs, become alive? The locus of this pandemic is the family and also the neighborhood where all the problems are manifested in the micro-level, the level of daily life realities. How have the BECs lived during these difficult times? They who are very active in the neighborhood: did the crisis made them inward-looking or made them stay true to their calling – reaching out in solidarity especially to the poorest among them? They who tirelessly do bible sharing and community liturgies every week, did the word of God and the devotional prayers come alive in their homes and streets?

What follows are excerpts from their responses. Please read their relevant reflections in Bukal website (www.bukalngtipan.org).



FR. DANNY PILARIO, C.M.

1. What has the pandemic experience taught you about the priesthood?

I learned that the "cultic priesthood" is not central at all to the church.

COVID-19 deconstructs the central role of the priest which is also the source of clericalism in the present church. Though we still say Masses online, the ordinary faithful make do with whatever they have at home, especially those who have no access to internet. For instance, during the Holy Week, it was the mothers and fathers who led the rituals.

They “invented” them for their use – be it Stations of the Cross around their homes, or the rites of the washing of the feet and bible sharing with the children. The liturgical fixation of many church leaders gave way to liturgical innovation and creative inculturation in order to adapt to concrete needs. In this new context, the parents and other adults have become the liturgical guides, spiritual leaders and family ministers. There was shift from the priest-centered mega-churches to the small churches of the home (“*ecclesia domestica*”) where the sacraments and ministries also take on different shapes and meaning. (Read full text in www.bukalngtipan.net)

2. *How do you foresee the priesthood post pandemic?*

The priest and church leaders should learn how to be in solidarity with their flock even as they also fear for their own lives. If doctors and nurses need to be with their patients despite their fears because their calling requires them to do so, the priests and pastors should do the same. It is their calling to be with their people. How this is done, church people should creatively think beyond the “stay at home” protocols. They need to creatively transgress these injunctions when the need arises in crucial times. Vincent de Paul once said: “Love is inventive unto infinity.” (Read full text in www.bukalngtipan.net)

3. *What challenges and changes in the priesthood do you foresee?* Here are some challenges to priests and all church ministers:

- How to go beyond formalistic, sanctioned and rubric-dictated liturgies toward creative worship beyond church walls and traditional liturgical rituals
- How to overcome the climate of fear inculcated by dominant government media toward fostering the spirit of solidarity and meaningful presence among the flock who are beset by all kinds of fear, pain and hunger.
- How to combat the temptation of self-sufficiency and indifference toward organizing one’s parish community toward new and creative ministries among the poor and marginalized
- How to en flesh Pope Francis’ challenge to priests to have the “odor of the sheep”, especially in times when the sheep are confused, battered and lost.
- How to make the Church real “field hospitals” when people around us are dying.

From the beginning of the lockdown, people – including priests and sisters – locked their churches and convents, stopped seeing their flock, cooked nice meals, read nice books or watched nice films, and hid in their homes for fear of their lives. Because of this, we do not see what happened beyond our walls, when people were running after relief vans, were frantically looking for milk for their babies, risking their lives just to get whatever food on their tables. In this time, the

church has become what Pope Francis feared to be – a self-referential church concerned only with its own self-preservation.

Because we heed the dominant government injunction to “stay at home”, enforced as it is with military might, we let go of our main calling to be in solidarity with the poor and hungry. This is what I call “lazy thinking” – to capitulate to one side of pole and not being able to keep its tension. We fall into “either or” thinking and not its dialectical “both-and”. For this, we have dropped our calling to be shepherds who need to care for the wounded and to be prophets who need to call into question the system for wounding our flock. Is there a way to take care of our own health and to feed the hungry, to seek out the lonely, or to critique government inefficiency as well?

For the lazy-thinkers, I often ask: “Is it OK for us to survive because we refuse to go out, while the rest of the world around us are dying both of hunger and the virus? Can we live conscientiously after that? True, we might have been saved from the virus but are we really saved? What does salvation really mean?”

ROWENA DAQUILANEA, JARO



1. *What has the pandemic experience taught you about the BECs?*

What I learned on a personal level from this ongoing fight against the pandemic re-affirms the four marks of BEC. My reflections on the following have more or less sustained me through the daily monotony of being confined only within our home and also somewhat eased the impact of the sudden shift to “new normal”:

- **Nurture essential connections:** Life is fleeting and when that begins to sink in, we start to rethink associations that genuinely matter and are really important. We are compelled to re-asses our connections and restore ties with our family. We also rediscover church in its most essential unit – among families and actual neighbors.
- **Faithful reliance:** As in any crisis, faith tends to acquire unwittingly some much needed reinforcement especially when people get pinned down to a sense of helplessness. Faith plays a huge role because once we realize that things are no longer in our control, we look to God for answers. These days I can say with more certainty that my faith is really my strength. I have also grown to appreciate even more the liturgy as a communal experience and supplication as a personal encounter/conversation and even companion. For BECs faith and prayer is always the pillar of hope and source of consolation, more so in these times when we cannot see what we are up against and the future seems so uncertain. Our assurance comes from a very common MKK mantra, “Bahala na ang Dios” and that for us seems consolation enough.

- **Implicit action response:** We all have a role to play in this universal effort to heal, protect and survive. No one is exempted. In in this time of crisis this was even more evident. We come to realize that irrespective of economic capacity, social standing, race or religion – everybody has a share in the fight to ensure the common good. Not long after the ECQ was imposed we started to see people rallying together to do whatever they can by distributing relief assistance, supplying protective equipment, feeding the hungry, comforting the sick, assisting the elderly, consoling those who grieve, etc. The first thing that came to my mind when the ECQ was announced is to mobilize the MKKs that were recently awarded sewing machines to produce face masks that are very much in demand in hospitals. I found out that the members were already discussing it on their own initiative weeks before I called them to make a proposal. This wasn't just an opportunity for the MKKs to earn an income while on ECQ, but it also gave them a chance to contribute to the collective action of assisting the city's frontliners. They felt a sense of fulfillment in that.
- **Interconnectedness:** Whatever we do affects everyone and everything around us. For me this is a very important lesson from the pandemic. This pandemic demonstrates interconnectedness like no other. Throughout this crisis experience we see signs of solidarity but also shared vulnerability. Like that song we often sing in our BECs – “though we are many, we are one body.” That is never truer than today. As we heal, the earth heals and as we move forward, we continue to ask: what can I give to make other peoples' lives more secure? This is a fruit of BEC thinking.

I've learned that we really need to concentrate our efforts on evaluating, strengthening/reinforcing elements in our BECs that nurture hard-wearing relationships, provide meaningful faith/prayer experiences and develop an unequivocal sense of mission. Because these are fundamental to the sustainability of BECs. If these elements are fortified, BECs/church will live through any crisis. Foremost in all our programs and initiatives should be investing in those elements, listening and learning every step of the way from the community's experiences.

2. How do you foresee the BECs post pandemic?

I believe post-pandemic, when we begin to embrace the so called 'new normal' BEC will make more sense than ever in the church, especially in parishes that did not believe in it. When you think about it, BECs now are becoming more alive and relevant when 'church-at-the-center' is no longer **the center**.

3. What challenges and changes in the BECs do you foresee?

- How do we reconfigure neighborhood communities to become the center of church life?
- How do we demonstrate or establish the relevance of church in a crisis response?
- How will “new normal” impact church traditions and practices and how far are we willing to go as church to shift and adapt to the changes?
- How can we integrate or utilize facts/science-based wisdom into our approaches?

BP. JOSE CABANTAN, MALAYBALAY



1. What has the pandemic experience taught you about the BECs?

BECs: Staying at (the Church in the) Home in this Time of Pandemic

The lockdown has given much attention to our house churches, the family. It is said that “parish churches are closed by this time but it also opens many churches at home.” St. John Paul II also calls the parish as family of families. We too in the diocese envision ourselves to be a family of BECs. Thus this home quarantine helps us realize the vitality and power of the families as “domus ecclesia”. BECs are called in this sense to work closely with the family life apostolate and those movements geared for the formation of families as house churches. BECs help strengthen the common bond of friendship in the family and among families. BECs too can provide the way for the families to be a missionary disciple. This becomes more concrete at this time of pandemic.

During the lockdown the family as a worshipping community becomes more manifest. Home liturgies abound especially during the Holy Week for the families to be active. Some families who followed the online Mass also prepared themselves well surrounding the TV set. Although they believe in spiritual communion, a certain family places bread in front of them just to “sacramentalize” their communion as a family. Others may call this an obsession of the Eucharistic bread but for them it is a really a sign of their hunger for the bread of life in the Eucharistic species. It is an act of faith. Harnessing that thirst and hunger of our families for the Eucharist will be a great potential for the building up of a Eucharistic community. By the time we were permitted to give communion outside the Mass, the BECs greatly help to implement that without violating the hygiene protocols. In the directive they should first attend the online Mass and then the priest go to the chapels and the Eucharistic ministers go to the families or BECs.

One thing we have noticed is their hunger and thirst for the Word too. The diocese is producing liturgical guide for the whole liturgical month's celebration. We expected that the orders of this guide will decrease since they cannot go to the chapel for their liturgical celebrations. But to our surprise the order just decreased a little. One Alagad/Eucharistic ministers said that they use this during their prayers in the family. Like the early Christian community, they too nourish their faith through God's Word and receive spiritually the body of Christ. A certain family has shared how each of the members of their family were assigned to share their reflection of the readings.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, the family as missionary disciples never cease doing charity for others in need. They continue to break bread together for others. BEC leaders are instrumental too in giving out food packs for those who have not received the aid from the government.

What the church is doing is just to complement what the government is giving to the poor. There are those who received from the government but since they are many in the family it is consumed quickly. So, the BEC leader identified these people and by the grace of God they were able to share their bread for others. *The church is so alive in mission at this time of pandemic though the church buildings are close. The pandemic indeed has allowed us to return to our homes and to our BECs, the most fundamental structure of our being church.* Through the generous hands of others, people have filled their hunger both for the Word and food. This is indeed a jubilee.

In the country, the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) is in a way a relief to the poor sectors who are hardly hit by this pandemic including those who lost their jobs due to the lockdown. The program is not that perfect as we have heard complaints from many parts of the country. Some were told that they cannot receive the fund because their names are not on the list. The list used today was the one prepared last 2015 and needs updating, but they are not able to do so. This tells us how imperfect the program is, the mechanics is not that efficient and needs a lot more improvement. Perhaps the BECs can help in improving the program if they were tapped.

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BECs Postpandemic Catalyst for Renewal

BECs is a great factor that sustains us as a people in mission. It is the community at the grassroots that can truly reach the roots of the grass. During the lockdown where people were isolated, one can sense the need for each other. People say that during lockdown "neighbor helping neighbors" is a great stress reliever.

Mental Health is affected in isolation hence one needs to communicate. Usually people communicate through the modern gadgets, thru group chats and others. This makes the person sane while in lockdown. But with BECs in the neighborhood, this need to live in solidarity with one another is so precious then. This makes their neighborhood not just virtual, but have a physical, spiritual bonding. Active participation in worship and in common action are inseparably linked. This experience during pandemic contributes a lot to the building up of more Basic Ecclesial Communities who are one in prayer, contemplation and in action fulfilling the three-fold mission of Jesus as priest, prophet and king.

The church indeed should be a hospital in the field like those field hospitals set up during this pandemic. We need to go out and should not stay at the center of our parishes. *Our BECs should not limit to meeting together every week for prayer but should also go out and visit the whole neighborhood. Truly the church, the BECs are revitalized, reenergized by fulfilling these missionary mandate of the Lord.* The experience is like the new Pentecost, that filled with the Holy Spirit they go out with hearts burning with God's love proclaiming the Good News to the poor.

The BECs then have a vital role of sustaining the fire that warms the heart of these fellow brethren of ours who have returned home. Part of the program of the diocese too in this jubilee is to institutionalize a ministry of the poor for the poor thru the social action ministry and our move to make a diocesan cooperative.

The program is named MKKMK (Moapil Ko Kay Makatabang Ko). This program is for all parishioners to give pledges as small as five pesos. When their contribution reaches two hundred fifty pesos they become automatically a member of San Isidro Labrador Diocesan Multi-Purpose Cooperative (SILDIMCO). Part of the savings of this will modify the **arancel** system of the diocese later on. The other funds will be used to help those who are in need like for house repairs, health and others.

Continuing Catechesis and Formation

Pope Francis conveys this as a challenge for all of us. After the lockdown, people might get used to virtual celebration of the sacraments. Online masses are helpful at this time of crisis but should not become a new normal that our young will no longer go to church since they can be with the church's celebration from a distance or virtually. This is a cause of concern especially that even before the pandemic some are hooked into their gadgets always as digital natives.

How can BECs help address this challenge in the neighborhood? The call for constant personal and ecclesial conversion is really real even in the post-pandemic period. Some people too who became acquainted too much in isolation would rather pray by themselves alone than by joining the Eucharistic celebration. These are some of the comments on social media when the issue to returning public masses was called off. Some people no longer appreciate the reality of belonging to an ecclesial body. We believe that BECs can take up this challenge, letting them experience what it means to be a Church in our day to day living.

A Time to be Pro-active in the Midst of Threats to Life

We learn from scientific studies that pandemic is also due to the denudation of the forest especially the Amazon. This might just be a hypothesis but there might be truth in it. That is why, they are alarming us of the future threats. But as we said, the pandemic has allowed the earth to rest and breathed a little. This implies that our BECs will be more pro-active in caring for our common home. This coming May 16-22 is declared by Pope Francis as Laudato Si week. We are asked to participate in this endeavor especially in forming our BECs to be "Carers of our Common Home." We are all called to be frontliners in this area of caring for our common home. The earth is one which is so vulnerable now above the powers that continue to exploit it and destroy the ecosystem in this too anthropocentric and consumeristic world. Perhaps we are one too who has contributed to this ecological crisis. This is the reason for ecological conversion.

Lastly of course, we have seen how vulnerable are the poor in this pandemic. They are always at the altar of sacrifice. But from our experience we can also tap the poor themselves to be the agents of their own development. BECs can link with government agencies like the DOST, DTI and others on these. A certain parish and a parochial school for instance by linking with these agencies have provided "Tubig sa Kinabuhi" a purified water for the community who are mostly Lumad. The school whose students are mostly Lumad also produces Nutritious Corn Instablend to address the malnutrition in the community. They tied up with the DOST's Community Empowerment thru Science and Technology program. These are just initiatives which can be done especially in this pandemic and even post-pandemic period. Responding to the cry of the poor and of creation can be done both by the BECs. This is an urgent need now because of this pandemic to be pro-active also in food production. It is both addressing the need to care for the earth and the poor.