

Accompanying Preaching: A Lived Experience

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Abstract: *Preaching has traditionally been understood as verbal proclamation within religious settings. However, Accompanying Preaching introduces a novel pastoral-theological framework that expands this concept by integrating presence, relationality, and solidarity with the lived experiences of individuals. This paper explores the practices of Accompanying Preaching as a lived experience, particularly in contexts of social and pastoral challenges. It draws from real-life experiences in catechetical missions, educational settings, and moments of crisis, illustrating how preaching is fundamentally an act of being with others rather than just speaking to them. By formalizing this approach, Accompanying Preaching is proposed as a theological and pastoral framework that may serve as a guide for preachers, catechists, and pastoral workers in their mission. Grounding this framework in theological reflection and practical experience, this study contributes to the broader discourse on mission and pastoral engagement.*

Introduction

Though deeply rooted in Christianity, the Philippines faces contemporary challenges such as religious formalism, secularism, and declining youth participation in church activities. The interplay between secularism and religious formalism presents profound challenges to the practice of preaching and the sustenance of vibrant faith communities. Secularism, which emphasizes the separation of religious institutions from state affairs and often prioritizes empirical and material perspectives, has become increasingly influential in modern society. This shift manifests in several ways that affect both preaching and personal faith.

One notable impact is the diminishing authority of religious voices. As secular viewpoints gain prominence, relevant traditional religious teachings may be perceived as outdated or misaligned with contemporary values. This perception can lead to a questioning of the relevance of sermons and religious guidance, especially among younger generations. Moreover, the rise of moral relativism, often associated with secular thought, challenges the absolutes that many religious doctrines uphold. In a culture where personal choice is paramount, the idea of universal moral truths can seem restrictive or antiquated.

Conversely, religious formalism, characterized by a rigid adherence to rituals and traditions, can also impede genuine spiritual growth. The annual "Translacion" procession of the Black Nazarene in Manila is one of the most attended devotions of Catholics in the Philippines. On January 9, 2025, over 8 million devotees participated in this event, which lasted nearly 21 hours and covered a 6-kilometer route. Many participants walked barefooted, jostling to touch the centuries-old statue of Jesus Christ, known as the Black Nazarene. This focus on external conformity can result in worship that is mechanical rather than heartfelt. When individuals participate in rituals without understanding or embracing their significance, they become devoid of spiritual vitality and risk draining them of their meaningfulness.

Another challenge in preaching is youth participation. The youth, representing a significant portion of the Philippine population, are vital to the Church's present and future. However, recent studies indicate a decline in active participation among young Filipino

Catholics. A 2023 survey by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) revealed that only 38% of Filipinos attend religious services weekly, with a notable drop among the youth demographic.¹

The disengagement of youth from traditional church settings has become a pressing concern for religious communities worldwide. A significant factor contributing to this trend is the perception among young people that church teachings and practices are irrelevant to their daily lives and contemporary issues. This sense of disconnection manifests in various ways, leading to a decline in youth participation and a growing skepticism toward institutionalized religion. Many young individuals find that traditional church teachings do not resonate with the realities they face daily. A study highlighted that one-third of young adults describe church as "boring" and about one-quarter perceive faith as irrelevant, with biblical teachings being unclear to them.² This sentiment suggests a disconnect between the church's message and the pressing concerns of the younger generation. When sermons and religious discourse fail to address topics pertinent to youth—such as mental health, social justice, and scientific advancements—young congregants may feel that the church is out of touch with modern society.

The methods by which churches convey their messages can significantly impact youth engagement. Reliance on traditional, lecture-style teaching without incorporating interactive or multimedia elements may not align with the learning preferences of today's youth. According to the above study, "When youth ministers rely solely on lecture-style teaching or dated curriculum, they lose their audience before they even start."³ In an era dominated by digital media and interactive content, static and unidirectional modes of communication can render church services less appealing to younger audiences.

Pope Francis emphasizes that evangelization should not be about imposing doctrines but about journeying with people patiently, allowing them to encounter Christ in their own time and context. In this light, Accompanying Preaching transforms preaching from mere instruction into friendship, rooted in genuine relationships and sustained by compassionate action.

The (R)evolution of Preaching: From Traditional Proclamation to Accompaniment

Preaching is often understood as the solemn proclamation of the gospel within structured religious settings. However, my journey as a theology teacher and lay preacher in the Philippines has led me to a profound realization: true preaching extends beyond the pulpit. It is a continuous act of accompaniment, a lived experience that weaves the sacred into the fabric of everyday life. This paper explores my personal journey of discovering and embracing "accompanying preaching." Reflecting on my years of ministry, I recognize that personal experiences have profoundly shaped my approach to preaching. Engaging with individuals and communities in their unique contexts has not only deepened my understanding of the gospel but also reinforced the importance of lived experiences in effective ministry. In the Philippines, a predominantly Christian nation, I have observed how cultural and spiritual environments shape one's understanding of vocation, ministry, and proclamation of the Word. While this context provides fertile ground for nurturing faith, it also presents a profound responsibility: to ensure that preaching does not become a mere repetition of doctrine but rather an active, engaging force. In a

¹ Social Weather Stations. "SWS: Only 38% of Filipinos Attend Religious Services Weekly." Philstar, February 21, 2023. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2023/02/21/2246557/sws-only-38-filipinos-attend-religious-services-weekly>.

²The State of the Church 2020, February 19, 2020, www.barna.com/research/current-perceptions/.

³The State of the Church 2020.

society deeply rooted in religious traditions, preachers must cultivate faith that is both firmly anchored in Christian teachings and actively engaged in the realities of the world.

Historically, preaching has undergone significant evolution. In the Old Testament, it was primarily directed toward the Israelite community, focusing on instruction, prophecy, and communal worship within the temple or synagogue. The audience was the "assembly of the holy ones," emphasizing a collective experience of faith. While there was an awareness of a broader audience, the universal mission of preaching remained a future prospect. With the coming of Jesus Christ, the nature of preaching transformed dramatically. His message of salvation and resurrection expanded the scope of evangelization, shifting it from an inward-focused practice to an outward mission directed to all of humanity. This development gave rise to two fundamental forms of proclamation: the edification of the Ecclesia and Evangelistic Outreach.⁴

Today, preaching has transcended traditional settings. The advent of digital media has revolutionized religious communication, providing preachers with new platforms such as podcasts, vlogs, and social media to extend their reach beyond the confines of church walls. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this transition, compelling many faith communities to adopt online services and virtual gatherings. These digital advancements have not only broadened access to spiritual guidance but have also allowed individuals who may not regularly attend church to engage with faith in new and meaningful ways. Beyond digital presence, contemporary preaching thrives in personal encounters. As preachers, we are called to accompany individuals in their faith journeys, meeting them where they are and guiding them through life's complexities.

Accompaniment in Preaching

In the Gospels, Jesus is depicted not merely as a preacher but as one who walks alongside people. In the narrative of Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), the risen Jesus joins two disciples on their journey to the village of Emmaus. Unrecognized by them, He engages in conversation, listens to their concerns, and offers insights into the Scriptures. This paradigm of accompaniment is further exemplified in the Gospels where Jesus is not merely depicted as a preacher but as one who journeys with people. These and other encounters highlight the importance of being present with others in their moments of confusion and despair. Throughout the encounter at Emmaus, Jesus listens attentively to them. After listening, He offers guidance by interpreting the Scriptures, helping the disciples understand the events they witnessed in a new light. Pope Francis emphasizes this approach, urging ministers to adopt a pastoral process he refers to as "accompaniment." He highlights that Christ's very incarnation placed Him in a relationship of accompaniment with us. Jesus became one of us, walked with us, shared meals, healed, and ultimately offered us salvation.

Presence and Listening: The First Component of Accompanying Preaching

Evangelii Gaudium emphasizes that "missionary disciples accompany missionary disciples."⁵ This statement underscores that evangelization is not merely about teaching or

⁴Edification of the ecclesia is preaching to those already gathered in faith, nurturing their spiritual growth and reinforcing their commitment to the teachings of Jesus while evangelistic outreach extends the message beyond existing believers. Robert Barron, *What Christians Believe: Understanding the Nicene Creed* (Irving, TX: Word on Fire, 2020), 74-91.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel), no. 173 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013).

instructing but about walking with others in their faith journey. The notion of accompaniment is deeply embedded in the Church's evangelizing mission, as reflected in *Gaudium et Spes* which stresses that the Church must "scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel."⁶

Accompanying Preaching begins with presence. Before any preaching can be effective, there must be a genuine engagement with people in their lived experiences. Pope Francis emphasizes this, urging the Church to be a field hospital that first listens and heals before instructing.⁷ In my preaching ministry, I have seen how deeply transformative simple acts of being with people and listening to their stories can be.

A good example is my encounter with people in the province of Batan, Aklan, located in the Western Visayas region of the Philippines. Batan is a fourth-class municipality with a regular income between ₱90 million and ₱130 million (\$1,600 and \$2,200 in U.S. dollars) and a population of approximately 35,000. While it may not be a high-earning town and the people lead simple lives, their faith in God and neighbor is a remarkable trait that even visitors or tourists have noticed. I learned about Batan through priests Msgr. Pedro Frac, then a 73-year-old parish priest, and Fr. Joebert Villasis, rector of a school there and a friend of Msgr. Frac. Their parish needed formation training for their teachers. The public school teachers had long wanted to offer catechism classes to their students since government schools do not provide religious education. At that time, there was only one parish priest for all 20 barangays in a 30-square-mile area surrounded by mountains and fish ponds. It was difficult for the priest to visit all the areas for religious services, especially in providing religious formation. Thus, the public school teachers took the initiative of securing permission from the Department of Education. They were allowed to provide religious classes under the conditions that the program would be voluntary, outside of class hours, and without government funding. Various logistical and financial challenges arose. Despite these obstacles, their desire to share their faith remained steadfast. However, since they were not catechists, they needed training and formation.

Collaborating with Msgr. Pedro Frac, we provided alternative ways to provide training. Given the high costs of flight travel from Manila to Aklan,⁸ we initiated an online religious education training-formation program for teachers. Most of the teachers then didn't have a good internet connection. The parish provided internet access, allowing 300 public school teachers to participate. However, financial constraints hindered many from traveling to the parish office from their homes to continue their studies. With each trip costing two dollars, this expense proved unsustainable for teachers earning approximately \$25 per week.

We adjusted our approach in order to continue with the ministry. Instead of conducting online courses, my team and I traveled to Aklan during summers and semester breaks to provide in-person formation and training. Since the teachers were situated in different barangays and transportation was costly for them, we went in pairs to their locations. It is easy to see this as something focused on us as we helped them, but that was not the case. This was not a one-sided

⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 4 (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1965).

⁷ The Church as a "field hospital" was used as a metaphor by Pope Francis in an interview with Antonio Spadaro in August. Vatican.va. Accessed March 14, 2025.
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papafrancesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html.

⁸ Batan is 49 kilometers (30 mi) from the provincial capital of Kalibo. There are no flights directly to Batan. Manila to Kalibo has a distance of 361.06 km or 194.83 nautical miles via air and has a population of 33,484 as of the 2020 Census, and a land area of 79.22 square kilometers.

mission; it became a reciprocal journey. Despite their hardships, the teachers extended hospitality—offering food and shelter, even though they have not much to spare. Their families welcomed us under their roofs for several weeks, demonstrating generosity beyond material wealth. Being a poor municipality, they had to contribute. They gave their crops, sometimes even their chickens, and every Sunday, they contributed a measure of rice until they had enough to feed more than 300 participants. Truly a multiplication of loaves and fishes.

Incorporating active listening into ministry is not merely a technique but a profound act of humility and love. By prioritizing others' perspectives over our own, we embody the biblical exhortation to "honor all people" (1 Pet 2:17).⁹ This approach demonstrates genuine concern for individuals' experiences and viewpoints, encouraging open dialogue and allowing them to share their stories without fear of judgment. This requires ministers to be fully present, offering undivided attention and empathy. It fosters trust and openness, creating a safe space where individuals feel valued and understood. Moreover, by understanding the unique challenges and needs of the people, pastors, preachers, and priests can offer tailored guidance and assistance, addressing specific concerns more effectively. This personalized support not only meets immediate needs but also contributes to long-term spiritual development.

Preaching that proclaims God's message to his people is always personal. Thus, it is not a lecture form with abstract language and concepts. It seeks to "open" the Scriptures as Jesus did, informing our listeners about its content, but always making the text's relevance apparent to them.¹⁰ We recognize that we are not merely giving a speech, but we are preaching to people about their personal relationships with God and their neighbors. That is to say, we will cast our sermons in a second-person mold. The dominant word will not be I, he, she, it, but you.¹¹

Accompanying Preaching as Relational

Accompanying Preaching transcends the mere transmission of doctrinal knowledge; it is an embodied praxis of relational encounter. Rooted in the incarnation of Christ, this form of preaching emphasizes journeying with others in their faith, fostering a reciprocal transformation between preacher and community. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). The incarnation signifies God's choice to enter fully into human existence through Jesus Christ. By doing so, God didn't remain distant but chose to walk alongside humanity, sharing our joys, struggles, and sorrows. This divine act of becoming human serves as the ultimate model for accompaniment, illustrating that just as God immersed Himself in our world to understand and guide us intimately, we are called to be present in the lives of others.

As Pope Francis articulates in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Church must be a "community of missionary disciples" who engage in a dynamic of listening, dialogue, and shared learning.¹² Accompanying Preaching is thus a pastoral method that affirms the dignity of every individual, recognizing that the gospel is best communicated within lived relationships rather than solely through proclamatory speech.

The essence of Accompanying Preaching is a two-way engagement. It does not position the preacher as a mere conveyor of divine truths but as a fellow traveler in the faith journey. This

⁹ Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition.

¹⁰ Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, eds., *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005) 25.

¹¹ Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 36.

¹² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Joy of the Gospel, no. 21.

mirrors the Emmaus narrative (Luke 24:13–35), where Christ walks with the disciples, listens to their concerns, and illuminates their understanding. The relationality inherent in this model underscores that authentic preaching is not unilateral but deeply dialogical. Yves Congar's ecclesiological reflections affirm that the Church is fundamentally a "communion" wherein ministry arises from relational participation rather than hierarchical imposition.¹³

This theology of accompaniment finds resonance in our experience with Msgr. Frac and the teachers. We, too, were accompanied by the people of Aklan. Their faith, struggles, and insights shaped our own spiritual journey, reminding us that evangelization is never a one-directional movement. Instead, it embodies the mutual conversion spoken of by St. John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, where both evangelizer and evangelized undergo a process of deepening faith.¹⁴ Evangelization is a dynamic and reciprocal process, enriching both the evangelizer and the evangelized. Faith is strengthened when it is given to others. As preachers share their faith, they experience a deepening and revitalization of their own beliefs. Conversely, those who receive the message embark on their journey of faith, leading to mutual spiritual growth. This mutual enrichment underscores the transformative power of God's word, fostering a deeper communion among all participants.

Through this shared experience, 316 public school teachers became catechists—not through a detached instructional process but through lived witness and participatory faith formation. This mirrors the early Church's catechetical model, where faith was handed down through communal engagement and discipleship. St. Paul's exhortation in 1 Thess 2:8 captures this beautifully: "So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also ourselves, because you have become very dear to us."

Solidarity in Crisis: Preaching Through Action

Accompanying preaching holds exceptional power during times of crisis. When Typhoon Ulysses struck the Philippines in November 2020, it devastated parts of Marikina in Metro Manila. More than 20 senior citizens, some with dementia, were stranded in their flooded, church-run hospice care facility. To survive the 8-foot floodwaters, they sought refuge on the roof of their bungalow. In the aftermath, a Catholic school offered its classrooms as temporary shelter, where they spent Christmas and New Year until a new residence could be found. The priest overseeing their care sought assistance beyond financial aid, emphasizing the need for companionship, care, and well-being. Together with other volunteers, we provided support through our presence, listening to them, and organizing the donated items and relief goods to make them feel at home, ensuring their well-being and respect. This effort was especially challenging amid the pandemic, as we took precautions to protect their health.

These experiences demonstrate that preaching is not confined to words. It is about living out the gospel message, especially when people are most vulnerable. St. Francis of Assisi's instruction—"Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words"—captures this ethos perfectly. In such moments, the line between giver and receiver blurs. The seniors we assisted were not just beneficiaries; they became our teachers, reminding us of the resilience of the human spirit and the importance of presence. Their gratitude was evident not just in words but in the warmth of their smiles and the tightness of their grips.

¹³ Rose M. Beal, *Mystery of the Church, People of God: Yves Congar's Total Ecclesiology as a Path to Vatican II* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 224-231.

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate), no. 2 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990).

This experience underscored that in times of crisis, our actions become the most powerful sermons. By standing in solidarity with those who suffer, we live out the teachings of Christ, offering hope and love through tangible deeds. Jesus Christ did not merely speak of salvation but lived among His people, experiencing their suffering and joys (John 1:14). His ministry was not distant rhetoric but an active presence—healing the sick (Mark 1:40-45), feeding the hungry (John 6:1-14), and mourning with the grieving (John 11:33-35). This embodied preaching challenges ministers and laypeople alike to respond to crises with both material and spiritual support.

The principle of solidarity in Catholic social teaching emphasizes that we are all responsible for one another. Pope John Paul II, in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, defines solidarity as "not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good."¹⁵ Pope Francis reiterates this call in *Fratelli Tutti*, where he exhorts the faithful to embrace a "culture of encounter" that transcends social, economic, and even physical barriers.¹⁶ Crises provide a stark reminder that accompaniment is not optional but a mandate rooted in Christ's way of caring for and engaging with the world.

Accompanying Preaching, particularly in times of crisis, is an urgent response to the call of the gospel. It is the tangible expression of faith that moves beyond words into action. As the Letter of James reminds us, "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). To preach in crisis is to be present—to listen, to console, to uplift, and to serve. This is the essence of solidarity in crisis: a preaching not of mere words but of profound, incarnational action.

Witnessing as Preaching

Witnessing serves as a powerful testament to faith, inspiring and encouraging others. Pope Paul VI, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, asserts that "modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."¹⁷

Witnessing is deeply rooted in Scripture. In the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus commissions His disciples, saying, "You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8). This mandate emphasizes that disseminating the gospel is intrinsically linked to personal testimony. In this context, a witness is someone who has encountered the risen Christ and, through their transformation, bears evidence of His enduring presence in the world. The Gospel of John provides a poignant example through the Samaritan woman at the well. After her encounter with Jesus, she returns to her community and proclaims, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did" (John 4:29). Her testimony leads many to believe in Christ, illustrating the profound impact of sharing one's faith journey. Similarly, the Apostle Paul frequently recounts his conversion experience as a testament to God's grace, using his narrative to connect with diverse audiences (Acts 22, 26).

In the Philippines, the intertwining of faith and daily life is evident, particularly in education. The 1987 Philippine Constitution acknowledges the importance of religious

¹⁵ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concern), no. 38 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987).

¹⁶ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship), no. 30 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020).

¹⁷ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelization in the Modern World), no. 11 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975).

instruction in public (government supported) schools, stating, "At the option expressed in writing by the parents or guardians, religion shall be allowed to be taught to their children or wards in public elementary and high schools within the regular class hours." (Article XIV, Section 3, No. 3) This provision opens avenues for catechesis within the public education system, allowing faith to permeate the academic sphere.

The public school teacher-catechist in Batan is a good example of a tangible manifestation of witnessing. These educators transcend their conventional duties by imparting religious education to their students without additional compensation or formal recognition. Their commitment stems from a profound sense of vocation, viewing their profession as a conduit for evangelization. These teachers navigate numerous challenges, including limited resources and the delicate balance of adhering to educational policies while fulfilling their catechetical mission. Their perseverance exemplifies the essence of witnessing; their lives become a testament to the faith they profess.

However, the call to witness is not without challenges, especially in an increasingly secular world. Societal secularization, diverse belief systems, and potential misinterpretation can impede the effectiveness of personal testimony. The rise of secularism presents numerous challenges to the Christian faith and its values often lead to a pronounced indifference toward religious expressions, creating an environment where faith-based perspectives are marginalized. This societal shift can result in the erosion of religious values and a diminished public presence of faith communities. For individuals striving to live out their beliefs, this secular backdrop can foster feelings of isolation and apprehension, as their expressions of faith may be met with apathy or even hostility.

In the Philippines, despite its rich religious heritage, secularism presents unique challenges to witnessing. The principle of "benevolent neutrality" that was adopted by the government aims to balance the separation of church and state while accommodating religious practices. However, this approach can lead to ambiguities in the public expression of faith, particularly within educational institutions. While the constitution permits religious instruction in public schools upon request, the implementation varies. In some cases, religious education is infused with specific denominational undertones, potentially alienating those of different or no faith backgrounds. This complex interplay between secular policies and religious practices necessitates a nuanced approach to witnessing, one that respects diverse beliefs while remaining true to one's faith convictions. Navigating this landscape requires discernment and a commitment to embodying the teachings of Christ in a respectful and authentic manner, fostering genuine dialogue and understanding in a pluralistic society.

Journeying Together: Shared Responsibility

In this framework, preaching is not a solitary endeavor but a collective mission that thrives on shared responsibility. This collaborative approach fosters a culture of giving and mutual support, as exemplified by the *Isang Salop ng Bigas* initiative in Batan.¹⁸ In this program, families contribute a measure of rice every Sunday, a practice that has been expanded to provide meals for catechists and teachers undergoing formation. This communal generosity is a form of lived preaching, demonstrating the power of shared responsibility. The biblical foundation for such communal efforts is evident in the early Christian communities. The Acts of the Apostles

¹⁸ In the Philippines, *isang* (*isa* means one) *salop* is roughly 2.5 to 3 kilos depending on the region. *Isang salop ng bigas* or a measure of rice was what the teacher-catechist contributed every Sunday mass so that they can feed more than 300 participants.

describes believers who "were together and had everything in common," (Acts 2:44) sharing their resources to support one another.

In Aklan, the *Isang salop* initiative embodies this principle by transforming individual contributions into a collective force for good. What began as a modest effort to feed a few volunteers has expanded into a robust support system for those dedicated to catechesis and education. This evolution underscores the impact of shared responsibility, where each person's offering, no matter how small, contributes to the greater mission of evangelization. Moreover, this initiative highlights the reciprocal nature of accompanying preaching. As the community supports its catechists and educators, these individuals, in turn, are empowered to nurture the faith and education of the community's members. This cycle of giving and receiving fosters a vibrant faith community rooted in solidarity and mutual encouragement.

The success of the *Isang salop* initiative also reflects the broader cultural values of the Filipino people, particularly the concept of *bayanihan*,¹⁹ or communal unity and cooperation. By embracing shared responsibility in their evangelization efforts, the community in Aklan not only addresses immediate needs but also strengthens the bonds of fellowship and collective faith. In essence, accompanying preaching as a shared responsibility transforms the act of evangelization into a communal journey.

Conclusion, Accompanying Preaching: A Seeking Preacher

Preaching and mission are two facets of the same endeavor, each energizing and informing the other. Preaching acts as a catalyst for mission by inspiring and equipping believers to engage in God's work beyond the church walls. Conversely, the mission offers real-world experiences that deepen and enrich the content and delivery of preaching.

Missiologist Eckhard Schnabel writes about a missionary approach that encompasses two key elements: intentionality and movement.²⁰ These components remain integral to contemporary missions. Mission originates from an authority that dispatches messengers with a message to the people. Intentionality reflects the mission's purpose as conceived by the sender, which should align with the messenger's understanding. Therefore, the messenger must clearly grasp the sender's intent. Movement, meanwhile, extends beyond mere geographical relocation. As Schnabel asserts, mission is not limited to traveling to distant lands or crossing cultural boundaries; it encompasses the entire effort of proclamation—the determination, labor, and struggle of stepping out of one's comfort zone.

The call of a preacher is to be a seeking preacher. This entails rediscovering the importance of going forth, and embracing the essential nature of a pilgrim Church. Preaching is not confined to the pulpit; it is an outward movement, a response to Christ's initiative. As an evangelizing community, we acknowledge that the Lord has taken the first step. He has loved us first, enabling us to go forth boldly—seeking those who have strayed, standing at the crossroads, and welcoming them back. Mission, in turn, is the Church's active participation in God's

¹⁹ There is no direct English translation for *bayanihan*. *Bayanihan* is a Filipino trait that embodies communal unity, cooperation, and mutual help. Traditionally, it refers to the practice of community members working together voluntarily to achieve a common goal, such as helping a neighbor move their house by physically carrying it on bamboo poles. Beyond its literal meaning, *bayanihan* represents the Filipino value of solidarity and selflessness, especially in times of need. It can be seen in modern contexts, such as disaster relief efforts, volunteer work, and collective problem-solving within communities.

²⁰ Eckhard Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 22-23.

redemptive work throughout the world. This includes evangelization, advocating for social justice, and demonstrating Christ's love in diverse settings.

One of my experiences as a seeking preacher led me to the remote islands of the Philippines, specifically to St. Bartholomew Parish of the Dominican Order in the Calayan Islands.²¹ Situated in the northernmost part of the country, the island is home to about 20,000 residents across 12 *barangays*. Reaching it requires a *lampitaw*—a 5 to 7-hour journey across the open sea from Aparri, Cagayan.²² Despite its vast area, the parish has only two priests. To reach the most distant communities, they must walk 10 to 12 hours from the Centro, where the convent is located. Consequently, when a priest visits, he administers five sacraments in a single visit. Conducting church services is already challenging—catechesis even more so.

If teaching and nurturing faith is both a sacred duty and an inalienable right of the Church, then every baptized person is compelled to preach. By virtue of baptism, all are called to continue the apostles' work. When I was invited, along with a team, to help train catechists for the island, the task felt daunting. The journey alone was long and arduous. However, upon arrival, we were most struck by the people's unwavering commitment.

There is only one church on the island, meaning attending Mass requires walking several hours. Yet, during our training sessions, not a single participant arrived late—despite having to trek 10 to 15 kilometers down the mountains. From our lodging near the convent, I witnessed a profound testament to Christian life. Their sacrifice—their willingness to walk, to spend time learning, to serve as catechists—was a living expression of faith.

This experience deepened my understanding of accompanying preaching, a concept rooted in the belief that preaching is inseparable from mission. In places like Calayan, where access to priests and formal catechesis is scarce, preaching assumes a new form. It is found not only in homilies but in every act of presence, every conversation, every shared burden. The people there did not merely listen to the gospel—they lived it. They embodied St. Paul's words: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16). Their lives became a proclamation, a mission of faith.

This is the essence of accompanying preaching—it is preaching that does not leave people behind. It does not remain distant, speaking solely from a position of authority. Instead, it seeks out, listens, and walks alongside others. It understands that evangelization is not only about words but also about witness. Mission, then, is about bringing the gospel to people and discovering Christ with them. The call to go forth is not about mere movement; it is about encounter. And true encounter demands accompaniment. This is the challenge for every preacher: to view preaching not as a task but as a pilgrimage. To step beyond comfort, to meet people where they are, and to proclaim Christ not only through words but through presence. In doing so, preaching becomes more than an act—it becomes a mission.

Thus, preaching in a Christian society is both a gift and a challenge. It is a privilege to proclaim the gospel where its language is familiar, yet it is a responsibility to ensure that it

²¹ The Calayan Islands, part of the Babuyan Group of Islands in Cagayan province, are approximately 530 kilometers (330 miles) north of Manila. There are no direct flights from Manila to Calayan. It is 10-12 hours bus ride from Manila to Claveria. From there, a *lampitaw* ride takes 4-7 hours depending on the waves.

²² A *lampitaw* is a traditional wooden outrigger boat used in the northern Philippines, particularly in Cagayan and the Babuyan Islands. It is designed for long-distance sea travel, usually powered by a diesel engine, and reinforced with bamboo outriggers for stability. A medium to large size *lampitaw* can carry 15 to 40 passengers along with cargo. Since Calayan has no airports, *lampitaws* serve as the primary mode of transport between the mainland (Claveria or Aparri) and the island. It is an open-air boat thus passengers are exposed and can get wet.

remains a living, breathing force for personal and societal transformation—preaching that becomes an act of accompaniment, witnessing, and educating in faith.

For Further Reading

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