

OCTOBER 23, 2015

**1st Conference Talk: “The Process of Incarnation of the charism”
(by Maria Luisa J. Mesina)**

I would like to start this conference, with the question that Jesus addressed to the disciples in Mark 8: 26-33: “Who do you say that I am?”

In this National Family Encounter, we can also ask: “who is Verbum Dei?”

When Jesus asked this question, he and the disciples went on to villages...and it was along the road, when He asked: who do you say I am? Verbum Dei has gone to many parts of the world already during these 52 years (1963-2015): we are on our way too!!! We are in 32 countries now. At what point of the way are we? In what stage of the development of charism are we? What time of history of salvation?

1. WHO DO YOU SAY VERBUM DEI IS?

To answer this we need to go back to the past.

We need to go back to the past with gratitude! This year 2015, it is dedicated as the Year of Consecrated Life, Pope Francis expressed three aims: 1. To look to the past with gratitude 2. To live the present with passion 3. To embrace the future with hope

We recall our founding spirit. There was a strong spirit full of passion and radical love for the Gospel in Jaime Bonet, our Founder. We don't call him Father Jaime¹. It is the spirit of openness to the needs of the Church and of world. “Give me to all people, take my love to others.”² These are the powerful words he heard from Christ when he was in dialogue with Him in front of the Cross and the Eucharist when he was 14 years old.

It is the spirit of urgency: “I want to take you to all people. I want to be your mouth, feet and hands.”³ “I yearn to change hatred into love, sadness to joy, anguish and despair into optimism and hope, sickness and death into life and resurrection. Because I am eager to see a radiant light dawn on so many gloomy faces, in so many burnt-out lives, in so many desolate hearts, and in so many peoples that live in darkness and in the shadow of death”⁴ Jaime carries in his heart the Gospel like a fire- “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” (Luke 12:49). The living encounter with Jesus through prayer and ministry of the Word would become the focus of our mission in the foundational period.

It was in year 1963 in Mallorca, Spain when the fire of Jaime lit other flames of fire! His love for Christ was very contagious! This is like what St. Catherine of Siena said: “Be who

¹ Jaime wants to be called with his first name. He is a very simple and humble man. He wants people to know that he considers himself as a brother among them. Thus, we are used to call our founder as Jaime only.

² Dialogue of Jaime with the Crucified Christ and Eucharist when he was 14 years old.

³ Dialogue of Jaime with the Crucified Christ and Eucharist when he was 14 years old.

⁴ Pregón del Evangelizador (Herald of the Evangelizer)

God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.” The Founder’s example inspired in the first missionaries followers the willingness to follow Christ wherever He leads. I remembered what one old missionary shared with me “As long as I am with Christ and Christ is with me, the community can ask me whatever and can send me wherever”. There was so much love for Christ.

Verbum Dei was born in the context of the Second Vatican Council and from the mind of the Church. Pope John XXIII opened the Vatican Council II in 1962 and ended in 1965.

Situating Verbum Dei in the context of Vatican Council II can give us light to understand the call which Jaime Bonet felt in response to the urgent need in the Church and in the world.

The concerns of the Council, as reflected in its documents and resonated in our charism, are:

1. *The place of the Word of God as the foundation of all Christian life. To promote the study of the Word of God especially for those who are engaged in the ministry of the Word so as not to be empty and unnecessary preachers.*
2. *Universal vocation to holiness. LG 40*
3. *The dignity of the human person based in Baptism and is called to dialogue with God. GS 19*
4. *The promotion of the laity. LG Cap. IV*

Vatican Council II had led more Jaime to have a stronger foundation to believe that women and married couples, not only the priests have the right and duty to preach the Word of God with their testimony of life.

Also, - the universal call to holiness, the dignity of the human person, the centrality of the Word and the promotion of the laity are very strong- all these aspects gave Jaime a more profound foundation of the Verbum Dei Missionary Family.

Then later, another document of the Church that has marked our spirituality as missionaries of the Word of God is the *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Evangelization in the Modern World, 1975). One number that Jaime would mention many times in his preaching and he even placed in the Statutes of FMVD is no. 76- *Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you really preach what you live? The witness of life has become more than ever an essential condition for real effectiveness in preaching... the world is calling for evangelizers to speak to it of a God whom the evangelists themselves should know and be familiar with as if they could see the invisible (Cf. Hebrews 11:27).*

When I read it the first time, I said to myself, like this was the first missionaries who caught my attention in the beginning: they were very convinced of what they preached, their lives were clear testimony for me and they were speaking of a God who is so familiar as if they could see the invisible!

In recalling our past with gratitude, we are to remember gratefully the foundational stage of our charism. Let us be grateful to the fidelity of our founder and the first missionaries! We pray that this founding spirit continues to inspire us in the actual story! We recall St. Mary MacKillop's words: "Gratitude is the memory of the heart". Jaime Bonet would say: "our life is gratitude to all what God has done in us!"

2. OUR STORY IS A CONTINUOUS PASSION TO LOVE CHRIST AND ANNOUNCE HIS GOSPEL

We are continuously challenged to be driven by the Holy Spirit to live the present story of Verbum Dei with that same passion of Jaime Bonet's radical love for Christ and loving response to the pressing needs of the world by dedicating himself fulltime to prayer and the ministry of the Word!

From that same attitude and spirit we want to embrace our future too!

All of us that we are here, we have taken the "relay race" to continue passing the Verbum Dei charism. Some of us here are the spiritual children of the first or old missionaries who founded Philippines, like me born from the missionary self-giving of Catalina Morey and Maria Jose Moron- they are my spiritual mothers because according to St. Paul you become spiritual father or mother when you introduce the person to the Gospel⁵. And we who are their children we became also founders and formators of other followers/disciples of Christ in Verbum Dei. ... Some of us are their spiritual grandchildren (because some of you have become missionaries and disciples because of my missionary self-giving) and some great grandchildren...and some great-great grandchildren of the first or old missionaries who came to incarnate Verbum Dei here in the Philippines way back 1977.

Verbum Dei has been here in the Philippines for 38 years. I've been with Verbum Dei for 34 years, including my years of being disciple. There were few disciples when I met the community. We were sometimes 3 or sometimes 5 faithful disciples when I joined the community. Now there are more than 100+! We are now in CDO, Cebu, Tagaytay and Manila. We are three branches here now: female missionaries, male missionaries and missionary married couples! The current reality of Verbum Dei is fruit of a long journey of fidelity and love for Christ and for the charism. Thanks to the faithfulness of many missionaries who came here and are still here! Thanks to the faithfulness of many disciples who have collaborated in reaching out people and in bringing Jesus to many!

⁵ Cf. 1 Corinthians 4:15

We are all part of the process of the development of Verbum Dei!!! We are part of the chain!!! John Henry Newmann said: “I have a part in this great work...I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection...”⁶.

Many of us have witnessed the development of Verbum Dei!

Who is Verbum Dei at this moment?

Foundational stage is ending! It is the initial and beginning period of Verbum Dei full of beautiful experiences, full of courage, vitality, enthusiasm and strong love for God and for others!

And in what stage are we now? Who and what is Verbum Dei now?

We are in the process of institutionalization. It’s the stage in which we are translating the spirit and insights of our founder Jaime Bonet into institutional structure with strong sense of fidelity. In the Congress 2015, Isabel Fornari commented to us that we are in the moment that we don’t hear the Founder Jaime Bonet preach nor speak. He is still alive but he is old (89 years old) and he can remember very few things only. So Isabel continued to say that we are not anymore in the oral tradition but we are already in written tradition of all what Jaime Bonet left for Verbum Dei as heritage or patrimony.

All the powerful beginning experiences of radicality to live the Gospel would remain a fleeting, passing and temporary elements without its incarnation and manifestation in institutional structures.

The institutional stage guarantees that the essential elements of Verbum Dei vocation and charism are continuously present & available in the current stage and faithfully lived out.

This is our stage now: INSTITUTIONAL STAGE. How do we live this institutional stage?

1. There have been several Congresses and Symposiums. They are General meetings composed of consecrated missionaries who are representatives of the 5 continents.

Congress about the Constitutions of FMVD

⁶ God knows me and calls me by my name...God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission—I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. Somehow I am necessary for His purposes...I have a part in this great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling. Therefore I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him; If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be necessary causes of some great end, which is quite beyond us. He does nothing in vain; He may prolong my life, He may shorten it; He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends, He may throw me among strangers, He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me—still He knows what He is about.... Let me be Thy blind instrument. I ask not to see— I ask not to know—I ask simply to be used.

Congress about the Directories
 Symposium about Formation Program
 Symposium about the Verbum Dei Missionary Family
 Symposium about Lay Consecrated Missionaries
 (among others)

Concrete results of these Congresses and Symposiums are important written documents that safeguard our fidelity to the charism and essentials elements of Verbum Dei.

2. There have been organizational structure that defines how governance, coordination, responsibilities and task allocations are directed towards the achievement of Verbum Dei identity, mission and spirituality. This means a more formal form of organization in which roles and responsibilities were clearly defined. Structure is very necessary because it gives members clear guidelines for how to proceed with order. Structure binds members together. Structure is inevitable – any community or any organization implies a structure whether it chooses to or not.

In the Philippines, we were constituted last December 2012 as Zone, it's a structure of Verbum Dei governance because of the 3 branches present in the same territory⁷. Zone has the objectives of promoting the ecclesial dimension of the Fraternity, fraternal communion, safeguarding the charism and apostolic criteria⁸.

We have organized also the Apostolic Councils in Cebu, CDO and in Luzon. Apostolic Council is a representative pastoral body of the local community that guarantees the apostolic coordination and the consolidation of the Verbum Dei Missionary Family.

All these structures are for us to be faithful to the VD charism and keep the flame of fire alive!

What unites us is the common project: National Apostolic Project (NAP). It's the way to instill common passion and purpose around a shared mission, a shared project.

Through all these efforts of institutionalization, we can see that Verbum Dei has grown a lot. The Holy Spirit of God has made it possible. The Holy Spirit made it possible that we have NAP! Common project unites us! It gives direction to our passion, focus, strength and dedication.

It's a grace of God that in every local community we can count on the collaboration, availability and generosity of concrete people who are committed to support Verbum Dei mission.

I can say that Verbum Dei is Verbum Dei because of the grace of God! Because of the Holy Spirit! Like St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:10 "By the grace of God, I am what I am".

⁷ Cf. Constitutions of Fraternidad Misionera Verbum Dei # 231

⁸ Cf. Constitutions of Fraternidad Misionera Verbum Dei # 230.1

There's a lot of work, love, service and self-giving...there's a lot of fidelity and conversions...in all these: It is God working in us and in each of us! 1 Corinthians 15:10.

This is Verbum Dei! Let's be grateful for where we are in the present moment. Let's be grateful for how far we have become.

So, who is Verbum Dei? A missionary family and a consecrated missionary celibates and married couples that are moved by the grace of God! We have received God's grace and we don't let it be wasted! (2 Corinthians 6:1) We let the grace of God impel us, urge us, affect us and make us grow and fruitful!

The greatest of all graces we have received is the Person of Christ!
Thanks to the living encounter with the Person of Christ we are Verbum Dei!
He is the Verbum Dei whom we follow. He has spoken to us and has urged us to be like him in loving and in living.

He is the driving force of Verbum Dei! He is the fire that we cannot put off inside our hearts like the experience of Jeremiah 20:9- "it is as if fire is burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones".
He is the reason why we are here all of us!

Christ continues to call us by our name...follow me...be faithful...

3. CREATIVE FIDELITY TO THE SPECIFIC CHARISM OF FORMING APOSTLES.

In exercising our mission, we carry the objective of our mission like a fire: form apostles. So in the mission, the words of St. Paul is a directive for us: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people |who will also be qualified to teach others" (2Timothy 2:2).

We look for reliable persons. It's a mission for those who are open and willing to embrace the power of the Word of God! It's a mission for those who are available and courageous to pass to the others the Life of God! The Gospel needs to be passed on to others. The Gospel needs to be communicated through our charism. But reliable persons means people who are convinced by the living encounter with Christ as the best means to transforming our hearts and realities around us!

Many times, we can think that to be part of the Verbum Dei Missionary Family is to do many things, is to be in activities. We don't have activities so as to be busy bodies. Jaime Bonet said, "Our mission is not something but our mission is someone". For example, do you share with another member on how to love Christ or on how they can also lead others to love Christ?

A flame of fire will die if no logs/woods are placed. We need people to be on fire in loving Christ and in loving our charism!

Verbum Dei Charism has to continue that's why carry the intention like a fire in your heart!

So much is at stake so as to keep the fire of love for Christ alive. This is where we must be very careful in journeying to the future. If we are not vigilant and wise, Verbum Dei could become just another remnant of history.

In the Verbum Dei Philippines, one very strong aspect that we have built among us is the sense of missionary family! There's hunger for true and joyful sense of family and our faith in God has made us to welcome one another as brothers and sisters. One young disciple commented: "I am happy to belong to this family!" You belong to a missionary family!!! As a missionary family, we work hard in preparing the mission together and we rejoice together when we are able to bring children, youth, working people, parents and adults understand Jesus, when they start to forgive and love!

You can go as far as Bantayan Island or Olango Island to farthest Island of Samar or as far as Musuan or Malaysia or China so as to bring Jesus through recollections. You can even organize in your tight schedule during the week in a call or commercial center or working office a weekly School of the Word, or among your fellow classmates, or even in your neighborhood. Thank you very much! Some of you go to the hill of garbage- Payatas- to transmit the Word of God. Some of you go to poor areas to give the wealth of Christ! Thank you very much! Thanks for accompanying people so they can know Christ and they can be transformed in Christ! It's beautiful your self-giving when you visit the houses of the people or when you spend time texting or talking to them. This is very missionary! You go where the sheep is and you start to smell like the sheep. This is like what Pope Francis said: the true shepherd is someone who smells like the sheep! This means that our missionary family opens widely its circle that others may enter and we want to create more circles that listen to the Word of God! We are one big family here in the Philippines!

You know who is Verbum Dei? It is described in Isaiah 54: 2-3, "Make the tent you live in larger; lengthen its ropes and strengthen the pegs! You will extend your boundaries on all sides". You are this! A disciple, an apostle who is with a heart like an extended tent that welcomes people as part of the missionary family!!!

You disciples, you are the hands, feet, mouth and heart of Verbum Dei in the Philippines.

We, the consecrated missionaries, are very happy that we can count on you!!! We encourage you to be **like John the Baptist pointing to Jesus! Point others to Jesus.**

Constitutions FMVD #48. The exercise of the ministry of the Word in its diverse forms aspires to a process of drawing people to Christ, in the measure of the capacities and possibilities of each listener. It is a patient labour of teaching and learning to pray, through

which the apostle takes the disciple by the hand towards the person of Christ rather than providing theoretical explanations. We have saved someone when we have taught him/her to pray. Christ will have a new disciple when s/he, through prayer, “comes to know Him” personally, not by hearsay but by personal experience. The fullness of our missionary joy will consist in this.

Be patient with others. Keep with others on knowing Jesus until they begin to sparkle. A dried wood is a dried wood no matter how many times you light it. But if it starts to sparkle, then a flame of fire will be seen. Follow on with them until they take what is given to them and have it change their lives. Later they become disciples who love Christ, lives out the values of the Gospel and incarnate also the charism.

The fullness of our missionary joy is when the others are following Christ! Later they become apostles of Christ!

Can you sense the joy of a bigger VD family? Can you not see that our growth and fruitfulness is dependent on how well we pass the charism on to others through our lives and through forming apostles?

You have an important role in the continuous process of incarnating the Verbum Dei Charism in the Philippines. Your role is that you live the passion of loving Christ and teach others to love Christ!

Forming apostles is a passion! It teaches not only that Christ changes me but it also empowers us to introduce change into the families, into the world. Like Jaime Bonet: “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” (Luke 12:49).

Incarnation of our charism is a matter of passion, of fire that lights/ enkindles others. The current reality of Verbum Dei is fruit of a long journey of fidelity...our future depends on our faithfulness in the present!

May the Holy Spirit renew our love for Christ and for the Charism so as to be faithful in the present!!!!