

Of Faith and Missions in Today's World

It is increasingly common today to hear of friends and family members going on "missions", or being on a "mission trip". Even our children talk about their mission trip experiences. Not too long ago, such proclamations brought to mind the image of devout and passionate people trekking through undeveloped grasslands to reach natives in order to spread God's word. Has the concept of missions evolved? And how does it relate to our faith? Must one come before the other, and, if so, in what particular order?

According to Fr David Garcia, OP, there is confusion in these terms, namely faith and mission. He shares his perspectives with us:

"Mission in usual parlance means to set out to do something practical and concrete. Today, it is common to hear about the vision and mission of organizations. So somehow, the religious environment has incorporated that organizational aspect of mission and we hear of parishes and religious groups "going out" for "mission work".

Technically speaking, the word "mission" as a theological term is somewhat different but not entirely disconnected from what we do. The etymology of "mission" comes from the Latin word *missio*, which means, "to send". In this sense, the congregation is sent at the end of every Eucharist by the words of the priest: Go forth, the mass is ended.

So, what is the Church sent to do?

As described by the (Catechism of the Catholic Church CCC 849), this is the missionary mandate of Christ: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19-20). The mission of the church is not, therefore, to make wells in Namibia but to preach the gospel to all and especially to those who haven't heard of it.

The other term that is even more confusing nowadays is the word "faith". To many it is loaded with religious meaning. However, it is not.

Faith is simply a belief. We regularly say things like, "I think or I believe that it will rain today." This means you are not a hundred percent sure, but are inclined to think so; no religious connotations here, merely a mundane exercise in believing in the absence of certain knowledge.

In this sense, faith is the opposite of perfect knowledge. And it is this sense of human belief that the Church uses to explain another concept of faith: the theological virtue of Christian faith.

St. Augustine explains that "faith is about things that are absent" (From "Creduntur Absentia: Letter 147 to Paulino; PL 33, 599).

St Thomas, another great and influential doctor of the church speaks of human faith or belief in these terms: "The intellect assents to something, not through being sufficiently moved to this assent by its proper object, but through an act of choice, whereby it turns voluntarily to one side rather than to the other and if this be accompanied by doubt and fear of the opposite side, there will be opinion while, if there be certainty and no fear of the other side, there will be faith. (From "Summa Theologiae", II-II, 1, 4).

Theological faith, however is God's gift, not simply an achievement of man's intelligence. God reveals something personal and intimate about Himself that must be accepted with faith, and that is what we call the Theological virtue of Christian faith.

However, true theological faith is faith that is alive. We call this faith with charity - in the past, what used to be called works of charity are what many now call mission work, the secular sense of the word mission. Theological faith without the works of charity is dead, and therefore it is not a virtue.

In this sense, works of charity need to be done in faith or with faith, and faith needs to be made concrete by acts of charity, that is, by the acts that show the love of God as Christianity understands it.

Thus, our faith, namely, our belief that God is love and wants all to be saved, requires us to do two things: love others, and communicate the good news of His love.

In loving others, we might have to help them to develop socially and build wells in Namibia (secular mission) while at the same time, convinced of God's love for these people, we cannot refrain from communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ to them (church's mission)."

Sign up now to participate in the Theological Reflection "Faith in Mission or Mission with Faith?" by His Grace, Archbishop William Goh at the Humanitarian Forum & Fair 2013. Organised by CHARIS, the event will be held on Saturday 22 June at Singapore Polytechnic Convention Hall. For more information: www.charis-singapore.org

Faith and Mission In Action: How the love for God moved these three women to put their faith in action by giving of their time and more!

Celestine Snodgrass

Epiphany

Bringing the love of Christ to the communities in Riau, through giving English lessons, hygiene training, bringing food packets and Christmas celebrations.

Just to “Look-See”

I went on my first mission trip just to look-see. I was stunned by the poverty I saw, just a short ferry ride from Singapore. I could not just stand by and do nothing.

The Call to Action

Our early efforts were sporadic and lacking in focus with no long term commitment. True mission involves being sent in response to a call. In the Bible we see the early mission activities by Peter and Paul were a response to calls by the Holy Spirit and they were sent by their church community.



Celestine with children in Karimbun, Riau Islands Indonesia, 2012

We were sent by our Spiritual Director, Fr. Brian DeSouza in response to a call from Fr. Poya in Batam, They were short of English speaking teachers, so we started the TeachNLearn programme in 2007.

Teaching English and more!

We run an English programme in the Riau islands. A team of volunteers go twice a month to teach English in St Ignatius Loyola Primary School in Rempang. Recently, in response to more requests we have extended the programme to two other mission stations, Tg Pinang (Bintan) and Taroka (Batam).

Besides teaching we also link up with various organisations to provide aid such as solar panels and water treatment to these mission stations. Once a year we organise an Advent outreach to the poor communities in Karimun island. We raise funds to buy basic foodstuff for 90 families, visiting each home to sing carols and deliver a Paket Natal. In supporting these mission stations we are helping to bring the Gospel message to the Riau islands.

Love and joy that keeps us going

The love and dedication of the TeachNLearn volunteers is really amazing. They give their money, their time and their talent to make the lessons meaningful and fun. It's truly Christ's Love in action. Some have been going every fortnight for years. There's always an aura of joy among us on these trips. That's what keeps me going. I have been doing outreach to the Riau islands since 2004.

Strengthened Faith

Certainly my Faith has been deepened through this mission. I glimpse the Lord's hand at work again and again. Every fortnight as our teams prepare for the trips to the 3 stations we often wonder about getting enough volunteers but somehow the Lord has always sent enough people, even as we expanded to more places. He has also always been at hand to help when we encounter obstacles on our trips, bad weather, immigration problems, greedy customs officials,. And whenever there was a need such as funds or expertise the right person would step into the picture. My faith has grown through these constant encounters with God as I carry out His mission work.

Millicent Tan **Project Kyrie**

*Loving God through
sharing with those who
need help*

God is complete!

God says to love your
God with all your heart
and to love others as
you love yourself.

Since God is complete and does not need anything from us, I show my love for Him and to live out His commandments, by sharing where I can, with those who need my help.



Millicent (2nd row, 2nd from right) with volunteers and beneficiaries in Batam, Indonesia, Mar 2013

The ABC Approach

My call to action inspires me to look out for those in need. In the days when I was a busy corporate executive, I started sharing plights of people to like-minded 'busy' friends via social media so that we pool our capabilities and resources to help and reach out in our ways.

In our missions we discern the type of help to be given by the following principles:

A : Assist with Humanitarian aid

B : Build good foundations through education and skills training

C : Create opportunities through jobs and small business schemes

Helping others - a lifestyle choice

Helping others has become a lifestyle choice. It is simply being me. Nothing in particular keeps me going except my belief that it is right to do what I do. It's not hard to just be 'ourselves' and there is a deep satisfaction knowing that with just a little effort, you are able to help others –both donors and beneficiaries - make a small difference in the corner of your world.

Since young I have been doing flag days and visiting the elderly. Project Kyrie network started in 2004. It's been one day and one person at a time. Length of time has little consequence when it is part and parcel of how you live life.

My faith, God's Work

My faith has deepened through mission because Mission is God's work and not mine. He has allowed me to flow along with Him, when He gets things done. So this 'trip' He has brought me on , I have seen a lot of things which could have been difficult or maybe even impossible, yet being accomplished so easily by Him and this have increased my faith and awe in Him.

Project Kyrie is aptly named as it is truly the Lord's Project.

Theresa Goh

M3

Changing lives of women and children through education, creation of jobs, self knowledge and spirituality.

The 'seed' that grew

The seed was planted in me after my first mission trip with ACTS (to Cambodia) in 2008, which was driven purely out of curiosity. I was then a volunteer with the non-profit sector and felt an intensifying need to give to the community. A couple of events that happened over 2009 and 2010 pointed towards a 'mission' theme and I felt the 'seed' growing. The trigger was set off when I had a chance meeting with the Canossian Sisters and they asked for help with their Myanmar mission.

A cause, prayers and affirmation

The Canossian's charism of 'service to the poor' was planted in me at a young age. I am also a strong believer that to change lives, one needs to have a good foundation in education. The Canossian's cause in Myanmar combines both helping the poor and education, something that I am intrinsically motivated by.

I prayed, convinced two friends to commit to helping me all the way, and next invited ten friends (Catholics and non Catholics) to my house to listen to the Myanmar Mission. The positive reactions encouraged me to go further and involve more people. Slowly what started out as an informal way of helping the Canossian Sisters became more structured and programmatic as we organized fund raising events and mission trips with regular monthly updates.

Driven to continue

I started supporting the Canossians in Jan 2010. Believing that one should not stay too long to do one thing, I'd earlier committed to help for 3 years. This is the third year but instead of winding down, I embarked on a Vision 2020 planning with the Canossians! Does this mean another 7 years to do this work? I don't know but I do know that something inside of me is driving me to do more with this mission over and above fund raising and organizing of trips.

I believe the Canossians have planted a solid foundation to change women and children's lives through education, creation of jobs, self knowledge and spirituality. I also believe that the work will move from providing education to the women to a more directly influencing of lives in the villages which are remote and far away. In a country which has been shut out of the world for 50 years, there is a lot to learn and much to do so I make it a point to tell everyone I meet about this mission regardless of their religious beliefs. Many who have helped in the mission tell me it has enriched their lives.

My faith, my season and time

I committed to this mission based on a deep trust that this is my 'season' and time. My faith has deepened because I see many people moved to do good. I witness how God positions peoples' talents to give back to his people. I see how God sends volunteers to this mission when needed. I also witness the deep faith the Canossians have, when their resources seem so limited, the first thing they do is turn to God and have collective prayers. I also witness how God sends others to remind us of how blessed we are to have so much.



Theresa with children in a Boarding House at Magekhine, outskirts of Yangon, Myanmar. Dec 2011