

# **OUR COMMITMENT TO THE APOSTOLATE**

**PASTORAL LETTER OF THE MOST  
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**TO OUR BELOVED PEOPLE OF GOD: THE CLERGY AND  
THE LAITY**

**GRACE, JUSTICE AND PEACE FROM OUR LORD, JESUS CHRIST!**

We address this Letter to you, first of all, to extend with joy our fraternal and cordial greetings and to express our gratitude for the considerable works you have accomplished with extraordinary dynamism during these past years to fulfill the objectives put before you as APOSTLES.

Secondly, we wish to remind you once again, through this Pastoral Letter, on Christ's unceasing call to the APOSTOLATE, and to stress to you a sense of awareness of our COMMITMENT AS APOSTLES.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Oftentimes we hear these words of Christ which we know and love so well: "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and have appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain."<sup>1</sup> This is Christ's call to the apostolate and it is addressed to us all who are chosen from thousands and thousands of human beings. What a special grace! What a singular privilege!

Moreover, the Holy Father, in his Encyclical "Mystici Corporis Christi,"<sup>2</sup> in calling upon all the members of the Church to collaborate in the building and perfecting of the Mystical Body of Christ, also reminds us — both the Clergy and the Laity — on our call to the apostolate. The Church, through his Holiness, only echoes the call of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> St. John XV:16.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* a. 35, p. 24, 1943.

In the decisive words to His Apostles, Christ said: "You, therefore, must go out, making disciples of all nations, and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all the commandments which I have given you."<sup>3</sup> Here, Christ presents the nature of our apostolate; it is, in fact, the definition of the Church's mission.

In his address to the Second World Congress for the Lay Apostolate, Cardinal Pizzardo remarks that "the apostolate is the work of one who seeks to make known the Will of His Lord and Master, that is to say, to make Jesus Christ known and loved. Obviously, to make Him known and loved by others, we must first know and love Him ourselves; that is the indispensable foundation of the apostolate."<sup>4</sup>

The Council Fathers, in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, define apostolate as "all activity of the Mystical Body directed to the attainment of the goal for which the Church was founded: that by spreading the Kingdom of Christ everywhere for the glory of God the Father, she might bring all men to share in Christ's saving redemption; and through them the whole world might in actual fact be brought into relationship with him."<sup>5</sup>

Doubtless to say, the Council Fathers are only expressing the mind of God regarding the essentials of our apostolate but with a strong desire "to intensify the apostolic activity of the People of God."<sup>6</sup>

However, to have a better understanding and a clearer vision of our apostolate with new awareness and a new energy, this Pastoral Letter hopes to treat the matter in the perspective of God's Plan, of the Mission of Christ and His Church, of the living Organisms through which the Church's Mission is fulfilled, and of our Common Undertaking to Build Up the Parish (with its Council and Plan) into a Genuine Christian Community.

### THE DIVINE PLAN

God has willed the salvation of all mankind and He decreed that this should be carried out through Christ and in Christ. The Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians,<sup>7</sup> sees this predetermined plan of God for the salvation of mankind to be centered through Christ

<sup>3</sup> St. Matthew XVIII:19-20.

<sup>4</sup> *Laymen In The Church Texts*. Vol. I, p. 47, Rome, 5-13 October, 1957.

<sup>5</sup> *Apostolate of the Laity*, No. 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. Eph. I:3-10.

**and in Christ, and to be revealed in various ways: the call to be holy in Christ; the divine adoptive sonship establishing relationship with God the Father through Christ; the liberation from sin through Christ's death; the gift of faith in Christ bestowed upon the Jews and the Gentiles, and finally, the bringing of all creation under Christ's Headship.**

Not satisfied with saving men, God has willed them to share in Christ and through Christ in His very Life and Being and Sanctity: "that you become sharers of the divine nature,"<sup>8</sup> In other words, God has also willed our identification with Christ.

Moreover, God has willed them to be united, around Christ, in a community. He has formed for Himself "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a holy people."<sup>9</sup> He has created for Himself a family, in which He is the Father and Christ the Elder Brother, whose members are one: "that they may be one, even as we are one."<sup>10</sup> Such is the Holy Church of Christ, of God, She is filled with the fulness of Christ. She is the fulness of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, God has willed that His Church should communicate the fulness of Christ to those who are still outside the fold,<sup>12</sup> those who are lost<sup>13</sup> and even those who are already within "that they may have it to the full."<sup>14</sup>

**Such is the Divine Plan of Salvation — CHRIST-CENTERED!**

### **GOD'S PLAN IN THE COURSE OF SACRED HISTORY**

Although the Church has Her origin in eternity, nevertheless, She belongs to history. She contains God's plan which must be unfolded and achieved in history.

When sin enters into history immediately after the fall of our first parents and consequently, the loss of divine life and other divine possessions), everything is orientated with reference to Christ. Thus, the Church is already present in the mind of God.

The Old Testament records many of them either in the form of a promise,<sup>15</sup> or by types and figures, like the Chosen Men from the

<sup>8</sup> 2 Peter I:4.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Peter II:9.

<sup>10</sup> St. John XVII:11.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. Col. II:9; Eph. I:23.

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. St. John X:16.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. St. Luke XIX:10.

<sup>14</sup> St. John X:10.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. Gen. III:15; XXII:18; XXVI:4; XLIX:10 Num. XIV:17; Deut. XVIII:15; 2 Kings VII:12-14.

days of Adam to the days of King David; like the Ark of the Covenant, the Paschal Lamb, the Manna and the Brazen Serpent; or through Prophecy.<sup>16</sup>

These biblical citations clearly point towards **One Person, the God-Man Jesus Christ**. For here, the transmission of the human flesh from which Christ will take His Body is already taking place; the physical and human environment in which Christ will be immersed and from which He will take His physical and human characteristics is already being formed; and the people from whom Christ will come are already chosen by a pact of friendly alliance established by God.

At last, "the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us."<sup>17</sup> The Second Divine Person of the Triune God, without ceasing to be God, takes a whole and complete human nature, that is, a human body and a human soul and unites it to His Divine Nature.

By the Fact that Christ enters into the human family, taking for Himself a human Mother, making Himself our Brother according to the flesh and making of us His brothers according to the spirit, a community is born: **The Church made visible to all**. And from the moment the Holy Spirit descend upon the disciples at Pentecost, the visible Church is made open to all peoples.

God's plan of love and salvation is, indeed, fulfilled in the various stages of Sacred History.

### THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Christ establishes the Church with a mission from the Father, He Himself, in several instances, defines such mission. Standing before Pilate, Jesus said: "The reason why I came into the world, is to testify to the truth."<sup>18</sup> As a boy, in the temple, He replied to Mary: "Did you not know I had to be in My Father's business?"<sup>19</sup> And again, in another occasion of His public life: "The Son of Man has come to search out and save what was lost."<sup>20</sup> "For I did not come to condemn the world but to save it."<sup>21</sup> The Nicene Creed,

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. Is. VII:14; XI:1; Mich. V:2; Osee XI:1; Dan. IX:24-27; Psalms XXI and LXVIII.

<sup>17</sup> St. John I:14.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* XVIII:37.

<sup>19</sup> St. Luke II:49.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* XIX:10.

<sup>21</sup> St. John XII:48.

in the profession of our Faith, sums up all this: "Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven."<sup>22</sup>

But Christ has to leave this world and to go back to His Father. In describing the pattern of His earthly life, He said: "I did, indeed, come from the Father, I came into the world. Now I am leaving the world to go to the Father."<sup>23</sup>

However, He confers upon His Church through His Apostles a special mandate when He said, "As the Father has sent Me, so I send you."<sup>24</sup> He who hears you, hears Me. He who rejects you, rejects Me, rejects Him who sent Me."<sup>25</sup> Thus, the Church through the Apostles and their successors will be seen as the **principle of continuity and diffusion for the Christian Revelation**, and at the same time, of **unity and authority for the believers**. The **Mission of the Church** is, indeed, the **continuation of Christ's Mission**. The **Mission of Christ** flows over into the **Mission of the Church**.

In continuing and exercising the Mission of Christ, the Church, bear this well in mind, in order to keep up for all times her identity with Christ, must preserve intact the **Orthodoxy of the Divine Heritage** — the "Depositum" which Apostle Paul says must be faithfully kept safe.<sup>26</sup> This helps us to understand the **Authenticity of the Church's Mission**, otherwise it is no longer the continuation of Christ's Mission but rather it is a purely human mission and a human affair.

Moreover, it must also be pointed out that the Church's Mission is neither springing from itself nor self-organized, but derived from Christ and conferred by Christ, in the words of Apostle Paul, "sent not by men or by any man, but by Jesus Christ and God His Father who raised Him from the dead."<sup>27</sup> One, therefore, has first to receive the **Mandate** to exercise so sublime a function, for certainly without being commissioned "Men will present themselves distorting the truth and leading astray any who follow them".<sup>28</sup>

### THE CLERGY AND THE LAITY

In the era of the New Alliance, the time in which we are living, the Church fulfills Her Mission through **Structures and Organisms** which Christ himself defines and prepares and to which the Holy

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. Denz., 54.

<sup>23</sup> St. John XVI:28.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* XX:21.

<sup>25</sup> St. Luke X:16.

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. 1 Tim. VI:20.

<sup>27</sup> Gal. I:1.

<sup>28</sup> Acts XX:30.

Spirit gives life. The Clergy (the Priesthood in the strict sense) and the Laity, by virtue of the grace and Character conferred on them by Baptism and Confirmation, the Clergy, also by Holy Orders), are the living and Strong Structures and Organisms destined to make up the Mystical Body of Christ. Though distinct one from another, yet the Clergy and the Laity are necessarily linked in the Unity of the Church. They are like the branches which must remain united to the vine-stem which is Christ, so that they may bring forth much fruit.<sup>29</sup> Though one is a Priest and the other a layman and consequently, the apostolate of the one is sacerdotal and of the other, lay, yet both collaborate in the commitment to continue Christ's Mission. For, both receive the commission to be the "salt of the earth and the light of the world."<sup>30</sup>

Certainly, "in the Church, there is diversity of service but unity of purpose."<sup>31</sup> "For just as in one body we have many members, yet all the members have not the same function, so we, the many are one body in Christ, but severally members one of another."<sup>32</sup> "Each has a share in the function as well as in the life of the body,"<sup>33</sup> and the whole body which is the Church, "derives its increase according to the functioning in due measure of each single part."<sup>34</sup>

Thus, the Clergy, in responding to the call of Christ and in exercising the apostolate, perform the role as demanded of them by their sacred vocation; the Laity, too, play the part which is proper to them according to their state in life.

### THE PRIESTLY APOSTOLATE

Christ entrusts to His Apostles the power of Consecrating<sup>35</sup> and that of Teaching and Governing,<sup>36</sup> that is, of communicating to mankind the infallible truth and of establishing the laws which regulate Christian life. The Apostles pass these powers to the Pope and Bishops who, in turn, pass them on to the Ordained Priests. The Clergy, then, that is, the Pope, the Bishops and the Priests, in exercising the apostolate, perform a triple Ministry,<sup>37</sup> namely, the

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. St. John XV:5.

<sup>30</sup> St. Matthew V:13-14.

<sup>31</sup> Apostolate of the Laity, No. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Rom. XII:4-5.

<sup>33</sup> Apostolate of the Laity, Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Eph. IV:16.

<sup>35</sup> Cfr. St. Luke XXII:19:20.

<sup>36</sup> Cfr. St. Matthew XXVIII:19-20; XVI:18-20.

<sup>37</sup> Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church, No. 30.

**Ministry of the Word, the Ministry of the Sacraments, and the Ministry of Serving and Pasturing the People of God.**

The **Roman Pontiff**, by Divine Institution, as Vicar of Christ on earth and Successor of Saint Peter, "enjoys supreme, full immediate and universal authority over the care of souls... a primacy of ordinary power over all the Dioceses."<sup>38</sup> It is, therefore, the **Apostolic Role** of his Holiness, the Holy Father, as Pastor of all the faithful, to care for the "common good of the Universal Church and for the good of the individual Churches."<sup>39</sup>

The **Bishops**, for their part, being appointed by the Holy Spirit Successors of the Apostles to be Pastors of soul, have as their **Apostolic Role** (together, of course, with the Supreme Pontiff and under his authority), continuation "throughout the ages of the work of Christ which is... to teach all nations, to hallow men in truth and feed them."<sup>40</sup> In other words, to teach, to sanctify and to govern (serve) the sheep entrusted to their care in their respective dioceses (with the cooperation, of course, of the Presbytery) is the Bishops' concern, that ultimately all men may walk "in all goodness and justice and truth."<sup>41</sup>

The **Priests**, by virtue of their Sacred Ordination and of the mission they receive from their Bishops, "are promoted to the service of Christ, the Teacher, the Priest and King. They share in His ministry of unceasingly building up the Church on earth into the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit."<sup>42</sup>

Since the Bishop, due to limitation of time and space, cannot be everywhere at once, a community of co-workers is ordained — The Priests, "his Brothers and Friends,"<sup>43</sup> who teach, sanctify and govern in His name the People of God in their respective Parishes, that "men may knowingly, freely, and gratefully accept what God has achieved perfectly through Christ, and manifest it in their whole lives."<sup>44</sup>

Thus, it is only in and through the exercise of the **Priestly Apostolate**, that is, the apostolate to teach, to sanctify and to govern, that the Clergy may attain **Christian Perfection** and achieve **Personal Sanctification**.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Eph. V:9.

<sup>42</sup> *The Ministry and Life of Priests*, No. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, Nos. 13 and 18.

## THE LAY APOSTOLATE

Sacred Scripture clearly tells us that God shows no partiality: the revelation of His choice of Israel to be the People of God does not mean that He withholds the Divine Favor from other men.<sup>46</sup> At first, however, the developing Jewish community of Jerusalem shows unwillingness to accept others as Bearers of the Word of Salvation. But, finally, through an exceptional Ordinance of God, they come to realize His plan in the inclusion of other people.<sup>47</sup> Thus, a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles is formed and acquired the new name of "Christians."<sup>48</sup> In the new alliance the Church calls these Christians "The Laity" or "The Faithful," who "by Baptism are made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God."<sup>49</sup>

Being incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body through Baptism, strengthened by the Power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, consecrated into a Royal Priesthood and a Holy People and by the Holy Eucharist nourished "to communicate that Charity which is the Soul of the entire-apostolate,"<sup>50</sup> "the Laity are assigned to the Apostolate by the Lord Himself."<sup>51</sup> Their Christian vocation, by its very nature, is, indeed, a Vocation to the Apostolate.<sup>52</sup>

As we have already said, the duty to exercise the apostolate is common to both the Clergy and the Laity. Christ in conferring on the Clergy the duty of Teaching, Sanctifying and Ruling in His Name and Power, makes also "the Laity share in His priestly, prophetic and royal Office."<sup>53</sup> In other words, "the Lay Apostolate is a participation in the Saving Mission of the Church itself;"<sup>54</sup> "a share in the Mission of the whole People of God in the Church and in the world;"<sup>55</sup> "a Cooperation in the apostolate of the Hierarchy."<sup>56</sup>

The Lay Apostolate, therefore, is not only inherent in the Christian vocation, but also indispensable and necessary. For the Church (since time immemorial), since the days of our Lord in Jerusalem,

<sup>46</sup> Cfr. Acts X:34F.

<sup>47</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.*, XI:1-18.

<sup>48</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.*, X:26.

<sup>49</sup> Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, No. 31.

<sup>50</sup> Apostolate of the Laity, No. 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.* Nos. 1 and 2.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, No. 33.

<sup>55</sup> Apostolate of the Laity, No. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, No. 33.



nearly two thousand years ago, is never without it. Spontaneous and fruitful, indeed, is the Laity's activity at the very beginning of the Church.<sup>57</sup>

The Laity, by engaging in temporal affairs through their secular professions and occupations, and by living in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, are called to exercise their apostolate in the world as a kind of leaven. Through their temporal activity led by the spirit of the Gospel, they can openly bear witness to Christ, work for and promote the salvation of the world.<sup>58</sup>

The modern conditions existing in our times — like the shortage of Priests (and in some instances, a number of them, deprived of due freedom in their Ministry, and abandoning their vocation either due to celibacy or crisis of faith or strained relations with their superiors) the indifference to the Christian Faith on the part of a considerable number of baptized Catholics (and in some cases, total loss of such faith), the laxity of morality due to immoral books or magazines, movies or dramas (and sometimes, the evil influence imparted by particular radio and television programs and press releases), drug addiction and delinquency, the unfaithfulness in some Christian homes, divorce and unnecessary separation which most of the time lead to broken homes, the ever increasing rate of population with the presentation of artificial contraceptives, abortion, vasectomy and euthanasia as its solutions, the deteriorating relationship between the Church and State in some places, the corruption of a number of public officials (even in high places), unjust wages and poverty, the deteriorating peace and order situation, the cry — justified or unjustified — for human rights and women's liberation, the gross injustice which creates a pitiful travesty on the dignity and personality of Man, and those other areas which sometimes involve a degree of departure from the ethical and religious influences and a serious danger to Christian life, thus widening the gap between the modern world and the message of the Gospel — urgently need the concern and attention of the Laity.<sup>59</sup> For the most part, these areas are accessible only to them and through them. They become, in the words of Paul VI, a sort of a "Bridge to the modern world."

"Upon all the Laity, therefore, the Council Fathers remind us, rests the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation ever increasingly to all men of each epoch and in every land. Con-

<sup>57</sup> Cfr. Apostolate of the Laity, No. 1; Acts XI:19-21; Rom. XVI:1-16; Phil. IV:3.

<sup>58</sup> Cfr. Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, No. 31; The Apostolate of the Laity, No. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Cfr. Apostolate of the Laity, No. 1.

sequently, let every opportunity be given to them so that, according to their abilities and the needs of the times, they may zealously participate in the saving work of the Church."<sup>60</sup>

### **BUILDING GENUINE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY: OUR COMMON UNDERTAKING**

By Baptism, as we have already pointed out, we, both, the Clergy and the Laity, are members of one and the same Body of Christ, whose **Upbuilding** is entrusted to us. We, whatever rank or status, are called to the fulness of Christian life and to the **Perfection of Charity**.<sup>61</sup> And one of the effective ways to achieve Christian Holiness is the fulfillment, in the Spirit of Christ, of our respective roles in the **Common Undertaking of Building Up A Genuine Christian Community**. "The office of Pastors... is also properly extended to the formation of a **Genuine Christian Community**."<sup>62</sup> "The Laity also have their own proper role in **Building up the Church**."<sup>63</sup> The role of the Laity complements the role of the Clergy in building up a **Genuine Christian Community**, "since Pastors and Faithful are bound to each other by a mutual need. Pastors of the Church, following the example of the Lord, should minister to one another and to the other Faithful. The Faithful in their turn should enthusiastically lend their cooperative assistance to their Pastors."<sup>64</sup> "Their activity is so necessary within the Church Communities that without it the apostolate of the Pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness."<sup>65</sup>

### **THE PARISH — FIELD FOR OUR COMMON UNDERTAKING**

Since it is the Parish that the community of Christians is made present and visible, it is the **Parish** that should be the logical **Field for our Common Undertaking** which is to build it up into a **Genuine Christian Community**.

But how do we view our Parish? If we understand our Parish only in a **physical sense**, that is as only a **place or neighborhood** in which we reside, then there is a danger that even if we are in the Parish, we may not be aware that we are a part of it. Thus we go

<sup>60</sup> Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, No. 33.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 40.

<sup>62</sup> Ministry and Life of Priests, No. 6.

<sup>63</sup> Apostolate of the Laity, No. 25.

<sup>64</sup> Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, No. 32.

<sup>65</sup> Apostolate of the Laity, No. 10.

to Church wherever is most convenient to us, one Church this week another Church the next. We know the Parish Priest only by name, because he is rarely seen; we never come to the convento because the Parish Priest either has an indifferent attitude or is always out somewhere; and our only contact with Parish life, perhaps, is when we are tapped for a donation for the Parish fiesta or for a Parish project, which we willingly give since we are residents of the Parish and because we consider ourselves as good Catholics.

Another view of the Parish is functional. We see it as a division of the Church structure created for the purpose of rendering service to the parishioners. It exists, therefore, to serve the religious needs of the people. The concept, of course, is correct but inadequate, because it results in an idea of a Parish life which revolves only about the Church, going to Sunday Mass and occasionally receiving the Sacraments, perhaps, with a pietistic attitude. No wonder, then, many people identify the Parish with the Person of the Parish Priest, and when we get in trouble with him, then, that's the end of our Parish life.

Let us, therefore, view our Parish as a **Community of Christians**, as the **Primary Community of the Mystical Body** which is the Church, the People of God. However, we must be fully aware that the Parish is, first of all, a **Human Community**, that is, "a group of people carrying on a common interdependent life, and living in the context of social, cultural, geographical circumstances. This is the matrix on which the Christian Community is built. Even before it becomes Christian, a community must already be viable as a human community."<sup>66</sup> And the Parish can only become a Christian Community "when we build upon the human community the Spirit of Christ, and we do this by incorporating it into the **Worshipping Christ**, the **Witnessing Christ**, the **Serving Christ**,"<sup>67</sup>

We can, therefore, deduce that when the Parish becomes a Christian Community, it becomes a **Living Cell** of the Church and shares in Her triple Characteristics, namely a **Worshipping Community**, a **Witnessing Community** and a **Serving Community**. Thus, the Parish becomes a **Genuine Christian Community** when we, the Clergy and the Laity, are united in the **Worship of God**, in the **Teaching of the Gospel** and in the **Service of and Love for one another**.

In the concept of Vatican II, the Parish, to become a Christian Community must have "its basis and center in the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist..." (Worship) and "if the celebration is to be

<sup>66</sup> Benito Sison, "Parish Ministry and Management", Philippine Priests' Forum, Vol. II, No. 2 (June, 1970) pp. 23-24.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

sincere and thorough, it must lead to various work of Charity and mutual help (Service) as well as to missionary activity and to different forms of Christian Witness."<sup>68</sup> (Teaching)

This then, is the way all of us should see our Parish. With this concept, we will be able to extend our vision from the confines of the Church to the farthest corners of the Parish, for there, too, the Message of Christ must be brought. We cannot remain indifferent to its problems. We can no longer be concerned only about our welfare but must also be concerned with the welfare of the other members, for as Apostle Paul says: "You are the Body of Christ. Every one of you is a member of it... that all the members may be concerned for one another. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members share its joy."<sup>69</sup> This concern for the welfare of the rest of the members must then be translated into apostolate which is the obligation, as we have already discussed, of every Christian arising from the very fact of his membership in Christ's Mystical Body which is the Church.

#### PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

Vatican II recommends an effective Parish Structure which, while preserving the character and autonomy of existing Parish organizations, can serve as an instrument for communication, coordination and cooperation between the Clergy and the Laity as they exercise their respective roles in building up the Parish into a Genuine Christian Community. And it is the Pastoral Council: "In dioceses as far as possible, there should be councils which assist the apostolic work of the Church either in the field of making the Gospel known and men holy, or in the charitable, social or other spheres. To this end, clergy and religious should appropriately cooperate with the Laity. While preserving the proper character and autonomy of each organization, these councils will be able to promote the mutual coordination of various lay associations and enterprises. Councils of this type should be established as far as possible also on the parochial, interparochial and interdiocesan level as well as in the national or international sphere."<sup>70</sup>

The Parish Pastoral Council becomes effectively working, if its membership is truly representative of the Parish community: "a council where we gather some of the leaders of our Parish who not

<sup>68</sup> Ministry and Life of Priests, No. 6.

<sup>69</sup> I Cor. XII:25-27.

<sup>70</sup> Apostolate of the Laity, No. 26.

only will communicate to us the needs and problems of their fellow parishioners, but will also evaluate our own leadership and functions, as well as share in formulating programs of action and in leading the rest of the Parish in the action that is expected of a Christian community. Such a Parish Council would indeed be a practical application of the principle of collegiality and co-responsibility in the Church which should find extension on all levels in the Church."<sup>71</sup>

Mostly, the Parish Pastoral Council draws its membership from the various existing Parish organizations. Some Parishes, however, cannot establish a Pastoral Council, because the organizations are dead or dormant, and if active and strong, lack the knowhow to form it.

### PARISH PASTORAL PLAN

For a better understanding, order, oneness and harmony, thus avoiding conflict, confusion, duplication of efforts, waste of energy and unnecessary competition in the Parish activities between the Clergy and the Laity in the exercise of their respective roles in building up the Parish into a Genuine Christian Community, the Parish Pastoral Council must draw up a **Pastoral Plan or Program**. To make it effective and relevant to the times, the Plan or Program must take into consideration the triple aspect of the Parish-Human Community: the **Worshipping**, the **Witnessing**, and the **Serving Community**. "It is hardly possible to draw up any successful pastoral program or to plan any feasible pastoral adaption without analyzing the sociological, cultural and religious phenomena that are current in our Parish communities. And ignorance of the factors underlying the problems and needs of the society in which we live will only result in the application of palliatives or in a scattering of energies."<sup>72</sup>

In this way, the Parish Pastoral Plan will consist of three Programs which correspond to the triple function of the Clergy and the Laity, namely, the **Worship Program**, the **Christian Education Program** and the **Social Action Program**.

<sup>71</sup> Benito Sison, *Op. Cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

## C O N C L U S I O N

Together with this Pastoral Letter we are also issuing a **Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines** for your deliberation and consideration, and hopefully, for adaption according to the needs of your respective Parish Communities.

We, therefore, end this Pastoral Letter with the inspiring words of our Lord, Jesus Christ: "Listen to what I say: open your eyes and see! The fields are shining for harvest!"<sup>73</sup>

May these words of inspiration make us find our joy and our strength and the guarantee of a fruitful harvest as we together, working as one, all of us, come to direct our apostolic efforts towards the transformation of our Parish into a real, living, and Christian Community, in which the Son of God made man, Saviour of mankind, is the Center and Life of all.

We wish you all a fruitful Apostolate and as a token of Christ's Love, we impart to you, our beloved Co-workers in the Apostolate, the clergy and the Laity, Our Pastoral Blessing.

(Sgd.) **SINCERO B. LUCERO, D.D.**  
Bishop of Borongan

September 8, 1977 — Feastday of  
Our Lady of Nativity  
Borongan Town Fiesta  
The Seventy-Ninth Day of Our Episcopacy  
In the Diocese of Borongan  
Eastern Samar

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<sup>73</sup> St. John IV:35.