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CHARITY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE MISSION

Sr. Mary Grace Deriu, DC

Dear Confreres, Sisters and Laity, my fraternal and respectful greeting to you all.

My task is to treat the theme: "CHARITY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE MISSION."

Confident of gaining your kind understanding, I am relying on your good disposition to help me overcome my emotion and to conquer my embarrassment.

As a premise I wish to summarize the dynamics of how we work:

- 1) The Mission is always prepared and organized by the Missionaries, in agreement with the Pastor and active church groups. The theme is chosen, the best time is set, and all the matters that are necessary for the success of the Mission are determined. As far as possible representatives of the above mentioned groups should meet in order to deal with the realities that face them.
- 2) We members of the group work in pairs, a lay person and a Sister, depending on the needs of the community, and our own availability. There should take part in the mission two or three other couples as I have already noted. The engagement should be for two or three weeks. We would arrive seven days before the Missionaries. At first we work alone. Later we will carry out our roles, while the Missionaries begin theirs.
- 3) On the day of our arrival the Pastor will give the mandate by a simple and impressive ceremony within the celebration of Mass, or during the recitation of Vespers. The ceremony simply consists in handing over the Cross before the community united in prayer. At this moment our work officially begins.
- 4) We are quests of the families that make themselves available for this service. Customarily the meals are taken together with the family, and the accommodations depend on what we find available.

Then begin the family visits. Starting at the outskirts and moving toward the center, we work to contact all the key families. We have contact with them; we explain the mission program; we strive to make them sensitive to the obligations brought about by this moment of grace. We form a favorable climate which gives rise to a cordial relationship in which we come to know the various problems in which the family lives. And in keeping with the opportunities which open to us, and where advisable, we suggest a meeting with the Missionary. Often times we take it upon ourselves to point out cases concerning the old and infirm.

This type of approach allows us to become aware of the problems and difficulties, and even of the joys of the people we meet. From this flows a message, a very simple message

about Christ and the Gospel, preparatory to a more ordered and complete message given by a missionary.

As a Daughter of Charity the experience of the Mission has always been wonderful. These are very beautiful and enriching moments, coming together with the many good things of my daily life. By means of these experiences, I have found a way of acquiring a deeper sensitivity and more profound attention to the problems that present themselves, leading to a greater openness and availability.

As Mother Guillemin used to say: "The Daughter of Charity must travel the world's horizons," aware as was St. Vincent of the new realities which we encounter, which are the signs of the times.

It is surely nothing new, but the problem that we meet with ever increasing frequency is that of the people who have "wandered away." It is a difficult problem to frame because there are many reasons that lead people to stray from a more active and committed church life. Even in the more complex cases, those, for example, who claim to have no interest in God, and anything that has to do with him, our attitude must always be a Christian one, always meeting these people filled with the spirit of God, speaking only and always with charity in the name of the Church, even offering if necessary to help with their material needs, accompanied by prayer in the natural way of St. Vincent.

Operatively we find a precise and to the point guide in our Directory. Allow me to quote one item, No. 40, which states:

"Witnesses of Christ, Lord of our life, we will apply ourselves fully so that those who meet us and listen to us, may be led to meet him through us."

My best experience on the Mission is when I witness the return to the Father of those who have wandered off: the great and deep joy that they felt after a long time away; the evident happiness that they know, being liberated from the weight of their bonds, and lifted up from their discouragement.

It is very important to lead souls to dialog especially within the family. There are many cases of loneliness of those who live with family members, spouses, parents and children. We all too often notice the inability to interact and to listen, which confirms the old saying that: "One is nevermore alone than when one is in a crowd." So we give particular attention to those who show a simple desire of finding someone with whom to speak.

Very often we meet people who ask only that we afford them a bit of attention, a minute or so of our time to talk to us. When we simply listen to them, they gain a sense of importance. Many times from this non-judgmental listening, a strong confidence springs up. We notice it often happens if they do not know us, the barriers of shame and human respect are broken down, and what is more, we are led to respect them and show our gratitude for having honored us with their esteem and trust.

We close our meeting with a brief prayer, with a cordial and affectionate farewell expressing the wish of seeing each other in the course of the Mission. And so from house to house, from family to family, from the last house in the country, we move to the center of the town.

From my experience on the Mission I have learned a great lesson: the duty of respecting to the utmost; respect everyone we meet. I may not understand, I may not share their feelings, but I have the duty to respect. Everyday I meet cultures and ways of life vastly different from my own upbringing and formation. I recall an important phrase from Pope Paul VI, pointing out that our times do not need pronouncements, but witnesses. Every day the struggles of daily life insistently repeat this phrase. Above all the people who are poor in every sense, those who no longer have anything, those who have lost everything, give me to understand by their silence and by their pain, that all they want of me is to help them regain their dignity. I am walking along their path in order to accompany them however briefly. I must walk with them to show them by my deeds that it is always possible to resume walking a road that they may have forgotten.

This is the human development taught me through the work that I do on the Mission. It seems that this way is well situated within the context of global evangelization. This is a point well stated in a pastoral document from the Italian Bishops, entitled *Evangelization and Sacrament*. In it on pg. 33 No. 81 we read: "The value of all the facets of human development to which the people of our time have been made conscious is based in the Gospel. They have been reincarnated and relived in the very life of the Church. The sacramental reality suited as it is to men and woman in their concrete situations, is understood in all the depths of its being. It makes one recognize and struggle for the just needs of this development; for liberation, for justice and peace."

And you, priests, sisters and laity who know better than I what was impressed on people's minds in the Council, make it incumbent on us in the Missions to gather together and to make clear to all THE DIRECTION IN WHICH THE CHURCH must go.

Surely this must be presented to our people with conviction, having them understand that the Church is made up of all the baptized who profess the faith, while at the same time being respectful of all those who do not share our faith.

To Mary and St. Vincent, evangelizer and servant of the poor, we entrust our work. May they guide us in proclaiming the Gospel of Christ; may they bless us and the people that we have met and will meet in the future.

Stephen India, C.M., Translator