



## **Mission response to the challenges and changes of 2021**

The Bendum team starts the year with a listening activity to see how we wanted to get the best out of the continuing lockdown - its stillness, distancing and uncertainties, lack of family - and deepen our own faith in finding ways forward in the coming year. We are living in the low hills in Mindanao, Philippines and working with ecosystem restoration, sustainable land management, and youth leadership. (Pedro Walpole SJ)

### **LISTENING to context**

There were questions asked. How do we understand the world we are living? How do we understand our relations and work? What expressions or concepts do we use to communicate personally where we are? How do we deal with this in our work and how do we live it out in the present time? Perhaps, many of us have found a path through, but not one we are always particularly happy about.

### **CHANGES analyzed**

Many in the group shared about the uncertainties in the bigger realities beyond us that affect us. The need for living normally again is strong, but it is a different normal, with the need for grace and acceptance. There is a vacuum and a need to align and adapt to many questions without answers.

New paths are needed as we face the challenges and changes of 2021 and the context is not just the virus.

There are far greater problems in many parts of the world compounding the uncertain local and global realities. Profit accumulation and poverty, food security, weather extremes, increased arms, ecological destruction and social displacement, among many others.

Are we prepared each morning for what is different?

Do we see what is different in access to local markets, hospitals, government services and agriculture?

Do we see that children are studying less under the modular no-class system? But many are also learning greater reflection and comprehension and increased virtual collaboration that affect us on the ground. When children go back to school, there will be different access, information, reflection, comprehension, and hopefully, attitude.

All these things are changing. We want to learn about things as they are changing, not simply how we would wish them to be and how they are normalized.

Do we let reality change us or do we change reality where we can? This is the whole complexity of our time, but the question of when is now.

### **OBJECTIVE is the how**

The objective that gained expression in the group is the need to shift position, shift perspective to one that is not filled with expectations. This is like coming to a new place or new stage in life where everything is altered, and one must establish a different set of relations while everything on the surface may seem the same. We can all gather around and seek to share this new position from which to view and act in the world.

## Mission response...

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### MISSION is the why

The call today is about mission. It is about how to be active without the answers, like a missionary sent to a new land who has to listen and learn a new language and life, always open and expectant of different people, ways, and circumstances.

We need to be open, sensitive to things coming our way in facing the unknown, the uncertain. The present and post-pandemic stance is mission.

Mission is preparedness for whatever, to find the good and announce it. Mission includes having the sensitivity and listening, seeking the opportunity for something better, aligning with people for the better, and searching for new paths to better the common good.

Mission gives us a sense of going forward, being humble in the face of mistakes, and strengthened by the listening and collaborating.

We are all invited in mission. The understanding is that we don't need the answers to start out and if we can shift positions and not assume standard ways forward. By listening, we find each step.

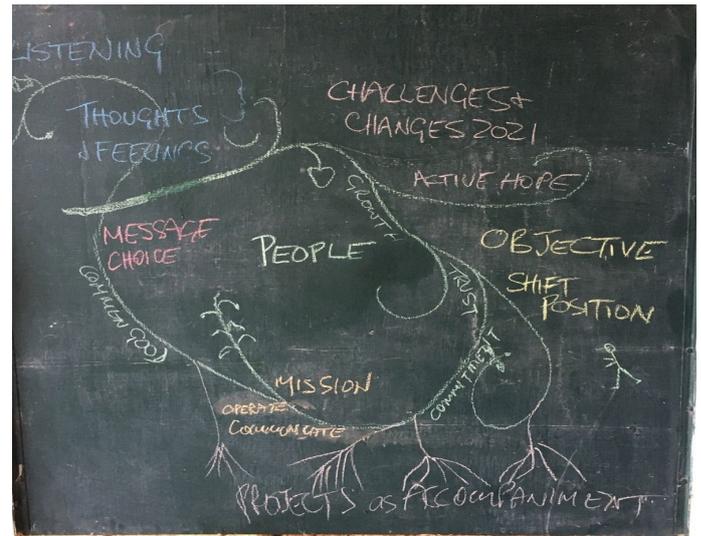
The next stage was to reflect on what mission meant for each one, and the following were some responses from the group:

- » Simply put, it is something I don't give up on.
- » It's the reason why I do things, it draws from within.
- » It is an expression of who I seek to be, it's a service for common good, it is a challenge and a challenge of sustained action.
- » It affirms an integrity in living, which is not determined by present problems and unknown.

It's a goal beyond the horizon. It means I have made a choice and with others whom I find we will make a difference.

We are emotionally and conceptually trying to get a hold of where we are, more than just the job or the work we do. This is an important formative process because it puts us in direct contact (tactile) with the challenges and the changes. We don't control it, but we are in direct contact with the local. We are in contact with the reality. We will try to get the best out of it. We know this is challenging and this is why we are in it.

How does this capture what we are trying to do and give us the "how" to operate in a given context? We want this shift in position because we



have an active hope – the position or orientation is that of going on a mission.

It is an openness to whatever we find. It affirms what we are talking of and we need to see the challenges anew. We need the right message to motivate the right people.

### MESSAGE is the choice

What is our group's message to people in Upper Pulangi, especially to the youth who seemingly cannot find anything to do and increasingly become istambay (Filipino slang for hang out, derived from the English phrase "stand by")? What message do we want to portray?

The need appears to be to amplify local stories, the togetherness, and to be more conscious of the accompaniment and not losing hope. There is a need to educate children and youth more broadly and help them realize the changes happening and that they are capable of the challenge and finding new opportunities.

It appears sometimes that nothing is moving, but there is so much changing. The world we come into in 2021 is going to be very different from personal assumptions, and we need to recognize the differences. It is a time to listen deeply if we are to have the peace and the trust (that does not come from outside). It is a time to commit. As someone said, there is a certain stubbornness in moving forward.

We have to understand this message because this message is choice. This is a time of actively choosing. It can't be a time of indifference, there are many choices to be made.

We want a message for the present world that communicates. We have to get this together in order to move forward. We need to develop an attitude of mission, of choice, to be involved. Mission is involvement. It is not problem solving.

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It is total incorporation of one's being. It is conversion.

The challenge is for people to make a choice and to make a right choice. If we do this, we will not be working and communicating in the same way. Because of the times we experience, the way we work has another effect. It won't be normal. It will change us and those with whom we are in contact.

A local example is in the maize situation here in the uplands. The recent harvest was good, but no one could store the maize and the production was a contracted transaction anyway at the onset. So prices "fell" to PhP 8.00 (US\$ 0.17 or Euro 0.14) a kilo last month. More than any pandemic, price manipulation each year in the uplands destroys more farming families and increases the land/forest area burned to survive, and this is global.

Normal is desperate at the moment. There are 95,000 tractors out in New Delhi and two million people. This is the biggest demonstration in the world facing the gravest brutality but determined to negotiate with a government that is tied into corporate growth before people. This is not normal and farmers are not going to back down. This will create new demands somewhere in the world. Some related recent articles are shared below:

- » [Will the farm bills benefit our farmers? Myth of freeing the farmer \(Indian Currents\)](#)
- » [Industrial agriculture is creating poison, not food \(Delhi Post\)](#)
- » [Delhi minister Kailash Gahlot tables resolution in state Assembly to repeal three farm laws \(Hindustan Times\)](#)
- » [SC says farmers have right to protest, suggests Centre put farm laws on hold \(The Indian Express\)](#)

California will be different next year once they get their act together and recognize collectively that there is growing vulnerability with the fires because of how we live. [The Los Angeles Times analyzed in September 2020](#) decades of data that track California wildfires and the destruction wrought and found out that "wildfires and their compounding effects have intensified in recent years – and there's little sign that things will improve."

Listening to the stories of the youth and understanding their choices

Taking a break to review, we asked what allows one to become more positive, a little more forward thinking. What can happen when we feel the difference? For some, the discussion affirms what

is better, that our work is the best choice, and it brings us personal questions for self-growth.

Are we doing our best in fulfilling this choice? This can further affirm the work we do. People see this as commitment. Those who can't commit do not last or they struggle on the negative side with the times, not seeing the commitment.

The youth have difficulty in making a choice and to hold themselves to this choice. They live this choice on a daily basis. When the context is unnerving, boring, or distrustful, they understandably jump into depression, with radical or dysfunctional responses and whims. It is partly a question of understanding community and opportunity. If the youth seek encouragement, despite radical requirements on either side to join the army or take up arms, they do so in many parts of the world where they feel lost. After the corn harvest, some youth found temporary work in road construction.

Listening to the stories of the youth who recently came as a group working on the farm here, we sought to spend some time talking about work responsibilities and rights, managing personal finances, preparations for family skills, and priorities.

The majority seek to find alternatives where they try to balance their personal choices such as where will they be more comfortable (safe), wanting a motorbike, and what will give them a more stable and fulfilling life where they can live out their dreams in relation to others.

A good life is not normal in the world of today which means balanced living, as this is not the norm. Yet we constantly read of many local stories of balance and beauty in the small.

We are after a life, not a normality. We want to live out in community and landscape what it is to be human, beautiful, cherished and hopeful - not the status quo.

So as a team, we seek to motivate and manage this context and consequence of change and choice working with the land and the youth.

We seek to listen more and come from a position of mission. Change and choice are what we are meeting with the youth in the world and for this, we need new paths to share and seeds to sow.

*Now as a reader you have got this far in the reflection, you might ask yourself: What's the most important word that has come to me as I read this and where do I want to plant the seed? ♦*



## A network of shared hope: connecting with youth in Kalimantan

Youth leaders from Bendum engaged in a dialogue with youth leaders from West Kalimantan, Indonesia on October 30, in coordination with Sr Ana Pina ACI of the Congregation of the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This is a product of discussions of a broader group of ecology centers that envisions a greater process of collaboration. This initial virtual dialogue was organized so that the youth from two communities can get to know each other and share stories, particularly as they share the same hope for a more sustainable future. Ariel Compade, JWL peace leader professional course student from Bendum shares his reflection from the experience:

*I'm really happy to have the opportunity to share my experience working on bamboo. We studied bamboo production, processing and fabrication last year when I was a grade 12 student at APC and Hulas youth training. Now, as part of the ecoagri team, I still assist in bamboo production and management. I am happy to listen to indigenous and rural youth in Kalimantan, Indonesia. We listened to them as they also shared how they value bamboo in their life and culture. I felt deeply connected to them in this sense. The stories we heard were very inspiring. I met Joni who was going through a training program in another village in Indonesia so that he could improve his technical skills and contribute to his community. I also met Herculanus who was a youth trainer in their community, as well as Novita who spoke passionately about their efforts to care for their land. I can envision different ways to collaborate with them, especially having bamboo production as our common thread. I was particularly interested in how they manage their bamboo operations. Through this conversation, we were able to help each other and support each other in improving our interconnected work. ◆*

## Christmas in APC

*Christmas in APC is a celebration of peace and an expression of gratitude, according to APC Deputy School Manager Mercy Pakiwag. This short reflection is shared in the [Women's World Day of Prayer Advent Calendar](#).*

Being part of APC is an opportunity to discover ourselves, and because we have the ability to teach, even though some of us we didn't finish a degree, we can render service to the children in our community. We are all thankful for being able to identify and sustain our culture, discovering the core values of being Pulangiyēn: seeking sustainability in helping each other, caring for our land and water, being honest, understanding, caring each other and being peace-minded.

In the Philippines, Christians celebrate Christmas, remembering the birth of our savior Jesus Christ. It is the season where all Filipino people unite, families come together as those abroad come home.



As Pulangiyēn, we also celebrate *Kaamulan*, a thanksgiving for the graces that we received during the year. We have *Panalangin*, thanksgiving for the harvest and many other celebrations. We join in Christmas caroling, *simbang-gabi*, advent vigil of nine early evenings (for us) and of course *noche buena* on the 24th of December. We hope you enjoyed the true peace and joy of Christmas. ◆

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