

THE EVANGELIZING MISSION IN SANCTUARIES

INTRODUCTION

The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which we acquire sanctity through the grace of God, will attain its full perfection only in the glory of heaven, when there will come the time of the restoration of all things. (cf. Acts 3,21). At that time the human race as well as the entire world, which is intimately related to man and attains to its end through him, will be perfectly reestablished in Christ. (cf Eph 1, 10; Col 1, 20; 2 Ped 3, 10-13).

Already the final stage of the world is upon us (cf. 1 Cor 10, 11) and the renovation of the world was irrevocably decreed and already anticipated in some kind of a real way; for the Church on this earth was chosen to have true and yet imperfect holiness. However, until there shall be new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells (cf 2 Ped 3, 13), the pilgrim Church in her sacraments and institutions, which pertain to this present time, has the appearance of this world which is passing and she herself dwells among creatures who groan and travail in pain until now and await the revelation of the sons of God. (cf Rom 8, 19-22)” (In LG Cap. VIIIO n° 48).

PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

General Goal

“To evangelize by proclaiming the Good News of Jesus, which is the way to sanctity through the service, dialogue, proclamation and testimony of communion, under the evangelical preference of the poor, by promoting human dignity, by renewing their communities, by building the People of God and by sharing justice and solidarity on the road to the definitive Kingdom.” (National Evangelization Project 2004-2007 of The National Conference of Bishops in Brazil).

Specific Goal

“To announce the Gospel of Jesus Christ, His person, His life, His death, and His resurrection to enable a PERSONAL ENCOUNTER with Christ, in the community, and to help each person to adhere to Him, and in so doing, carry out the missionary task entrusted by Him to the Church.” (National Evangelization Project 2004-2007 of The National Conference of Bishops in Brazil).

Common Goal

“The general goal of sanctuaries is to motivate the People of God, who have become pilgrims, to embrace the life of the Church through basic options and in light of the message of each sanctuary.”

SANCTUARY DIRECTIVES — PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

1. Sanctuaries must be incorporated in the Organic Pastoral of the National Conference of Bishops, the Regional and the Particular Church.

- "For many people, the sanctuary is the only place where they listen to the Word of God and receive sacraments. Therefore, special attention must be paid to the sanctuaries' pastoral, so that they become places of true evangelization and part of the Communion in Mission."

- Sanctuaries must be open to receive dioceses, Parishioners, groups and movements in special moments of celebration.

- To achieve a perfect integration with the local community, common planned activities shall be organized, at personal, ministerial and pastoral levels.

- Sanctuaries shall fully embrace the campaigns promoted by Episcopal Conferences, and other pastoral activities by each country's Church, in accordance with the nature and characteristics of their pastoral action.

1.1 Pastoral Agents are responsible for the liturgical pastoral activities in the sanctuary, promoting team spirit through study, planning, vision and availability. Sporadically, Pastoral Agents, in a missionary spirit, may spread their activities to other communities. It will be very valuable to include in those activities study visits and pastoral exchange to other sanctuaries, at regional, national and international levels. Laypersons must collaborate, providing special services and ministries, according to the praxis of the Church. The sanctuary shall work hard to provide a suitable preparation to laypersons.

1.2 In the Sanctuary, the work of the Vocational Pastoral Ministry shall be well-organized and dynamic, helping pilgrims understand their specific Christian vocation, without replacing the effort of the congregation or community.

1.3 The Sanctuary's Pastoral Agents shall consider that pilgrims are just representatives, coming on behalf of their community. They go back renewed to share the message of the sanctuary with their brethren. Therefore, pastoral and liturgical activities shall seek an active and committed participation in their local community.

1.4 The religiousness of pilgrims must be highly esteemed. Therefore, the sanctuary must promote the richness of their values, respecting their popular practices, overcoming their limitations and providing them with the right guidance, through a suitable and creative evangelizing pedagogy.

1.5 The Sanctuary shall value and celebrate blessings, preceded by suitable catechesis, answering the pilgrims' human wishes. "... The Church defines blessing as removing the veil that covers the good that upon creation the Lord vested on things, and the Redeemer wishes and offers to the men and women that He saves." The Sanctuary does not encourage the practice of vow-making but it does offer safe guidance about the right way to make them.

FRATERNIZATION BETWEEN PILGRIMS

2. The Sanctuary must offer pilgrims room to express communion, solidarity, sharing, like the primitive Christian community did. This fraternization helps people to be evangelized and to in turn evangelize others, within the current spirit of the Church.

2.1 It is essential that the Sanctuary offer a joyous and welcoming environment for pilgrims. This shall pervade every activity, for each community and culture. In that atmosphere, pilgrims shall be suitably received and treated, so that they shall take back a message of hope.

2.2 For the pilgrims' well-being and order, the Sanctuary shall offer them suitable humane services, as something characteristic of the Church. Therefore, there shall be welcoming teams, information and security services, medical care, communion centers, and free parking.

2.3 The pilgrims' artistic bent shall be encouraged, providing them with the opportunity for their folkloric and cultural displays. These may be festivals, performances and other popular expressions of their culture.

2.4 Business activities within the Sanctuary, even if necessary, shall avoid ostentation, exploitation and abuse. This is a service for pilgrims' well-being. The products shall be of good quality and profits must be reinvested for the pilgrims.

LISTENING AND MEDITATING THE WORD OF GOD

3. The Sanctuary must help pilgrims to listen and meditate the Word of God.

3.1 The proclamation of the Word of God shall enlighten pilgrims with the truth about Jesus Christ, the Church, and the Human Person, fostering closeness for their necessary conversion and adherence in a Church community.

3.2 The proclamation language shall be simple, but rich in examples. The pilgrim's life and experiences shall always be the starting point. It shall continue to be prophetic, but at the same time full of gentleness, opening doors of hope, mercy and fraternal communion.

3.3 The Word of God, celebrated in liturgy, shall also be illustrated through the communication media: films, slides, performances, canticles, printed matter, conferences, exhibitions, especially during Bible Month.

In the Sanctuary, special attention must be paid to the revision of prayers and canticles' language, so that they match the wishes of the people, the meaning of the Sanctuary and the renewed content of Theology.

PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY PRAYER

4. The Sanctuary shall help pilgrims in their personal and community prayer.

4.1 The Sanctuary shall foster personal and community prayers that stem from the Word of God and the pilgrims' experience.

4.2 Pilgrims shall be duly prepared to take an active role in the liturgy of the Sanctuary, that recalls the Mystery of Salvation.

Liturgical celebrations shall be adapted to the pilgrims' life situations and the nature of the Sanctuary, in accordance to the Church orientations.

RECONCILIATION

5. The Sanctuary must help pilgrims to celebrate their reconciliation.

5.1 The Sanctuary's Pastoral must be organized in such a way that it encourages pilgrims to reconcile with God, guiding them towards an authentic conversion to a Christian way of life.

5.2 In the Sanctuary, typically penance signs and celebrations shall be valued and promoted, fostering reconciliation. This requires the suitable preparation and individual confession of sins, using the Second Rite of the Ordo Paenitentiae — the reconciliation of several penitents with individual confession and absolution. If necessary, the Third Rite, contemplated in Ordo Paenitentiae — the reconciliation of several penitents with general confession and absolution — following the rules established by the Church.

CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST

6. The great assembly, gathered in the Sanctuary, shall be invited to the celebration of the Eucharist, as the height of Christian life and the pilgrimage.

6.1 Given the fact that most pilgrims turn to the Sanctuary for spiritual comfort and confidence for their Christian life, the Eucharist shall be marked by hope, celebrating life to encourage them and provide them with joy along the way, with a view to the ultimate freedom in Jesus Christ.

6.2 The celebration of the Eucharist shall be carried out in such a way that pilgrims feel encouraged to participate more actively in the Sanctuary and in their local communities, and also to show solidarity with the weak and the poor.

6.3 Given the spirit of the Sanctuary and its pastoral, which is clearly extraordinary, pilgrims do not receive other sacraments, aside from cases of proven exception, following the orientations of the Communion in Mission and the local Church.

CONCLUSION

To finish this approach to the Sanctuaries' evangelizing mission, we present an observation from the Informative Newsletter of the Pastoral of Tourism, Pilgrimage and Sanctuaries, from the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerants: "Great crowds arrive here every day. Anyone may ask themselves: 'Is this just a tourist or a pilgrim?' Only God knows the secret of the heart. Our responsibility is to make every effort to welcome newcomers to the Sanctuary. They should be welcome with 'their joys, hopes, questions, doubts, fears and pains.' They should find an attentive ear, an open heart: these are the signs of our God, who offers mercy and forgiveness. Our world without mercy, without forgiveness, needs places where hope can take shape..."