

A Vision of a Missionary Parish

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Abstract

This article discusses and explores the vision of a missionary parish. It does so in three sections: First, it discusses the understanding of a missionary parish based on a scriptural foundation in the Acts of the Apostles, the Pauline metaphor of the Body of Christ, and Paul's strategy of mission. Second, it presents Pope Francis' insights on the theme of the missionary parish in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*. Third, it explores the ideas of four contemporary missiologists and theologians regarding the missionary Church and its implications for the understanding of a missionary parish.

Keywords: Missionary Parish, Missionary Church, Local Church Community

A. Scriptural Foundation: The Term *παροιμία* in the Bible

In the Bible, the notion of the parish is linked with the Greek word, *παροιμία*. The adjective *πάροικος* has the meaning of neighbouring, and the specialized meaning of a non-citizen or alien. The verb *παροικέω* means to dwell by or besides, or technically to be an alien. Thus, *παροικέω* comes to mean to immigrate or to sojourn as an alien. Therefore, *παροιμία* connotes living abroad or a temporary sojourn (Blöchlinger, 1965: 21-23).

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel are described as *πάροικος*. The fact that Israel itself once dwelt as *πάροικος* among strangers reminds it of the fact that, before God all nations were not landowners but only transients. For instance, in Gen. 15: 13, as *πάροικος*, Abraham is the type of the people of Israel. In Ex. 2: 22; 18:3, *πάροικος* is also used of the Israelites in a strange land. Thus, from the beginning, the people of God were foreigners and sojourners.

The New Testament follows the usage of the Septuagint by keeping the word *παροιμία*. For instance, in Luke 24: 18; Heb. 11:9, *παροικέω* means to be an alien or to dwell as a foreigner. In Acts 7:6, 29; Eph. 2:19; 1 Peter 2:11, *πάροικος* has the meaning of an immigrant alien. In Acts 13:17, *παροιμία* is used for Israel's sojourn in Egypt and in 1 Peter 1:17, is used to describe a person's life on earth. The

Christian in the New Testament knows that his life in this world is only of a temporary nature. Consequently, it can be said that the Christian community is a pilgrim community.

1. The Christian Community in the Acts of the Apostles

The notion of the parish (παρουσία) as a pilgrim community is verified in the description of the Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles. In the early Christian Community, George Webber explains that “the Church was an intentional community, but not in any necessarily sectarian sense. Its purpose was to establish the discipline of a community of nurture and to be an effective base in its pilgrim vocation” (Webber, 1979: 51). In the same vein, Alex Blöchlinger says, “He [Christian] is on earth as pilgrim” (Blöchlinger, 1965: 23). As such the early Christian community was a missionary community. Stephen Bevens and Roger Schroeder state, “We believe that a reading of the Acts of the Apostles shows that the origin of the church is intimately connected to its consciousness of the mission that it saw before it, and so Acts can be claimed to provide a strong biblical basis for dictum that the church is ‘missionary by its very nature’ (AG 2)” (Bevens and Schroeder, 2006: 3).

Furthermore, Bevens and Schroeder explore this community by describing the mission situation of the early Christian community before and after Pentecost. Before Pentecost, “The rest of the narrative in Acts reveals the community as most hesitant to accept the possibility of a Gentile mission. Perhaps it is more plausible to believe that the disciples were only being loyal to Jesus’ expectation of an imminent End” (Bevens and Schroeder, 2006: 15). The Pentecost experience, however, encouraged them to build community. As a result, Bevens and Schroeder emphasize, “Their number was increasing daily (2:47); they enjoyed an intense and happy community life (2:42-47; 4:32-35)—surely a sign of the End; and they enjoyed the esteem of many in Jerusalem (5:12-16)” (Bevens and Schroeder, 2006: 17).

The gathering of the earliest disciples in Jerusalem is also significant in describing the early Christian community. VănThanh Nguyễn explains:

What is most important is that earliest Christian community of believers was devoted “with one accord to prayer.” The Greek term *homothymadon* is often translated as “one accord” (NAB, AKJV), or “one mind” (RSV), appearing primarily in Acts (2:46; 4:24, 5:12; 15:25) to emphasize the remarkable harmony and unity of the early

Christian family. The disciples were praying for the “promise of the Spirit” (1:5) to empower them to become witnesses of the risen Christ (1:8) and to hear the message of the kingdom of God (1:3) to the ends of the earth (Nguyễn, 2022: 1458).

Indeed, “prayer was a fundamental ingredient of the growing number of believers (Acts 2:42)” (Wright, 2010: 258).

What happened in the early Christian community has continued until now in the Church community. The spirit of the missionary movement is ongoing in the Christian community. Edgar Javier says, “The early Church understood herself as a missionary movement—that is, following the Way [Jesus] (cf. Acts of the Apostles)” (Javier, 2019: 79). Thus, this early Christian community becomes a model for becoming a missionary parish today—particularly being a sojourner in the world, going forth to reach out to the gentiles, and witnessing to the risen Christ.

2. The Pauline Metaphor of the Body of Christ

The Pauline image of the Body of Christ describes the Christian community. Blöchlinger states, “It is asserted that the parish is an organic cell of the body of Christ reflecting and embracing the life of the whole even though not so perfectly as the diocese” (Blöchlinger, 1965: 27). Based on this statement, the image of the Body of Christ can be employed as one of the biblical foundations of a missionary parish. Two passages can be used to show this, namely, the metaphor of the Christian community as one body in Christ in Romans 12:1-8 and in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. James Dunn, in his commentary, explains:

The body character of the community seems to be already assumed. And the more elaborated body imagery of 1 Corinthians 12 (as also Romans 12 and Ephesians 4) seems to have in view the interactive relations of the worshipping community in general, and not simply a community focused on the sacrament (Dunn, 1998: 550).

Furthermore, Dunn says, “Much the most plausible source of the imagery is the use of the metaphor of the body elsewhere in precisely the way that Paul most consistently uses it—the body as a vital expression of the unity of a community despite the diversity of its members” (Dunn, 1998: 550).

In regard to Romans 12: 1-8, Sheila McGinn says that the Roman community had a problem at this time. She explains:

Paul centers his remarks on a key concern of his specific audience, this “inter-racial” community of Christ-believers of Jews and Gentiles of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew heritage, of various social classes, all united in this final *kairos* by the astounding agapeic action of God-in-Christ reconciling the world (McGinn, 2022: 1532).

Because of this problem, Paul sent a letter to the Roman community to help them even though he had never been there. They did not know him personally. It is written in his letter, “so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” (Romans 12: 5). Regarding this particular text, McGinn says, “This shared perspective of trust in Christ allows the community members to work toward common goals and support each other, as is the case in an organic body (cf. 1 Cor 12: 12-27)” (McGinn, 2022: 1576).

In regard to 1 Corinthians 12: 12-26, there was a division in the Corinthian Churches at this time. According to Alan Mitchell, “In yet another effort to overcome division in the Corinthian Churches, Paul involves the organic metaphor of the body that needs all of its individual parts to function interdependently” (Mitchell, 2022: 1611). One of the purposes of his letter is to promote unity in Corinth. Mitchell further comments, “Paul finds it particularly apt for promoting unity in Corinth. Of course, as with the spiritual gifts, Paul elevates the metaphor by applying it to the Church as the Body of Christ, thereby giving a theological rationale for harmony in Corinth rather than a political one” (Mitchell, 2022: 1611). In the words of Pope John Paul II, this notion refers to an organic communion, that is, “at the same time it is characterized by a diversity and a complementarity of vocations and states in life, of ministries, of charisms and responsibilities” (John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 20).

Having explained the image of the Body of Christ, Paul’s mission to the communities was to maintain faith in Christ, strengthen each other, and create unity and harmony. Paul’s mission to the communities is significant in the parish context, particularly in a multi-ethnic parish. This is because “more importantly, the parish Church is one body in Christ precisely because its members, though many, partake the one bread (1 Cor 10:16-17)” (SVD Generalate, 2022: 33). Albert Ottenweller stresses, “Each member has gifts given for the good of the Body. Each uses his gifts for the building up of the Body. It is

not the priest (team) that is important; it is the Body of Christ, the parish” (Ottenweller, 1987: 12).

3. Paul’s Missionary Strategy

Some insights about Paul’s missionary strategy are significant to understand the vision of a missionary parish. This missionary strategy can be used in the context of parish ministry. It applies not only to the maintenance of communities but also to the development of communities as missionary communities.

Johannes Nissen explains that one of Paul’s mission strategies was a collaboration with other people. He says:

He [Paul] distinguishes among three categories of fellow workers: first, the most intimate circle, comprising Barnabas, Silvanus, and especially Timothy; second, the “independent co-workers,” such as Pricilla and Aquila, and Titus; third, representatives from local churches. Through them the churches themselves become co-responsible for his mission work (Nissen, 2007: 110).

The collaboration which was part of Paul’s mission strategy encourages others to participate in God’s mission. They become co-responsible for the mission. This mission strategy is significant in the parish, particularly in terms of the participation of all community members.

Collaboration with other people entails flexibility and accommodation. Regarding this, a missionary strategy in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 is significant in understanding flexibility and accommodation. Glimpses of a missionary strategy can be extracted from Paul’s letters. His ministry was not a lonely one; it has rightly been called a ‘co-worker mission’ (Sandnes, 2011: 128).

Another of Paul’s mission strategies is “*zentrumsmision*.” Nissen states, “One essential aspect of Paul’s mission is his involvement in “*Zentrumsmision*” (Nissen, 2007: 110). This strategy means Paul’s preference to concentrate on certain strategic centers.¹ Nissen further explains, “In each of these, he laid the foundation for a Christian community, clearly in the hope that, from these strategic

¹ For instance, he preferred the district or provincial capitals such as Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus, each of which stood for a whole region. These cities were the main centres as far as communication, culture, commerce, politics, and religion were concerned.

centres, the gospel would be carried into the surrounding countryside and towns.” (Nissen, 2007: 110). In the words of David Bosch, “Paul thinks regionally, not ethnically, he chooses cities that have a representative character” (Bosch, 1991: 132).

B. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*

1. Pope Francis’ Vision of a Missionary Church

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis lays out his vision of the Church as a fundamentally missionary Church. This can be seen particularly in Chapter I of *Evangelii Gaudium* which is entitled, “The Church’s Missionary Transformation.” Antonio Pernia comments that Pope Francis dreams of a Church which moves from the “conservation mode” to the “missionary mode.” (Pernia, 2022: 1). As Pope Francis puts it, “We need to move from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 15). Thus, he speaks against “ecclesial introversion.” Quoting Pope John Paul II, in *Ecclesia in Oceania*, he says, “All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 27). Therefore, he says that he prefers, “a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 49).

2. Implications

The vision of a missionary Church is concretely lived out in a missionary parish. This vision of Pope Francis has implications on the notion of a missionary parish.

a. From Comfort Zones to the Peripheries

Pope Francis explains that a missionary Church is a Church that “goes forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 20). In this perspective, Edgar Javier comments, “For Pope Francis, the term periphery ‘expresses both geographical and existential meaning’” (Javier, 2021: 60).

In the context of the parish, the strong impression that the Pope gives is that he is inviting the Church to go forth from the comfort zone of the parish. This vision implies that the parish should become a missionary parish. A missionary parish needs to shift the focus from the comfort zone to the peripheries.

Furthermore, Pope Francis stresses that “the Church which ‘goes forth’ is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 24a). On this point, the community of missionary disciples is an evangelizing community. According to Pope Francis, an evangelizing community “takes the initiative to go out to others, seeking those who have fallen away, standing at the crossroads, and welcoming the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 24b). This community also “gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 24f).

As a community of missionary disciples, an evangelizing community is also “supportive of people, standing by them at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 24h). “An evangelizing community is always concerned with fruit, because the Lord wants her to be fruitful” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 24k). “Finally an evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always. It celebrates every small victory, every step forward in the work of evangelization” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 24q).

Stephen Bevans says, “Pope Francis’s call for a truly missionary Church comes out of a totally different context and reflects not a European interest but that of the majority world” (Bevans, 2014: 173). This implication of Pope Francis’ vision of a missionary Church is significant for the parish context. The parish that goes forth from its comfort zones to the peripheries is important today. Such a parish manifests a missionary spirit that “takes on the ‘smell of the sheep,’ and the sheep are willing to hear their [the pastors’] voice” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 24g).

b. The Conversion of Structures

In the process of becoming a missionary parish, the parish must convert structures to avoid being a bureaucratic community. Pope Francis states:

There are ecclesial structures which can hamper efforts at evangelization, yet even good structures are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining, and assessing them. Without new life and an authentic evangelical spirit, without the Church’s

“fidelity to her own calling,” any new structure will soon prove ineffective (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 26d).

The recent letter of the Dicastery for the Clergy states, “The conversion of structures, which the Church must undertake, requires a significant change in mentality and an interior renewal, especially among those entrusted with the responsibility of pastoral leadership” (Dicastery for the Clergy, no. 35). In the context of the parish, this conversion of structures involves the pastors or parish priests and co-workers in pastoral ministry. As the Dicastery for the Clergy puts it, “Parish priests who ‘are co-workers of the bishop in a very special way,’ must resolutely grasp the need for a missionary reform of pastoral action” (Dicastery for the Clergy, no. 35). This conversion “actually calls for vivacity in the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit” (Marqueses, 2017: 116).

In terms of the parish as an institution of the local Church, the community of missionary disciples must be “not an outdated institution” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 28a). According to Pope Francis, “precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 28a). In other words, Pope Francis urges that parishes must be up-to-date institutions, that is, parishes which have great flexibility, openness, and creativity. As Pope Francis puts it, “While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if it proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be ‘the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.’” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 28b).

This idea of Pope Francis entails the pastoral conversion of the parish community. “Pastoral conversion is one of the central themes in the ‘new phase of evangelization’ that the Church is called to foster today, whereby Christian communities be ever more centres conducive to an encounter with Christ” (Dicastery for the Clergy, no. 3).

c. Pastoral Ministry in a Missionary Key

In line with Pope Francis’ teaching about the missionary Church, Pernia comments, “This vision of the Church entails the missionary transformation of ecclesial structures and approaches to evangelization” (Pernia, 2021: 2). For Pope Francis, this transformation

requires that pastoral ministry be undertaken in a missionary key. As Pope Francis puts it:

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way.” I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, styles, and methods of evangelization in their respective communities (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 33a).

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key is an essential insight to evaluate the “missionariness” of the parish.

Pastoral ministry concentrates on the essentials, the heart of the Gospel, which is the center of evangelization. Juan Esquerda Bifet says, “Evangelization is an ecclesial activity that proclaims the Gospel so that faith may be born, enlightened, and deepened in a life of holiness with personal and social consequences” (Bifet, 1994: 31). However, pastoral ministry often makes the mistake of identifying the messages it preaches with secondary aspects of the Gospel. Pope Francis says:

The biggest problem is when the message we preach then seems identified with those secondary aspects which, important as they are, do not in and of themselves convey the heart of Christ’s message. We need to be realistic and not assume that our audience understands the full background to what we are saying, or is capable of relating what we say to the very heart of the Gospel which gives it meaning, beauty and attractiveness (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 34d).

Echoing Pope Francis’ statement, Antonio Marqueses comments, “Our missionary preaching... should bring about the innate depth and beauty of the Gospel that makes it attractive to people” (Marqueses, 2017: 121). Thus, in the parish context, the heart of the Gospel, which gives it meaning, beauty, and attractiveness, must be the focus of pastoral ministry.

4. Images of a Missionary Parish

a. The Parish as a Mother with an Open Heart

A parish as a mother is characterized by a welcoming attitude. It acts like a mother who welcomes all her children even if she finds out that some children are not faithful to her. Pope Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia*, calls for a Church which is like a mother who welcomes her children and takes care of them with affection and encourages them along the path of life and the Gospel (Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 299).

In the same vein, the SVD Generalate states:

Fundamentally, the caring mother leaves her doors open for all who, burdened by the trouble of this world, are in need of a listening ear. Moreover, the doors of an SVD Parish are to remain open for those who, moved by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, sincerely seek to partake in the sacramental life of the community (SVD Generalate, 2020: 32).

Furthermore, Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, points out, “A Church which ‘goes forth’ is a Church whose doors are open. Going out to others in order to reach the fringes of humanity does not mean rushing out aimlessly into the world” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 46a). Moreover, using the image of the house of the Father, Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of the welcoming attitude of the Church. He says, “The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our Church doors should always be open so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 47a).

In this regard, Paulo Suess comments, “Francis dreams not only of a Church of open doors that waits at those doors for a disabled humanity, but also of a Church that sets out to encounter a disabled humanity in dialogue (EG 165) at the peripheries (EG 20)” (Suess, 2014: 153). Thus, the image of a missionary parish is guided by the maternal spirit, that is, the community that, like a mother with an open heart, welcomes and takes care of all without discrimination.

b. The Parish as a Poor Church for the Poor

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis exhorts, “Today and always, ‘the poor are the privileged recipients of the Gospel,’ and the fact that it is freely preached to them is a sign of the kingdom that Jesus came to establish... May we never abandon them” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 48d). Indeed, “For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. God shows the poor ‘his first mercy’” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 198a). Thus, Pope Francis emphasizes, “This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties, they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 198e).

Likewise, a missionary parish must be a poor Church for the poor. Therefore, “the parish, called to reach out to everyone, without exception, should remember that the poor and excluded must always have a privileged place in the heart of the Church” (Dicastery for the Clergy, no. 32).

c. The Parish as a Church of Mercy

Pope Francis has a special concern regarding a Church of mercy. According to Paulo Suess, “The key to the meaning of many gestures, words, and writings of Pope Francis is God’s mercy” (Suess, 2014: 148). This can also be seen in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*. Pope Francis says, “The salvation which God offers us is the work of his mercy” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 112a). Suess comments, “This indomitable mercy is the synonym for the constancy of his endless love (EG 3; 6). On the basis of this identification with love, Francis holds with Thomas Aquinas that mercy is ‘the greatest of all virtues (EG 37)’ (Suess, 2014: 149).

In this regard, Pope Francis states, “The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 114c). Furthermore, quoting the instruction *Libertatis Nuntius*, Pope Francis emphasizes, “The Church, guided by the Gospel of mercy and by love for mankind, hears the cry for justice and intends to respond to it with all her might” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 188a) Thus, a missionary parish must also be a Church of mercy, “a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 28f).

C. Theological/Missiological Insights

The insights and ideas of theologians and missiologists seem to be appropriate and helpful in exploring the understanding of a missionary parish. Although they do not actually deal with the topic of the missionary parish as such, nevertheless, they provide its theological and missiological foundations by reflecting on the Church as missionary.

1. The Parish as a Community of the Poor

Commenting on Pope Francis’s apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Antonio Pernia underlines that an essential element of a

Church that is truly missionary is that it is a Church of the Poor. According to him, the idea of a Church of the Poor is a response to the missionary challenge of the continuing poverty of millions of our brothers and sisters (Pernia, 2021: 3). “Indeed, this challenge has been recognized on all levels of the Church—the universal, regional, and national levels” (Pernia, 2021: 5). He emphasizes that the challenge to be a “Church of the Poor” is seen as consisting of two dimensions, namely, (a) the challenge to be a “Church **FOR** the Poor” and (b) the challenge to be a “Church **OF** the Poor,” and thus to be a “Poor Church” (Pernia, 2021).

In regard to the first challenge, he states:

This entails working for the integral liberation of the poor. Here the accent is being a Church **FOR** the poor, where the poor are regarded as the object of evangelization and the recipients of the Church’s ministry. This was the original insight which emerged as a result of Liberation Theology and the phenomenon of the Base Ecclesial Communities or BEC’s. It found concrete expression in the various ministries of the Church in favor of the poor—the creation of BEC’s, the formation of organizations of the various sectors of the poor (farmers, workers, fisherfolk, urban poor, etc.) for the defense and promotion of their rights, the promotion of cooperatives and other community development projects (Pernia, 2021:5).

In regard to the second challenge, he writes:

Thus, this challenge entails the recognition that the option for the poor is God’s own perspective, God’s own way of looking at reality. As such, it constitutes a hermeneutical key, that is, a key for the interpretation of reality. Thus, a Church **OF** the poor is a Church which looks at reality from the perspective of the poor—a Church which adopts the hermeneutic from the periphery, the perspective of the margins, the optic of the poor, this view from the underside of history. This is, therefore, a Church that is evangelized by the poor and thus adopts the perspective of the poor (Pernia, 2021: 6).

This notion is significant in the vision of a missionary parish. This is because parish ministry entails a missionary community of the poor and for the poor. Indeed, this notion can respond to the challenges of parish ministry.

In his other articles, Pernia further says, “Developing a new language in the context of multiculturalism and adopting a new

perspective from the standpoint of the poor-these, I believe, are the twin challenges of the Church today which is called to be truly missionary” (Pernia, 2015: 40). Moreover, he stresses, “The deeper significance of these twin challenges lies in the fact that these challenges constitute an invitation to seek the ‘Other Face’ of God. For this ‘Other Face’ of God is revealed when we come face to face with the Stranger and with the Poor” (Pernia, 2015: 40). These challenges are also significant in the context of parish ministry. Ministry among the poor in the parish is an invitation to encounter the “Other Face” of God.

Thus, Pernia says:

What we need today, in the new evangelization, are not nice homilies and great sermons, not theories and theologies, not words and books. Rather, what we need are men and women who are not afraid to show their thirst for God and are not ashamed to drink with delight from the living water of the Gospel. People in our society today, seeing these men and women drink water delight, may begin to ask themselves whether they, too, would not benefit if they drank from the life-giving water of the Gospel (Pernia, 2015: 55).

Becoming a missionary parish cannot be separated from evangelization. Pope Francis recalls how “the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 28e). Thus, in continuity with the teaching of Pope Francis, the thought of Pernia is relevant concerning evangelization in the parish.

2. The Parish as a Community of Attraction

Commenting on the teaching of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 14, Edgar Javier says:

In line with Pope Francis’ thinking in *Evangelii Gaudium*, our approach to mission might be described as a “missiology of attraction.” This new paradigm is grounded on “an attractive gospel message” of God’s mercy and compassion. This understanding of the message is embodied and ensouled in an “attractive community”—a community of believers in Christ, the human face of God’s mercy and tenderness. It is an open and welcoming community that embraces anyone and offers an “attractive teaching” that is culture-sensitive and religion-sensitive (Javier, 2021: 62).

In view of this, he talks about the parish community, which must be an attractive community, that is, a welcoming parish. The idea of

“community of attraction” in parish ministry entails a Christian witness, the formation of the Christian community, and an inclusive community.

Regarding Christian witness, Javier stresses, “Christian witness makes the Church present in the midst of those who have not yet heard the Gospel message through the example of the members’ lives and by the witness of the word” (Javier, 2015: 93). This idea is in line with what Pope Paul VI states in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 41). Furthermore, Javier explains that this witness is manifested in the Church’s concern for the poor and its effort to do dialogue (Javier, 2015: 93).

The parish as a community of attraction requires a formation of the Christian community. At this point, Javier states, “The *formation of Christian community* is the work of the Spirit. The community is the sign of God’s presence in the world. It must be deeply rooted in the people’s culture” (Javier, 2015: 94).

In terms of an inclusive community, he asserts, “Building God’s global community engages all peoples of different cultures and religious traditions” (Javier, 2015: 99). In this regard, he also stresses the openness to pluralism in the community, that is, “from *exclusivism* to *inclusivism* and eventually to *pluralism*. No culture, no religion should be bordered by exclusivism” (Javier, 2021: 64). This idea must be kept in mind by a missionary who is working in the parish.

3. The Parish as a Community in Mission

Stephen Bevens believes that the parish as a community in mission. Although he does not talk directly about the missionary parish, his reflections on the missionary Church shed light on the understanding of a missionary parish. In his article entitled “Ecclesiology Since Vatican II: From A Church With A Mission to A Missionary Church, he says, “More and more clearly today, the church is being understood as a communion-in-mission” (Bevens, 2005: 28). This is based on the concepts of Vatican II which, “in the Council’s aftermath, have been developed in ways that have provided fresh and exciting perspectives for the church’s understanding of itself not only as a ‘communion,’ but as a ‘communion-in-mission” (Bevens, 2005: 29). Furthermore, he explains:

These concepts are the notion of the Church as the ‘universal sacrament of salvation,’ the idea of the reign of God as a non-separable and yet distinct reality from the church, the understanding that the Church is ‘missionary by its very nature,’ and the insight that the church lives out its mission in dialogue with the ‘signs of the times’ (Bevans, 2005: 29).

As a biblical foundation, he explains, “This can be seen particularly clearly in the Acts of the Apostles. Luke seems to delineate a number of stages in this work, which gradually open up the community of ‘the way’ to a wider perspective while at the same time they give the community a clearer and clearer identity over against its original Jewish matrix” (Bevans, 2005: 29). The early community, in other words, becomes bigger because they have a more comprehensive perspective of being Church. They become more inclusive. Furthermore, he stresses, “The Church, properly speaking, does not have a mission. The mission, rather, has a Church” (Bevans, 2005: 49). In this regard, the missionary parish must have the identity of the Church as communion-in-mission in many aspects of pastoral activity. The missionary parish must also be outward-looking and world-oriented in its ministry among the people.

Bevans adds that a missionary Church depends on the context. In this sense, the Bevans’ insight into contextual theology is significant. He states, “Contextual theology is not just something that needs to be practiced in places like Asia, Africa, ... Rather, every theology needs to pay attention to the context and put it in dialogue with Christian Tradition” (Bevans, 2011: 370). For him, “Every pastoral situation is a missionary situation” (Bevans, 2011: 370-371). Further, he says, “mission is always in a *context*, and so before we engage in mission, or engage in a new missionary activity, for example, we need to discern what the context calls for” (Bevans, 2011: 375). This insight is also essential for the missionary parish. A missionary parish undertakes its activities always in context.

4. The Parish as a Local Church Community

James Kroeger proposes that the parish as a local Church community. His insight about the local Church is based on the FABC’s perspective. This is significant to understand the missionary parish as a local Church community. Regarding this perspective, Kroeger emphasizes three important elements, namely, the identity of the Asian

people, the unity of the local Church with the universal Church, and the importance of inculturation. He says:

As the community of Jesus' disciples in Asia, the Church consistently links her identity with Asian's people and their life situations. She seeks to be—in fact, not only theory—the 'Church of the poor' and the 'Church of the young.' She shares the vicissitudes of the 'Church of silence' in several parts of Asia. Her pastoral priorities concern the displaced (refugees and migrants), women and the girl-child, youth, families, the poor, the followers of Asia's great religious traditions. She actively fosters increasing communion among Asia's local Churches in unity with the See of Peter, which lovingly presides over the universal Church; she promotes authentic catholicity (Kroeger, 2014: 140).

In addition to this, he says, "The theological thematic of *local Church* provides an appropriate, integrating center for the life of Asia's faith communities" (Kroeger, 2014: 140). Indeed, the community of the local Church enhances and strengthens the identity of being Asian people in its context. In other words, the identity of the local Church is the Church of the poor, the Church of the young, and the Church of silence. This community cannot be separated from the universal Church.

In his other articles, Kroeger articulates, "since, the local Church is the *entire* people of God, the inculturation process demands the involvement of *all* members of the Christian community" (Kroeger, 2008: 443). He stresses that the local Church is the cornerstone of today's emerging, inculturated faith-communities in all the continents (Kroeger, 2003: vii). By saying this, it can be said that the community of the local Church must be rooted in the culture.

D. Conclusion

This article has discussed the vision of a missionary parish. The vision of a missionary parish can be traced to early Christian communities in the Bible, particularly in the early Christian communities in the Acts of the Apostles, in the Pauline metaphor of the Body of Christ and in Paul's mission strategies.

Furthermore, Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, presents the vision of the Church as a missionary Church which has implications on the notion of a missionary parish. The implications of Pope Francis's vision are going forth from comfort zones to the peripheries, the

conversion of structures, and pastoral ministry in a missionary key. In this document, Pope Francis implicitly describes the images of the missionary parish, namely, the parish as a mother with an open heart, as a poor Church for the poor, and as a Church of mercy.

Finally, this article explores a further elaboration of the idea of mission in the parish context by presenting the reflections of four contemporary missiologists and theologians. Pernia proposes the parish as the community of the poor. For Javier, the parish as a community of attraction entails a Christian witness, the formation of the Christian community, and an inclusive community. Bevans urges that the parish as the community in mission must be dynamic, outward-looking, world-oriented, and rooted in the context. Lastly, Kroeger emphasizes the parish as a local Church community, which promotes the Asian way of doing mission.

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