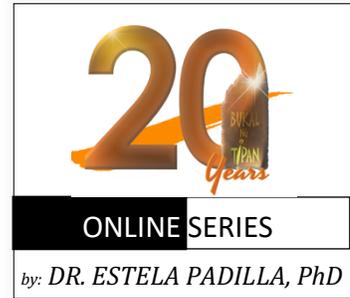


'PRESENCING'

NEW EVANGELIZATION IN THE NEW NORMAL?

on FORMATION



Last week, we started with this series called 'Presencing' (Otto Scharmer) which means deep listening. We wish to listen to one another and be inspired to change. How does a church or a faith community in the 'New Normal' look like?

Last week, we posted the reflections on Priesthood – the Ordained and the Lay through the BECs. They are the church and together they will carry and lead this transition into a new culture for a better church and society. This week we wish to reflect on Formation, a very important element for the change we wish to happen in postpandemic times. For most of us, perhaps when we hear the word 'formation' in church settings, we think of seminars, courses, conferences. If formation is limited to such, then who would attend church seminars these days, with all the limitations on transport and gatherings? Or a bigger question: Do people really need faith formation? In the midst of all the challenges this crisis has given us, what kind of formation could be relevant? We see a lot of seminars online, but is that the 'New/Better Normal'? The method is new – online (which is not new for the youth), but isn't such the same old formation, inputs given by experts? If people are mostly staying at home, how will they engage in faith formation? How about those preparing to lead the parishes, our seminarians. What formation do they need to lead in a time of crisis and chaos?

We at Bukal believe that life forms us. Formation happens in daily life. If formation is not connected to the daily lives of people, then formation could

remain a cerebral activity, and could then be an ineffective instrument of change. Jesus and the Holy Spirit form our hearts and character. If faith is not central in our daily consciousness, then formation loses its core energy. Perhaps, 'Presencing' – in Tagalog 'pagkanaririto' at 'pakikidama/ramdam' – is a good way to describe formation: a faith activity of a community immersed in daily life concerns and engaging God's Word and one another in common discernment and action.

We wish to look at three areas of formation – seminary, parish and catechetical. For seminary formation, we asked Fr. Andy Peter Lubi, the rector of St. Augustine Seminary in Tagaytay and also a theology professor. Next we have the reflections on Parish Formation from Ms. Mary Ann Cruz, program officer who handles the National Christian Formation of CEAP (Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines) and is also a very active Formation Team member of her parish in Cubao. Lastly, we have Fr. Renato De Guzman, SDB, who used to belong to the ECCCE (Episcopal Commission on Catechetics and Catholic Education of the CBCP) and a professor of Catechetics. He also reflected on Parish Formation being a parish priest himself.

We asked them the following questions:

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



FR. ANDY PETER LUBI,
RECTOR ST. AUGUSTINE
SEMINARY

Priestly formation is a "singular journey of Christian discipleship" that involves a process of integration and configuration to Christ, the

The initial stage of this formation primarily happens in the context of the seminary community where the integral formation of the person is promoted in the spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral aspects.

The main formation dynamics is by way of accompaniment. (cf. Ratio Fundamentalibus Institutionis Sacerdotalis, 2016) All of these have been well-established and institutionalized in the existing seminary structure and programs until the pandemic wrought by COVID-19 came about and this clear and present danger considerably rocked the boat and rendered many traditional ways of being and doing things along the vocational itinerary ineffective and impractical during this unprecedented crisis.

We now ought to face such salient questions as: How can integration be achieved if isolation has become the new norm? How can accompaniment be done when less encounter and interaction is considered the better choice? What would happen to the formation of hearts for service that values the ministry of presence and outreach especially to those in the peripheries when it is a lot safer for seminarians to remain locked up within the secure seminary premises? What would be the new and effective avenues for intellectual formation when face-to-face classroom instruction would be limited if not totally ruled out for safety purposes? Does the injunction “to stay home and save lives” mean that it is preferable for seminarians to literally stay home with their biological families or to let the seminary be their “home” during this critical moment?

The pandemic experience consists of living with a continuing threat of COVID-19 to the health and well-being of everyone. Physical and social distancing have become the new normal that unfortunately cause greater isolation and distrust brought about by the unknown which oftentimes degenerate into discrimination and marginalization. There is a pervading sense of insecurity and uncertainty that induces paralyzing psycho-emotional anxiety and worsening socio-economic instability. Communal fellowship and worship, foremost of which is the Eucharistic Celebration of the faithful, have been suspended for some time, and if ever they will be permitted to resume, they will definitely be marked by limitations and deprived of the usual festivity. On the positive side, the pandemic has accentuated our ecological consciousness—that everything is interconnected and interdependent, and the advancement in information technology has become our main recourse to enable virtual presence and connectivity.

What then are the implications of this “new normal” to priestly formation, specifically to formation within the context of the seminary? More than ever, there is a felt

need for physical and psycho-emotional health and wellness and an urgency to comply with standard health protocols inside and outside the seminary premises. There would be more occasions when prayer and spiritual exercises will be more practiced individually than collectively. There would be less classroom academics but more e-learning; less communal fellowship activities and sports and more solitary engagements even in rest and recreation; and less pastoral exposure and immersion, more “in house apostolate” and evangelizing undertakings utilizing the modern means of social communications. With greater economic instability, there will also be less financial viability and support for both the seminarians and the seminary as an institution.

Hence, the current pandemic poses pressing challenges but at the same time offers golden opportunities for creativity and resiliency for both the formators and formands--

1. To be more accountable to oneself and to every member of the community in matters of holistic health and well-being.
2. To nurture a deep contemplative spirit and a discerning stance rooted in docility and gratitude acknowledging that the Holy Spirit is the “primary agent of formation” and that the priestly vocation is fundamentally a personal response to God’s unmerited call.
3. To greatly exercise responsible freedom and practice ascetical discipline in the actualization of auto-formation.
4. To concretely live out one’s personal values towards internalized virtues.
5. To innovatively animate the community given the limited opportunities for fellowship, group and contact sports, outing and socialization.
6. To skillfully and responsibly utilize information technology not just for the formation of the mind but of the heart using state-of-the-art means of social communications for evangelization recognizing that the world wide web has become more and more the “Areopagus” of today (cf. Acts 17:16-34).
7. To remain in touch with the profound real life situations outside the confines of the seminary despite being securely locked up inside in order to vicariously share in the hopes and griefs, joys and sorrows, consolations and desolations of humanity so as not to be oblivious of the misery and struggles of the multitude.

9. To have a more emphatic and compassionate heart especially towards the sick and the aged, and those grieving their lost.
10. To develop an ecological consciousness and be more open to conversion with a sense of mission following the example of St. Therese of Lisieux who even while confined in the convent, offered her every undertaking for the promotion of charity, peace, justice, and reconciliation in the world.

Although the unique advantage of most seminaries is their secluded setting that can easily be locked up in response to the pernicious danger posed by COVID-19; still, there ought to be prudent compliance with standard health protocols to ensure safety and protection. There must be greater emphasis on auto-formation recognizing that the formand is the primary subject of formation and highlighting the exercise of responsible freedom. What can help facilitate self-formation is for each seminarian to craft a “Personal Formation Program” that will include the manner by which he would nurture his physical and psycho-emotional health and the specific aspects of formation that he intends to work on towards greater maturity and integration. Because of the expected fluidity of situation, regular communal discernment must be undertaken for proactive response to the ever-changing circumstances that affect the seminary life. Accompaniment has become more crucial during these uncertain times and it can be done by way of counseling, spiritual direction, individual colloquium, and by the practice of “buddy system” and by “unity or cell group” support structure. The “Triple Communication” dynamics that do not merely involve discussion of organizational/business matters but foster emotional and spiritual “communion of souls” can be helpful in addressing proneness to loneliness that can be experienced due to lessening of communal interactions. Since learning and connections with “the outside world” would be mostly by way of information technology, the prudent use of communication gadgets is necessary to ensure skillful and responsible utilization recognizing the potent power of social media to make or break one’s growth in maturity and intersubjectivity. Since most seminarians today are either millennials or post-millennials and by nature “digital natives”, they can be formed and trained to be effective social media evangelizers using the language and symbolisms meaningful and relevant to people from all walks of life especially the young.

In the area of Spiritual Formation, seminarians must be made more conscious and committed to the “constants” in life pertaining to God and to His providence and mercy affirmed by faith, nurtured by love,

and those that engender hope. The treasures of personal prayer and spiritual discernment, of silence and solitude, and of regular consciousness examen/examination of conscience need to be more appreciated and valued. More sacred spaces can be developed within the seminary compound to provide wider breathing spaces and intimate engagements with the divine through the beauty and wonder of nature.

More interventions in the aspect of Human Formation by way counseling and conferences addressing mental, affective and sexual health will also be of great help amidst this pandemic. With regard to Intellectual Formation, due to less face-to-face classes and the introduction of more blended learning, seminarians have to be encouraged to make the most out of this open learning opportunities to engage in solid and systematic reflection and research to add to the body of philosophical and theological literature and to offer projects that would enrich pastoral ministry and mission.

The Pastoral Formation will be more of an “inside experience but for the outside.”(cf. CBCP Episcopal Commission on Seminaries Proposed Guidelines for Seminary Formation during the COVID-19 Pandemic, March 15, 2020) Hence, greater creativity is needed so that with less physical presence, there will be more affective and spiritual presence by way of mediated yet impactful connections with faith communities. Modules for online Catechesis and Biblical studies and materials meant to empower families to be true “domestic churches” can be created by seminarians to support diocesan and parish programs. In-house ecological apostolate and pastoral service can be enhanced by way of doing or sharing in the household chores like cooking, baking, cleaning and gardening, and for the opus manuale to be directed towards livelihood projects for community self-sufficiency and for solidarity projects benefitting the poor in the spirit of pagdadamayan and pagmamalasakitan.

Indeed, seminary formation amidst the COVID-19 pandemic is a daunting challenge analogous to sailing along stormy seas. Nevertheless, it can be a kairos moment for the grace of resiliency and renewal to take root and flourish.





MARY ANN CRUZ,
CEAP

The pandemic took us all by surprise. Before we knew it, there were no more masses in the churches and all our parish assemblies were cancelled. All our formation activities were also cancelled. As it was Lent, our Lenten Recollection in the parish was cancelled.

We were thankful that there were Lenten Recollections online. This was so unsettling. It made me feel a bit insecure actually, I was so used to having the Church always present.

If there was anything that this pandemic taught me about parish formation, is the rich resource that is available all over the world through cyberspace. Formation has become borderless. With all the available webinars, recollections, masses and religious activities available online (synchronous or asynchronous) the Formation has become not only more available but in a way “convenient”. The Church continues to be present – ever present. Actually more available even. I found myself moving / surfing from one website to another to listen to other inputs. I would go to mass more than once, for a chance to listen to homilies in other online masses – sometimes, doing so to calm me or assure me when I am gripped with fear and anxieties during sleepless nights.

Since face-to-face interactions are going to be limited post-pandemic, perhaps, this kind of “normal” will continue. Online formation activities will continue. Social media where most of the people are will be maximized. I hope that the Formation activities will be more organized. The DIOCESE can post a menu of all DIOCESAN-WIDE formation activities (i.e. for the general faithful, for specific ministries, for specific organizations). There can also be a cross-posting of formation activities from the parishes or vicariates. Hopefully, the CBCP can also have its own menu of formation activities. This way, we are truly ONE CHURCH! Communion!

There are opportunities for people with similar interests (even if not geographically belonging to one parish) to come together; pray and reflect together since cyberspace is borderless.

The only challenge here is the accessibility of these formation activities to those with less resources or those with limited or no internet connectivity.

FR. RENATO DE GUZMAN,
professor of Catechetics and parish priest

Here are my reflections then both for the parish ministry and catechesis, vis-à-vis the work of formation.

1. More than before, Christ-centered Parish formation (both for parish leaders and parishioners) and catechetical formation (both for catechists and catechized) during this pandemic crisis.

More than ever parish and catechetical formation should focus on the Truth, Jesus Christ. Formation programs have to bring us to encounter and grow in friendship with Jesus, as the two disciples experienced. We need to experience Jesus accompanying us who are lockdown and who face an uncertain future because we do not know when this crisis will end. As the two disciples felt the friendly presence of Jesus, we all need Jesus walking side by side with us. Hence, the focus and main content of our parish and catechetical formation should be no other than the Risen Jesus, from whom we draw out hope and vision in the ministries.

2. More than before, Spirituality and Prayer in the parish and catechetical formation

The two disciples were very distressed. Is this not the trend among us during this crisis? Yet, when Jesus broke bread with them in their house, their hearts were burning and they welcomed Jesus. They let go of their frustration and anxiety while they were conversing with Jesus.

Since we are like the two disciples, we are anxious and we worry of the outcome of this pandemic crisis, the Spirit is leading us to be in conversation with Jesus through prayer. This time, it is not personal prayer alone is the Spirit inspiring us to experience, but family

prayer at home. The liturgical celebrations are now beamed in different way inside our homes. We have more time to come together and pray as a family.



3. More than before, Missionary Discipleship at home and in social media in the parish and catechetical formation

The end of the walk of the two disciples with Jesus was not inside their house. It ended back in Jerusalem. (Luke 24:33-48) To face their crisis, the two disciples took a different direction; sad to say a wrong direction. They left the community in Jerusalem. But upon recognizing the Risen Jesus in their midst, they could not help themselves to share with the community. So off they went back to Jerusalem "at the same hour / at once" (Luke 24:33). They were like Mary Magdalene, the woman apostle of the Resurrection; they also brought the news to the Jerusalem community that they left behind that morning.

Similarly, we are in crisis. While avoiding to be positive of the virus, we may tend to be overtaken by a negative and discouraged outlook in life, a virus worse than Covid 19. That is why it is necessary to cling to Jesus; it is important to relate with Jesus not with our heads but with our heart; it is essential for us to have a personal and real encounter with Jesus in these days of pandemic crisis.

With Jesus we are challenged to stand up to this crisis with the missionary spirit and enthusiasm of believers like the early Christians who suffered persecutions. For safety, they were hidden; some at home, some inside the catacombs. But their experience with Jesus was strong and alive that while in hiding and staying at home, their faith grew stronger, giving witness to the Risen Jesus even to the point of giving up their life.

As our parish and catechetical formation in this pandemic crisis leads us to experience the presence of Jesus at home and in the social media and gives us the graced moments of praying personally and as family and growing spiritually, the call to missionary discipleship should be nurtured as well. A goal of the parish and catechetical formation is to make us more convinced and engaging missionary disciples at home and in social media.

At this point, let me recall the urging of Pope Francis to the young, and now to all of us, in *Christus Vivit* 241: "Young people can find new fields of mission in the most varied settings. For example, since they are already so familiar with social networks, they should be encouraged to fill them with God, fraternity and commitment." I believe this is the best time for this encouragement to happen.

So, Estela, let me summarize reflection that you asked me to do: this pandemic crisis has led me to see both for the parish and catechetical formation more than ever the significance of being centered in Jesus Christ, oriented to spirituality and prayer, and directed to the formation of missionary disciples at home and in social media.

Now regarding the catechetical formation, here is my reflection which is still inspired by the Emmaus Story. I will try to be more practical in this part.

How do you perceive Catechetical Formation post-pandemic? What challenges and changes do you foresee?

Following the reflection above that the catechetical formation (both for the catechists and the catechized or learners) should be Christ-centered, oriented to spirituality and prayer, and directed to forming missionary disciples at home and in social media, I recommend the following as the catechetical direction during the pandemic crisis and hopefully in our catechesis henceforth.

1. More than ever Christ-centered catechesis

It is the Person of Jesus that we need to hand down and not only the truths about Him. Jesus is with us (Emmanuel) and walks with us (the Risen Christ). He helps us understand the Scriptures in His light and inspires us with His Spirit. "Were not our heart burning within us, while he was speaking on the way, and when he opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32)

Catechesis has to be grounded more than ever on the Word of God to animate the catechized with the Story of God who became Man and lived among us, who died and rose from the dead for us, who now is one with us as we await for His glorious coming. Indeed, to be Christocentric in the post pandemic crisis, catechesis has to be **kerygmatic**.

Pope Francis already initiated the revival of kerygmatic catechesis in *Evangelii Gaudium* 164.

In catechesis, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal. The kerygma is trinitarian.... On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you."

In Chapter Four of **Christus Vivit**, Pope Francis reiterates this kerygma for the youth and he tells them that this a very important message,

the one thing we should never keep quiet about. It is a message containing three great truths that all of us need constantly to keep hearing. (CV 111) The very first truth I would tell each of you is this: "God loves you." (CV 112) The second great truth is that Christ, out of love, sacrificed himself completely in order to save you. (CV 118) Finally, there is a third truth, inseparable from the second: Christ is alive! (CV 124)

Since in **Evangelii Gaudium**, Pope Francis mentions that the kerygma is trinitarian, to be consistent with this statement, I would add the fourth truth that Pope Francis told the youth in **Christus Vivit**.

In these three truths—God loves you; Christ is your Savior; he is alive—we see God the Father and Jesus. Wherever the Father and the Son are, there too, is the Holy Spirit. He is the one who quietly opens hearts to receive that message (CV 130) Ask the Holy Spirit each day to help you experience anew the great message. (CV 131)

So Estela, in this pandemic crisis, the challenge that I foresee is the revival of kerygmatic catechesis. Without completely abandoning experiential (inductive) catechesis, catechists need to shift kerygmatic (deductive) catechesis. Catechists have to understand and accept that the experience of the historical Jesus told in the Gospels is also human experience. Hence in kerygmatic catechesis where the Person and the Message of Jesus Christ is the starting point, it is also experiential and anthropological because the kerygma has a human dimension.

In doing kerygmatic catechesis, catechists and catechetical leaders will highlight the “initiation” dimension of catechesis and communicate to the catechized the first proclamation.

*This first proclamation is called “first” not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. **It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment.** (CV 164) (boldtype-mine).*

In kerygmatic catechesis, we become more conscious of giving emphasis on the catechized’s personal encounter with Jesus in the catechetical process rather on finishing what we wrote in our lesson plan. Catechesis will have to be deeper than being experiential and cerebral. Catechesis will have to be more affective and effective. This is the challenge.

2. More than ever we cannot overlook the close link of catechesis and liturgy, spirituality and prayer.

Again, there is a need to revive the early Christians’ belief: “*lex orandi, lex credendi*” that gave rise to the **catechumenate** as model of faith formation and rite of becoming Christians. The pandemic crisis is the “*Carpe Diem*” for catechesis to be liberated from overly academic and cerebral paradigm. We are now in the “*Kairos*” of creatively linking catechesis with liturgy, spirituality and prayer; catechetical formation to the liturgical and prayer life of the Christian community.

The two disciples of Emmaus listened to Jesus as well as broke bread with Him. It was in the breaking of bread that the process of recognition was completed, the process that began with Jesus opening the Scriptures for them. Throughout the process they were caught up with the catechist par excellence. So they affirmed: “*Were not our heart burning within us, while he was speaking on the way, and when he opened the Scriptures to us?*” (Luke 24:32)

Catechesis in the post pandemic crisis has to revive *mystagogy*. The two disciples in recognizing Jesus in the breaking of bread did *mystagogy*. In the sign and action of breaking of bread, they deepened on the mystery of faith.

Again I quote Pope Francis regarding *mystagogic initiation* that he refers in *Evangelii Gaudium* 166.

This (mystagogic initiation) basically has to do with two things: a progressive experience of formation involving the entire community and a renewed appreciation of the liturgical signs of Christian initiation.... Catechesis is a proclamation of the word and is always centered on that word, yet is also demands a suitable environment and an attractive presentation, the use of eloquent symbols, insertion into a broader growth process and the integration of every dimension of the person within a communal journey of hearing and response.

The neophytes in the times of the catechumenate had their faith enriched as they celebrated the sacraments through *mystagogy*. As the rites were experienced and explained, their faith in Jesus became more firmly rooted and strong faith convictions were formed in them.

When infant baptism was introduced in the Church liturgical praxis, after the Patristic times, the Church has abandoned giving importance to *mystagogy*. Thus, CCC makes an attempt to revive it as it recommends the practice of *post baptismal catechumenate*. CCC 1231 states:

Where infant Baptism has become the form in which this sacrament is usually celebrated, it has become a single act encapsulating the preparatory stages of Christian initiation in a very abridged way. By its very nature infant Baptism requires a post baptismal catechumenate.

This is the challenge for catechesis during this pandemic crisis: the revival of *mystagogy* in the catechetical process. Catechists and catechetical leaders should get into understanding the baptismal catechumenate, as it is the model of all catechesis in the Church, especially its last stage, “*a time of mystagogy, characterized by the experience of the sacraments and entry into the community.*” (GDC 88) They need to be creative to carry out *mystagogy* in a new context, the home and social media.

For this I suggest that in lieu of the sacramental celebration that we can't have these days of social distancing, the mystagogy takes place in the family prayer at home and prayer experience in social media where non liturgical symbols replace the liturgical symbols.

3. More than ever, we cannot overlook one unique feature of the story of Emmaus and that is togetherness.

The two disciples were not only focused on Jesus' words and actions; they walked together with Jesus; they broke bread together with Jesus; they set out to Jerusalem animated by their encounter with the Risen Jesus. *"And they explained the things that were done on the way..."* (Luke 24:36)

In today's pastoral language, inspired by Pope Francis, this togetherness is known as **synodality**. As Pope Francis approved in the *Final Document of the Synod on Youth*, a synodal church for the youth, and he proposed in ***Christus Vivit***, a youth ministry that is synodal, there is also an urgent need to do catechesis that is synodal, centered in and **together with** Jesus.

Togetherness in catechesis comes primarily from the person of the catechist and catechetical leader and later will be part of a catechetical syllabus or programs. The catechist is not only a teacher of a subject called "religion" or "Christian Living"; he or she is not only a minister of the Word and a transcriber of the documents of the Church. The catechist accompanies the catechized and together they walk the journey of faith as Jesus accompanied and walked together with the two disciples.

The fruit of accompaniment in the catechetical process is a relationship between the catechist and catechized that leads to **spiritual accompaniment** or **spiritual direction**. Spiritual direction is unfortunately not thought of as an important element of continuing evangelization and faith formation; yet the process of evangelization is completed by faith formation and spiritual direction.

The catechists go beyond teaching when they include spiritual accompaniment in the catechetical process. They are forming the catechized as missionary disciples. Jesus accompanied the two disciples from Jerusalem to Emmaus. At the end of the experience, the disciples became witnesses of the Risen Lord such that *"rising up at that same hour, they returned to Jerusalem"* (Luke 24:33).

Formation toward missionary discipleship is not really new in catechesis. In fact, it refers to one of the tasks of catechesis: initiation to missionary life.

GDC 86 discusses catechesis, open to missionary dimension, forms the catechized to become disciples of Jesus and live their Christian vocation in their professional, cultural and social life as well as in taking part in various ecclesial ministries.

Pope Francis places this task of catechesis in the context of the new evangelization and introduces the term "missionary disciples" in *Evangelii Gaudium* 119-121. He further challenges the youth in *Christus Vivit* to live their vocation as young missionaries in society and even in the world of the internet. In all these, the catechized and the young need to be accompanied since missionary discipleship is given as part of our Christian vocation and is nurtured and becomes mature with the Christian community and the Christians in the community accompanying them through daily witnessing, active community life and spiritual direction.

In summary, the story of Emmaus leads us to three characteristics of catechesis after this pandemic crisis, namely:

1. Christocentric that leads to **kerygmatic catechesis**
2. Close link of catechesis and liturgy, spirituality and prayer that leads to the revival of **mystagogy**
3. Togetherness and accompaniment in catechesis that leads to **synodal catechesis** that highlights **spiritual direction** and **missionary discipleship**.

As catechetical leaders in the post pandemic crisis, in considering these three characteristics, we need to look into the formation of catechists, the catechetical programs in the various stages and forms, and the organization and structural aspect of the catechetical ministry (diocese, parish, BECs and schools, etc).

There are more to share as we are in new normal situation and we are challenged to search for new ways of evangelizing and catechizing, educating to faith our faithful. The "how to carry out" catechesis that is Christ-centered, spirituality and prayer oriented and directed toward the formation of missionary disciples in this pandemic crisis and even thereafter will be interesting to discuss as well as the rediscovery of the church in the home or domestic church and family catechesis in this pandemic crisis.

