

# TOOLS FOR GROWTH AND RELATIONSHIPS

## THEMES

**Chilota Elochukwu**



## **Dedication**

**to**

## **All Daughters of Divine Love**

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## INTRODUCTION

Some times beginnings are not remembered because they did not seem important at the time. However, certain events in our lives become important because we can see later that it was at that time that something started. Then, we might begin to say things like: It was when I visited this place and met this person that something significant started to happen and develop in my life, and so on, whenever that time, or event comes to mind, we attach a significance that was not there before.

I have some years of Sabbatical. I spent nine months of my Sabbatical leave - January 1999 to September 1999 - having more time for reflection, taking a little longer sleep sometimes, visiting some of our Sisters in the country of their Missionary apostolate. I took the advantage also to visit some places of interest of my choice. Moreover, I have the opportunity to look back and review the journey already made. I wrote my experience down in a small book entitled: "*Freedom in God's Arrival*". All these gave me joy.

Taking more courses and studies are part of my Sabbatical programme. For

some years now, I have heard about a Growth Facilitation course going on in Kent at the **Institute of St. Anselm**. Having an opportunity of a Sabbatical, I went to St. Anselm.

Personally, I have my reservations about psychology, when the use of it is exaggerated. That is, when it fails to be only a tool for work, that is, when it claims to determine and know all the answers to human behaviour. But, I like to work with psychology when it is seen and used as a tool to improve human daily personal life and interactions. The Institute of St. Anselm helped me to achieve this. It helped me to see psychology in its right perspective. It is simply a tool. It does not have all the answers to all human problems and behaviour.

My experience of this intensive course in St. Anselm, coupled with my many years of personal experience and interest in interacting and researching human growth, have exposed me and enriched me with greater awareness and insight.

There is a saying, "*If you cherish hand over*". That is, if you have anything

that you cherish and would not want it to die you hand it over for continuity.

Just as **Jesus of Nazareth** did not want the reality of God's love to die and empowered his own to keep the memory; "*Do this in memory of me*", Jesus empowered us to keep his memory. The memory of God's love, which he came to make known. It is a treasure. Jesus wants us to keep the memory of a self-giving love that he offered without holding anything back. So, on my part, because I cherish this experience, awareness and insight I got from St. Anselm's and from other studies, and would not want them to die, I hand them over.

As a person, I have a great interest in standing at a corner, while with the eyes of my mind, observing human beings. As I stand at a corner and observe with full attention and empathy, I notice that as days go by, things continue to happen in the world. People die, babies born, more advances on several fronts – search for new perspective for understanding human existence, search for meaningful culture and history, people ask personal questions like: "*What can I know?*", "*Who am I?*". There is much running about for one thing or the



other, people raise hands looking for support, there is hunger for self-care; people look for peace. There is a search for spiritual dimension and so on.

We hear much now about these issues I mentioned above. They reflect a need - hunger for openness. Recognising such concerns, I tend to articulate some issues and themes in the pages ahead.

## 1. TOUCHING THE ROOT: IDENTITY

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### Mis-Construction of Identity

Identity has its own problem of mis-construction. For many people the word *identity* triggers different understandings and feelings. People struggle to know their identity, but not many arrive at it. This is because identity is a world away from what people think it is.

There is a story told of **Okujo**, a beautiful young woman of thirty-one years old. Okujo used to sit at the **Cutta Square** almost all day staring at people as they drove and walked past. She would talk to no one, and her face would be beaming with worries.

Because Okujo sat almost all day at this square, neighbours felt that it had past being just a leisurely holiday, and began to question why a young woman like Okujo would spend long hours in Cutta Square.

✓  
Said long hours in some fields

One day two women in the neighbourhood, Jenda and Sally, plucked up courage and approached Okujo:

**Jenda and Sally:** Hello, young woman! We've seen you for almost two weeks now in this Cutta Square, at this particular corner, are you all right?

**Okujo:** Oh! Thanks for your observation and interest. Oh, yes, you see, I have a worry. I feel I've lost my identity in life and in society. I lost my high-paid job, and since I lost it, I haven't got a meaningful job. I'm fed up with life, and worse still, my husband is due for promotion, but there is no sign of that, and life is passing me by. It's hard on me. It's like I'm ashamed of myself as a person, worthless.

Okujo was in tears as she told her story. For Okujo, identity means getting a well-paid job in society. Her identity is just having a meaningful job, and having promotion and other things she feels make her who she is. Because these things are no longer available, she feels that she has failed in life.

Some people feel like Okujo. For such people identity is found in just physical advantages, a good job, good education, professions, good everything. When these things are no longer there, they collapse. They feel that their identity is no more, that they are worthless.

### **Group Community and Personal Identity**

Sometimes it is easier to live in the language of "Anyi" that is the statement by which we hide behind the Congregation, Group, Community for our identity. We make such statements like: our congregation, our community receives visitors well, we take care of the elderly and the sick, our congregation do this, our group do that, and so on.

Some people found their identity in groups in the community in a congregation and get fixated on them. It is good to find identity with the group or community in which one belongs. The problem is though, to get fixated. If I continue to make such statements like: our congregation receives

visitors well, our community takes good care of the sick and aged, our group is the best and so on, yes, your congregation and your community receive visitors well, and your group is the best, but you, what is your personal identity?

Group, congregation, community builds a corporate identity. The individual has to identify with the corporate identity, but should you stop there?

If you find your identity in the congregation, community, group – it is good, but at some stage you must find your identity apart from the group. You should not be totally absorbed by it. It is good to discover your identity, and differentiate yourself. When you do this, you stand a better chance to contribute more to your community and your group and to your congregation.

For growth to take place in us, we need what the psychologists and counsellors call the process of individuation. Process of individuation is an inner movement towards the development of the mind. It is a highly complex and articulated inner journey with a definite goal, and that definite goal is God. Men and women discover their person only by re-uniting themselves with

God, because it is impossible to deny the inner loneliness that only God can take away. **St. Augustine** experienced this inner loneliness when he echoed that a human soul is restless until it finds its rest in God.

Identity means to be mature, to be an individual person. It means a mature person standing on his or her own two feet, being able to take responsibility for her or his actions.

The quest for identity is to enter into the journey of the meaning of our life. Identity involves maturity, to talk about identity is to talk about maturing. Identity is a process of 'becoming'. We live in 'becoming' until we become what God wants us to become.

**St. Paul** in his letter to the **Philippians**, proudly talked about his identity. Paul talked about his disposition towards externals, about physical qualifications, how he regarded them as nothing – "all as filth" – since his attachment to them, might rob him of his personal identity, which was his decision for Christ.

*For him I have accepted the  
loss of all other things, and  
look on them as filth if only*



*I can gain Christ ..... that  
I may come to know him and  
the power of his resurrection.<sup>1</sup>*

### **Mixed Feelings of the Beginning**

Some beginnings are important for us – beginnings like baptisms, religious professions, marriages, ordinations, are important for us, and we surround these beginnings with a ceremony to mark the occasion. Our parents, relatives, guardians, friends and well-wishers are invited. Lorries carrying different “lejba” dancing groups drive in, in turns into the arena. Photographers and video cameras click all over the place as the ceremony goes on and joy beams in the faces of those present.

But as the ceremony and celebration go on, there are certain feelings of uneasiness in the air because the ceremonies contain some pronouncements and declarations. After making such public pronouncements and declarations, participants wonder with mixed feelings whether they will be able to make sense of all the solemn words they pronounced during the ceremony, whether they will be able to make the solemn words pronounced during the ceremonies come true.

So in the same way, the beginning of a journey towards personal identity might

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<sup>1</sup> Philipians 3:3 – 12

be surrounded with certain uneasiness. There might be mixed feelings of whether you will be able to complete the journey if you get started. As you start the journey, just know that you are not alone in the journey.

Many people would like to begin this inner journey towards self-differentiation, but they lack courage. I am suggesting to these people they pluck up the courage and get started.

As you start the journey you think of Jesus of Nazareth and the beginning of his public ministry, how he was anointed and empowered by the great enabler, the **Holy Spirit**<sup>2</sup>. So, you are not alone in the journey.

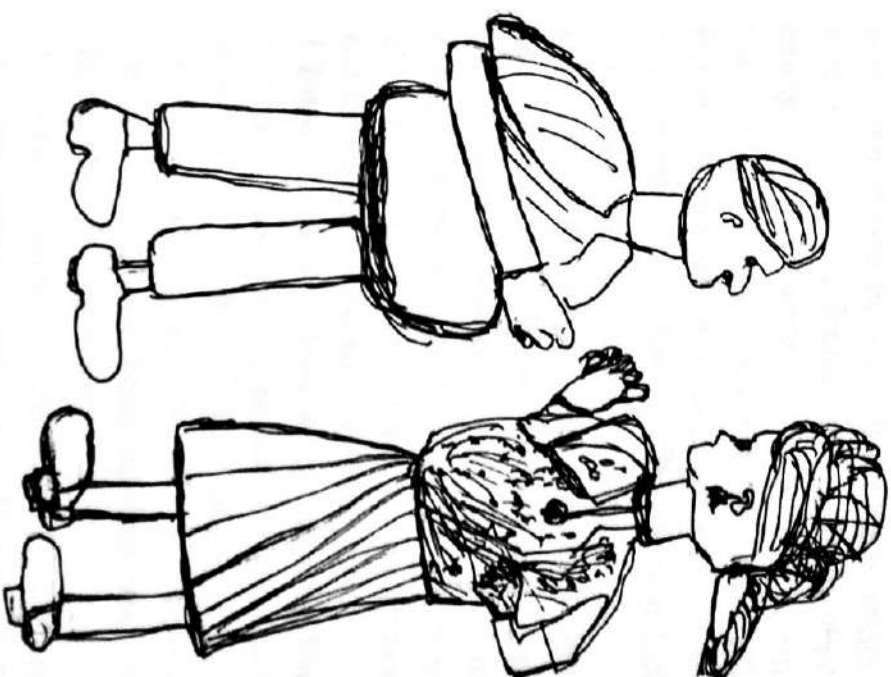
### **Who Am I?**

Chinwe read recently a write-up about self-differentiation, and shared with Okechi her team-mate seeking his opinion about the new insight.

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 3:21-23  
Mathew 3:16-17

Chinwe wondered at her new insight



**Chinwe:** Okechi, I read in the Awareness Journal eight days ago, that for anyone to understand another person and relate properly, that it is necessary for the person to know himself or herself. That is, I'm to know who I am – meaning that until I know who I am, it will be difficult for me to relate with anybody. I found the statement very strange and embarrassing. Does it mean that both of us have understood ourselves? For we've known each other for a couple of years now? I feel hurt. What do you feel about this insight, Okechi?

**Okechi:** Oh! really dear, you feel hurt. Well, Chinwe, if we are honest with ourselves, we would realise that there are certain areas of ourselves we've not been able to explore in order to understand ourselves more and who we really are.

**Chinwe:** Okechi, from your understanding, it seems that both of us are not clear with who we are, is that right? Okechi, I hope you wouldn't mind: So, for a couple of years, you've not been relating with me from who you really are?

**Okechi:** Chinwe, I feel I need to dig deep for an answer, anyway. Maybe in the



process of digging, I may discover parts of me that are not really me.

Okechi's answer touches the real issue. The answer touches on a real problem, straight to the point. The question "*Who am I?*" is a question that many ask less, and yet asking the question, "*Who am I?*" is like a key that opens all other locks in a person.

### **Facing Life Honestly**

The inward journey of discovery of "*Who we are*" is not like any other journey we make in life, when we know where we are going, and plan how to get there, and if at a point, we miss our way, we stop and ask others which bus, which street, which road, or if we are unsure, we consult the map.

On the contrary, this journey has a different orientation. As I said earlier, the journey of "*Who we are*" is a need which many people aspire to, but each one has a different story, and a different detail. This is because it involves a unique person. We are

distinct and unique individuals, because we are looking for something. Each one of us needs to discover for herself or himself the ways that lead to what he or she seeks, and what you want to happen, and how you can make it happen for you.

### **A Coat of Survival**

Some people are so tied together by the invasion of others that they find it difficult to differentiate themselves from others. These people depend on others to determine for them who they are. They give in to this either because they are fearful of others or because they are too lazy to take a deep look into themselves, or they are looking for some material gain which they may only achieve by putting on a mask.

Experience has shown that these people, in order to survive in life, project who they need to be in order to survive. They accept who they are not in order to get on in life. That is why we tend to be surprised when we see certain behaviour

coming from the people we tend to associate with – certain becoming and polished behaviour.

To start a meaningful journey of who we are, a safe environment is essential. If a safe environment is lacking, then what a psychologist or counsellor could call our “Child within”, that is who we really are, will go into hiding. When this happens, in order to survive in life a certain degree of ourselves will wear a “coat of survival”. A “coat of survival” is a false self that is worn by the individual when the real self senses an unfavourable environment. The unfavourable environment might be a hostile environment, a compromising environment or a non-compromising environment that is not ready to dance to the tune of the individual. So, in order to survive, the individual starts to wear a surviving coat, staging up actions and strategies for survival. Pretending to be what one is really not. Once our true self goes into hiding, the false self will take up the job of wearing a “Survival Coat”.

Some people give up who they are because they are fearful of others. There is a story told of two male University students – Nkem and Jide.

Nkem and Jide were friends. Nkem was what the primary/secondary school language will call the ‘bully’ of the highest degree, a stubborn and a proud guy, a Colossus, but academically on top, while Jide was a lamb, very withdrawn, and would struggle to get 3 marks above the pass mark. But they are friends, a long-standing friendship, too. At their private study time together, and of course, at Nkem’s good mood, Nkem would explain most lectures to Jide better than the lecturers.

At the University College, in the neighbourhood, all those who knew Nkem well wondered how Jide was able to get on with him. But there was a secret submissive agreement between them, and they arrived at such a secret and submissive agreement with these terms: Nkem forced Jide to accept what he must join him in any action he engaged in, and any he ordered to be done.

At one time, Nkem would order that they would not go for lectures and both of them would stay away. Nkem would invent a good reason to give to anyone who might be interested to know when they did not attend the lectures. At other times, Nkem

would rule that they would not participate in any student affairs for some weeks. At other times, during exams, Nkem would rule that they would not take some papers and they would stay away.

This bullying lasted for so long that Jide became uncomfortable, and it seemed he would want to get the experience out of himself but did not know how to go about it, because he was very scared of Nkem. Jide was in a kind of 'invaded' situation. He was forced to dance to the tune of Nkem which made him say an automatic 'Yes', giving away his power by giving in to Nkem's mood.

Jide told his story before those he trusted, then he began the journey process of his identity.

Well, you may check yourself and see how you have, in life, put on this 'Coat of Survival' in order to get what you want or to get whatever you feel are your priorities – compromising.

### **True Self**

One of the problems of recovery or true self is expectations to fulfil. There are

people whose identity, or who they are, are peoples voices. Who they are is based on the mood of the people about them. If they say "Oh! Janka is very tough", then Janka will try by all means to live up to the affirmation of being a very tough person, even when toughness is not in her nature.

Then, there is a tension inside, a struggle to become an individual, and to meet up with what others expect from you. The more you compromise, the more you are dissatisfied, and the less you become who you really are.

For the authentic self to emerge, a safe environment is essential. From experience, we know that people begin to change when the best in them is affirmed. People begin to change when they are encouraged. They change when they are encouraged to see the best in themselves.

There is a story told by a Redemptorist, Fr. Denis McBride, of a couple, Maude and Harry who were married for 15 years and their relationship as husband and wife is limited to newspapers exchanged at the breakfast table and weather reports noted at the dinner table, too. Maude spends her day engaged in house work, and her husband Harry,



works for long hours and gets too tired to talk in the evenings. So, the only alternative for the couple is to settle in front of the television. Maude never hears Harry call her by name, only as "You". This makes Maude feel like an old plant that has been left to wither quietly behind the curtain.

One day, Maude's friend, Mabel, arrived and gave Maude some advice: "Maude you need to take a look at yourself! You're a mobile mess, dear. What you need is a new hair-do and a new outfit, then Harry will notice you".

Next day Maude spent hours at the hairdressers and at various stores.

When Harry her husband came in, he stopped, he looked at his wife and then he realised what she had done. He then moved over to her and took her in his arms, and called her name over and over again. When this happened, Maude became radiant and practically glowing and beaming with joy; Maude brightened up.

Maude was transformed, not because of the new outfit, but because that was the first time she heard her name called in love. The gap of estrangement was bridged, and life sprung up again towards a fulfilment of

becoming who she was. Harry's recognition of Maude in love energized her and she flowered. Maude was empowered to be herself.

You remember that Jesus has the same experience. Because of what he did and said people wanted to know who he was, and while others like the neighbours were asking who Jesus was and were guessing who he might be: "Joseph son's surely", others, ancient prophet Elija, but God recognised him as "My Son, the Chosen One".<sup>3</sup> God recognised Jesus and called his name in love the "Chosen One". This has an effect on Jesus. The recognition touched on who Jesus was. It enabled him to face the future and was able to make the most difficult journey to Jerusalem where he met his death. The death that eventually transfigured many people.

We all tend to become who we are when we hear our name called in love. We tend to flower because we are empowered to be who we are.

The next tool to **discovering True Self** is a limit (boundary). Setting a limit is a limit you set for yourself, which will enable you to know when another person is

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 3: 16 & 17

interfering and influencing your feelings, your decisions, your choices and even your needs. The personal limit I set for myself will function to protect and bring out my True Self, my well-being and integrity.

From our discussions on the previous pages, we have seen that some people prefer to be un-free. They prefer to live in bondage having no identity, because it will really take something out of them to work on their True Self.

We have also seen that some people find identity in spending their time on planning for a 'Coat of Survival'. They give up and conceal how they feel about something, they give up their view points in matters where they need to express their views, in order to fulfil expectations, to please, to satisfy, and to impress others. As they do this, they betray their True Self, and their whole sense of integrity and wholeness.

However, the good news is that, when the balance of life occurs that is, when you are able to differentiate yourself from the bondage of others' invasion, and from the bondage of co-dependency, and when you have removed all the survival coats and masks, then, you will be left with who you

really are – your True Self. It is only when you are left with your True Self that you can become what God wants you to become.

## 2. COPING WITH PROBLEMS IN LIVING

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### Attention Please!

Gabby expressed her concern to Gracy:

*Gabby: Gracy, supposing you love somebody at first sight, and probably at second, and at subsequent sights. After so many deliberations on your part, you decide to let the person know you love him or her, but the answer comes back: "Sorry I just don't like the whole of you". Gracy, what would you do then, does it mean you took an imprudent decision?*

*Gracy: Gabby, Oh! This is an internal struggle, and I feel it requires taking a new look at some significant areas in a person's life. I invite readers to think about this while we move on.*

### **Insight Sharing**

At a recent workshop on hints for wholeness, Jota a participant who was preparing herself for her new assignment as the director of formation, expressed her anxieties.

**Jota:** From my letter of appointment, I am still sure that I am moving in to the function of the director of formation. I've followed many formation courses, and I've attended and participated in many workshops on formation, for my own personal growth and in preparation for this new assignment. As the present workshop is coming to an end, and the date for my mandate is just next door, I'm still confused as to what would be my fundamental attitude and focus as formator to formation work and to the formatees.

The workshop facilitators threw back Jota's concern to the participants. Each tried to share some insight.

Looking back at the concerns Jota expressed in the face, I suggested that we



look at some working explanations and suggestions towards formation.

1. Formation viewed from a human development perspective and from a religious dimension involves growth, conversion and wholeness. Formation is a call to holiness and wholeness, a call to growth, a call to conversion. Formation is not something one person or several people do to others. It is not a process that forces or imposes on others. Formation is not just conformity, it involves discernment. It is a process which enables a person to accept herself or himself as she or he is. It involves integral growth of a person. It involves experiences, values, choosing direction for life. It involves sharing with others. Formation leads to transcendence. It means a journey towards God, and it is an on-going process.

2. From the working explanation or definition, I suggest that the basic attitude of a formation director towards formation work is to view herself or himself as a facilitator, a co-discerner, because the formatee is there to discern. Moreover, she or he is to bear in mind that the **Holy Spirit**

is always at work within the Church, as the sole teacher and the sole formator.

3. Formation is best seen in the context of person-oriented rather than rule-orientated. This means that a formator is to pay attention to persons rather than focussing on the rule, but this does not in any way mean advocating lawlessness. Person-oriented formation will enable the formatee to get into the human process which will facilitate her getting in touch with the core of our being, where the encounter with the source of our life is possible. Moreover, the formator is to make sure that she or he does not form the formatee in his or her own image and likeness, instead of directing them towards the formation of what God wants them to be.

4. Respect for individual history is essential in the formation process. It will be very liberating if the formation is not done in a uniformation manner - that is, formation is to be done in such a way that individual history is followed and respected, instead of viewing every formatee from the

same angle. This means that the formator is to recognise that every person has his or her own personal history, and I feel that each is to be treated as such.

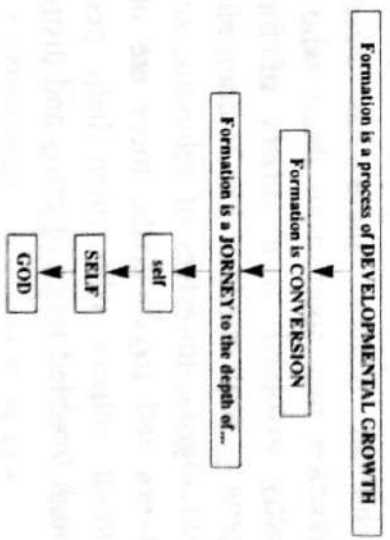
5. Formation should give the formatees a 'breathing space'. 'Breathing space' means that the formation directors do not probe for information from the formatees, that director does not force information from the formatee. A 'breathing space' allowed to a formatee will help him or her to blossom. A kind and relaxing atmosphere will help a formatee more to be himself or herself, ready to share deeply. It is always better to allow information to come willingly from the formatee than forcing it out of him or her, out of curiosity.

6. A formator is not to be a threat to herself, or to threaten the formatees. Any sincere candidate in formation is moving towards a success. In order words, any sincere formatee wants to succeed, that is, he or she wants to reach a stage either for consecrated life, priesthood or outside of this for another vocation. So, any type of threat by the formation director fills the atmosphere with tension and fear. For such

a threat, an immediate reaction by the formatees is to withdraw into themselves. The formatees will withdraw and go into hiding. They will begin to live in fear, and tend to do all they are told without attaining any development or growth for maturity.

Some formatees will begin to look for 'victims' for you, from among themselves. They will begin to carry false information and report against other formatees, because they are looking for survival. They want to survive by talking ill of another person. Many formatees will be dying so many deaths before their natural death comes.

Threatening formatees will have an enormously devastating effect on the process of formation. It will block the process of formation except wearing of masks and living in fear.



**Pauly**, another participant shared his concern about the new development in his life.

**Pauly:** I'm a teacher by profession. I came to this workshop with great expectations. I'm hoping to get help to enable me to meet the new development in my life experience.

I notice that a number of people confide in me, and many share deeply with me their personal life experience. But, I feel inadequate facing this trust and I wonder what would be the best attitude towards anyone who came to share with me.

There are various approaches to this concern expressed by Pauly.

From experience, it is clear that at certain moments of life, we tend to clamour to be with another, other than ourselves, someone to tell our story to; someone to share intimately our story. Over the years of human history, there has been a conviction that apart from those who are directly involved in a variety of formal helping professions like counsellors, psychologists, ministers of religions, social workers and psychiatrists, there are other informal helpers who often help people through troubled times of crisis and distress.

*"In short, the world is filled with informal helpers"*<sup>4</sup>

People have various reasons why they look for help. Some look for help when they are in crisis, have troubles, difficulties, frustrations, worries, doubts, have important decisions to make about themselves, about their relationship with **God** and people.

When anyone is welled-up in these needs and looking for help, she or he has some expectations. She or he expects to be listened to. So, the basic attitude of the helper is to listen. Although you may be aware that your problem may not have any clear cut solution, you would want to be listened to, as you tell your story.

From experience, we know that listening is not an easy art to struggle with. It is hard to listen. Listening is a very powerful communication skill. Those who have it, have a great virtue, and those who have it are not too many.

Sometimes people seeking help experience a kind of reluctance in behaviour on the part of the helper who might, non-verbally, be saying to the person seeking help: *I'm not ready for you, I've no time*

<sup>4</sup> Egan, Gerad "The Skilled Helper"  
USA: 511 Forest Lodge, Pacific Grove, 93950 Pg.4



*for you now, I'm terribly busy.* These things may not be said verbally, but it is implied. These could be acted out further in different non-verbal gestures that will depict inattentiveness and lack of disposition on the part of the helper.

The quality of attention and involvement in any listening situation is normally conspicuous; even the blind know when the attention is paid to them. In other words, you will know when your story is being listened to.

An effective listener, listens with patient understanding and empathy. She or he is there with complete presence – going beyond physical presence. She or he endeavours to be there with their whole being, fully aware.

Patient listening carries with it the real sense of understanding and being with the person, without any abuse of trust or exploitation, which may exist by forcing information out of the person seeking help.

The person seeking to be listened to sometimes notices that his or her helper is not fully present, and if she or he enquires, an answer might come *"Oh yes, I'm listening to you, I heard all you said. I can repeat it"*. Nobody goes to another to share

his or her story in order to get the story wholesale, back to him or her. What I feel people need is not someone who will repeat their story, but someone to listen to them and be with them.

From experience, we know how comforting it is when you visit a friend who is in an awkward situation – you may say nothing but your presence makes a difference. Anyone seeking help is looking for someone to listen to him or her. There may be some suggestions from the helper, but that is secondary. The person seeking help wants first of all to be listened to. So, the basic attitude towards someone who comes to you seeking help is to listen to that person.

### 3. SEARCHING FOR LIFE MEANING

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Betty, one of the participants at the growth course workshops who belongs to a religious community, expressed her concerns:

*Betty: I'm here for this growth course workshop in preparation for spiritual direction work. Are there basic attitudes and focus associated with spiritual direction?*

In the previous pages, I talked about the formal helping professions; spiritual direction might be classified among these professions. Although it differs from them, it has some affinities because it assists the individual in developing his or her relationship with God.

#### **Basic Attitudes and Focus**

Looking closely into Betty's enquiry, there is no doubt that there are certain

attitudes associated with spiritual direction. I would like to reply immediately with this familiar saying, "*The taste of the pudding is in the eating*". I am trying to say that nobody can accurately taste the pudding except the person who has actually eaten it - she or he will be in a better position to describe the actual taste. Similarly, spiritual direction is better judged by persons from experience. That is, when you experience the direction yourself, you will be in a better position to pass a judgement on the worth of it.

The spiritual director himself or herself is to know that effective spiritual directors are usually discovered by the people, and by the Christian community. They do not put themselves forward without the people seeking them. In my culture "Jgbo", a woman does not tell a man to marry her. It is always a man that seeks out a woman he likes and asks for her hand in marriage. So, it is always better for the spiritual director to be discovered by people rather than by self-presentation.

The spiritual director is to recognise that the primary basis for the trust people repose on him or her is in his or her membership in the faith community, so that

the director is communicating with another member of the **Church** something of his or her relationship with God.

If spiritual direction is to be understood, as it is proposed, it is clear that the personality of the director is central. That is the spiritual director must be someone who is in a conscious relationship with God and also someone who is able to relate well with the people. As someone who is facilitating the development of a relationship of another with God, the spiritual director needs to be an outstanding sign of **God's loving care**. The person of the director, his or her faith and love and their capacity for relationships is crucial.

For the spiritual direction to produce the desired result, the spiritual director has to enter into a kind of agreement or working alliance with the directee provided that there is a foundation for this, which is, that the directee wants to relate more personally with God.

The working alliance might include the following: Frequency of direction which could be determined by circumstances. However, spiritual direction lasts a long time.

The spiritual director is to be a person who is able to keep confidentiality. The spiritual director is to ensure that privacy is maintained by making sure that the deep sharing of the directee and director is not overheard by others. We all know how difficult it is to disclose oneself to another. So, it can be devastating to know later on that the story was overheard by another. So, the environment for sharing is to be appropriate. The spiritual director is to make sure, through prior arrangements, that the session is not interrupted by someone walking in, or knocking on the door, or even telephone calls.

There is a general understanding about spiritual direction, that spiritual direction is all God's work. The spiritual director is only offering to help.

Spiritual direction does not mean that a person gives the responsibility for his or her life to someone else. That is to say, the director is to be aware that she or he remains a facilitator of the relationship. In other words, she or he is only giving help. She or he is in no way going to take the responsibility for the person's life. In any circumstance, the person who receives the

direction retains the responsibility for his or her life.

When a person seeks spiritual direction, he or she has an aim. It implies that the person is going somewhere, and would want to talk to someone on the way, in a one-to-one atmosphere about his or her aim. The talk will aim at helping the person to find his or her way.

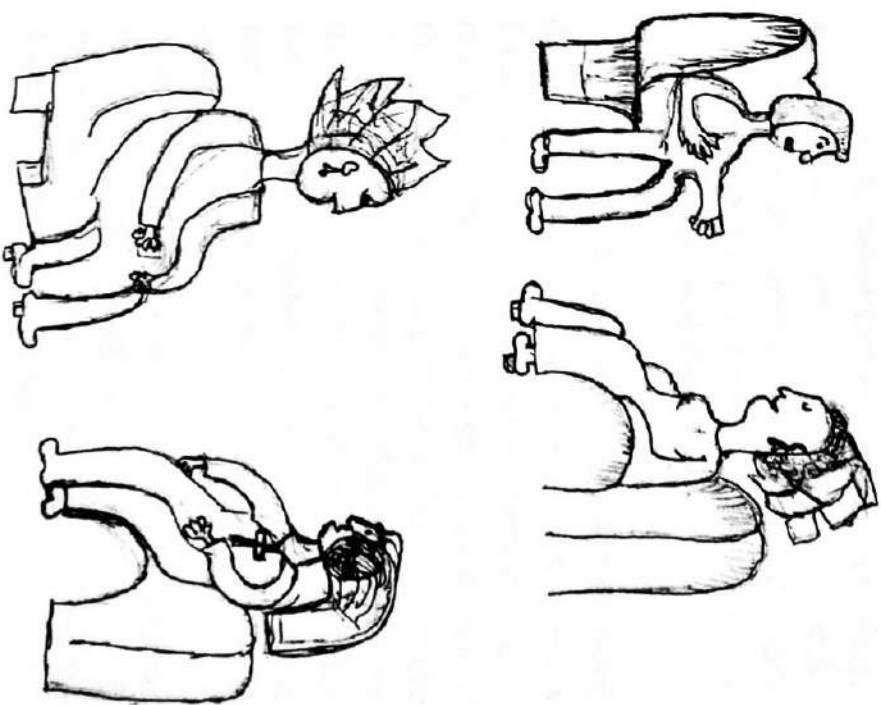
Spiritual direction does not suggest a forum where the director gives a person a detailed programme on how to live. As I said earlier, the person seeking direction is already going somewhere - so, the director is only a helper towards focussing. Spiritual direction focuses on the process of a relationship with God. It involves helping another person to relate consciously with God, and to grow in that relationship.

The primary focus of spiritual direction is on experience of God, and this experience often occurs in prayer. The spiritual director is most interested in what happens when the person consciously puts himself or herself in the presence of God. So, the central task of the spiritual director is the facilitation of the relationship between the individual and God.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> William, Barry and Connolly

### Growth Facilitation and Spiritual Direction atmosphere





## **Why Focus on Prayer Experience**

At the same growth course workshop, Joe, a participant who read my book: *"Freedom in God's Arrival"* challenged me, wanting to get further explanation on focussing of spiritual direction.

**Joe:** Chilota, in trying to say what spiritual direction is not, you wrote that,, "it is not a forum for discussing another person. It is not a chamber for problem solving, but if that problem is going to be a 'block' for the directee then it should be discussed during the direction". In all this, does it mean that the spiritual director is not interested in the rest of the life of the person he or she is directing?

*hls* For the moment, it suffices to respond to Joe by affirming that the director is interested in the whole of the person, but the focus is in the prayer experience.

In spiritual direction, you meet people with various needs. People who come for spiritual direction have conflicting desires. People may be seeking direction because they see it as what most people do these days. Some seek direction because they are ordered to do so by an authority. Some go for spiritual direction because they want development in their relationship with God. Some seek spiritual direction because they want to preserve the marriage. Some seek spiritual direction because they have a great worry and concern. I feel that none of these concerns is insurmountable, provided the individual has an inner motivation for prayer. Problems arise when the desire for prayer will never be present in the person.

As the spiritual director listens to the sharing of prayer experience of the person seeking the direction, she or he is listening to the whole person of the directee with his or her concern, but the focus is on the prayer experience of the person. This is because you notice that when someone has a worry or concern, is confused or really troubled, she or he will be so preoccupied with the awkward situation that they will have little chance to reflect deeply and be able to look at the situation objectively.

They would like to push the blame on other people, because they have a narrow view of things.

### **Effect of Dialogue in Prayer Experience**

Prayer is most of the time associated with rote recitation of prayer, performance of duty. Here, when I talk about prayer experience, I am talking about a relationship that exists between the individual and God. Here I am talking about when you are ready and willingly decide to look at the Lord who is already looking at you.

Prayer is like a lubricating oil which soaks and loosens. It has the capacity of grounding the life of an individual. It has the capacity of helping people to look deep and identify his or her impression of Jesus, to reflect, and be able to ask the basic questions like: "*Who am I?*" "*Who is God for me?*" "*What is God like for me?*"

Our relationship with God in prayer and our effort to respond to him involves all of ourselves and all of our being. Prayer

does not take place in isolation from the rest of our interests and concerns.

You will notice that the more experience of prayer you have, the more you will find yourself seeking a way of expressing yourself more fully. Your feelings, moods, desires, gestures, attitudes, your life-style will be affected.

You tend to see things differently and things will begin to have different meanings for you. For example, your interests, concerns, worries are affected by what happens to you in your communicative prayer with the Lord. In this communicative prayer, your vision broadens, and you have a greater openness to change. You will find out that you will be more considerate and more compassionate. You tend to be more patient, more tolerant to other people's feelings.

Those who are in a communicative relationship with God in prayer, tend to be more kind to people. They also tend to love and appreciate people more.

#### **Prayer - a "Keep Talking Theme"**

Prayer is a "keep talking theme" - One evening, I was taking a walk along the sea shore just next door to a big study centre in the city of Kent. I saw four young people walking down the street from the other side looking tired. They approached me and greeted me and introduced themselves. Karen, Susan, Margaret and Paul.

We exchanged greetings and a little chat. They told me the story of how they spent the day, that they were coming back from a youth rally organised by a youth Chaplain team. They described how the field was full of people with an inspiring topic on: "Growing up and Prayer" which was beautifully presented by speakers. I felt it was really inspiring and as Karen was describing her experience of the rally, Paul exclaimed: "*But where is the enthusiasm, Karen?*" Paul's exclamation "*But where is the enthusiasm?*" touches on the real problem.

We all know that there is a greater awareness of prayer now more than ever before.

Workshop upon workshop on prayer is more readily available.

We notice that there are more books, articles and write-ups on prayer than ever before. There are several methods and practices on prayer, more than ever before. But, where is the enthusiasm to back up all the write-ups and awareness created on prayer? There is still little willingness to enter into prayer as an inner desire, and experience of God remains relatively isolated, because there is not much enthusiasm to go further. Then, we ask: Is it possible to re-kindle the enthusiasm? Sometimes people comment and ask: "*Why all this much noise about prayer?*" "*Why so many talks and conferences on Prayer?*" "*Why so many Workshops on Prayer?*"

To all these questions and comments, I will suggest, if not answer, that it is all right to give prayer such a prominent place. That is what prayer deserves, because God is "*Unchangingly always new*". This means that God is unchangingly always a new experience for anyone who is willing to listen, and respond to him.

Do you know when there is a crisis in the life of any individual? It is when God ceases to be a "new" experience.

We hear about people breaking down, we hear of vocation crisis, we hear about people being unhappy in themselves or unhappy because others are happy. We hear of people causing heartache for others, thrusting and jostling people up and down. It is when God stops being a "new" experience for the individual that everything ceases to have meaning and then, she or he starts to search for the meaning elsewhere. Then, she or he will begin to undergo changes – change of profession and person. He or she will continue to be an unsettled person, because God, the source of meaning in life, has ceased to be a "new" experience. God is an "*Unchangingly always new*" experience.



#### 4. EVERY DAY TRANSACTIONS

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Every day transactions means behaviour expressed in daily communication, conversation, and interaction between persons, friends, couples, people, community, family and groups.

##### **Community / Group**

By community, or group, I mean a system where more than one person lives, interacts, shares, works and inter-relates with one another, aiming at common good and interest.

A community has a leader or a facilitator whose function is to stimulate growth and change in the members of the community, and to motivate the members to feel they belong.

The religious community falls in the above general definition of community and

group, and it is this religious community that I would like to dwell on further.

##### **Religious Community**

A religious community is a group whose common call is to live and share the Gospel and Gospel values. Membership consists of individuals who believe they have been called to live with others with a similar call.

Community living is a life-style to support, nourish and to challenge the members to live the Gospel more fully. Community, therefore, is both witnessing and apostolate.

The primary bond of every community is friendship and mutual love of the members. The friendship and love the members of a religious community share, speaks much more than words and actions.

In a recent vocation discernment workshop, **Jennie** a young woman of thirty made an observation about community living:

**Jennie:** I love religious life, but community life scares me, because it seems to me that some members of the community are regarded as being too young to join the community, and it seems obvious in daily interactions.

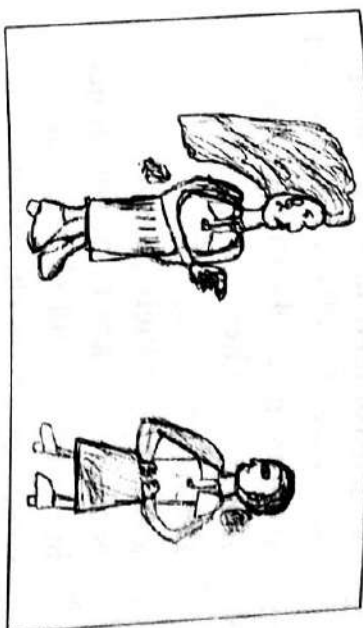
Jennie's observation could be regarded as an exaggerated observation. A Religious community consists of persons who come from different parts of the countries of the world, from most diverse cultures, to answer a call. It is fortunate or unfortunate that each person comes seeking the same response, and each come with their maturity or immaturity, with strength or weakness, and of course, with the intention of following Christ more freely and to imitate him more closely.<sup>6</sup>

In a religious community, one would say that as at now, the minimum age of the members is twenty-one years. Therefore every member is an adult.

In effect, in a religious community, everyone is an adult, and the members are to live and relate like adults, and persons of

<sup>6</sup> Vatican Council II, Decree on the Up-to-Date, Retrieval of Religious Life, *Perfatae Cartialis*, M.I. as found English Trans (1975)

the same family, and this promotes respect for every member, otherwise there is no community.



We all know that words are powerful, and that soft and kind words have the capacity of creating a thousand years of happiness. I feel and suggest that the function of a leader is to lead the members to the desired daily choices of life.

The community leader is to admonish, to beg, to exhort – but not to punish. The Church is very conscious of this when she says:

**Superiors are to devote themselves to their office with diligence. Together with the members entrusted to them, they are to strive to build in Christ a fraternal**

community, in which God is sought and loved above all. They are therefore frequently to nourish their members with the focus of God's word and lead them to the celebration of the liturgy.... They are to give the members opportune assistance in their personal needs. They are to be solicitous in caring for and visiting the sick; they are to chide the restless, console the faint-hearted and be patient with all.<sup>7</sup>

In the Jewish history, Joshua, in his old age called a meeting of all the tribes of Israel in Shechem. Then he called out the elders, judges, and officials; they gathered to listen to their distinguished leader and the bravest invasion commander in their history. When Joshua began to speak, he did not recall his military conquest of Canaanites which he led, nor did he stir the people to appreciate all he did for them, but he led the people to choose and recommit themselves to God of Israel.

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<sup>7</sup> Code of Canon Law, Can. 619

Joshua was not itching to be remembered by the people of Israel for his great victory. He did not plan to be remembered as the great man who led the people of Israel to the Promised Land.

Joshua was rather pre-occupied more with the battle of fidelity to the God of Israel than singing his glories and victories on all he had done for Israel.

Joshua won the last and important battle when he led the people of Israel to the victory of fidelity to the Living God.<sup>8</sup>

In the same manner, the primary function of a religious leader is above all to lead the members to the original language of Jesus in the Gospel.

### **RE-PROGRAMMING**

By re-programming, I mean a process by which an individual needs to stop a while and reflect on certain attitudes, beliefs or behaviour about himself or herself which she or he believed to be part of her and therefore impossible to reconsider.

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<sup>8</sup> Joshua 24: 1-24

You hear people make statements like: "*Oh, that me*" "*I'm just that way*" "*There's nothing I can do about that*". "*It's just the way I am*" and so on. With these kind of statements, people unknowingly push themselves into a non-get up seat.

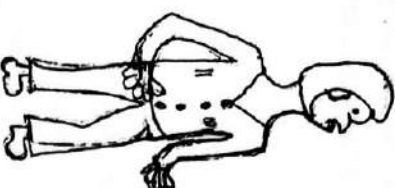
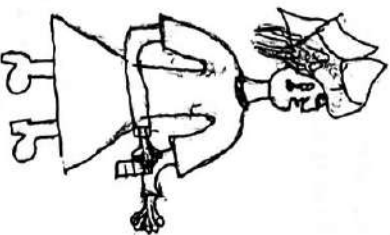
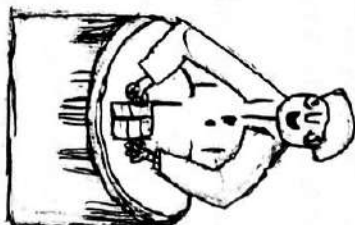
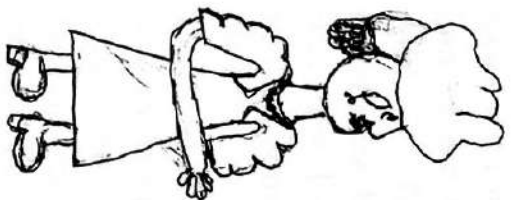
People are reluctant to change especially when they realise that people are indifferent about whether they change or not, and they too believe that they cannot change.

However, is it necessary for a person sometimes to reflect on his or her attitude or behaviour? Maybe some conversation and sharing that follows can help us see how certain behaviour and attitude can cause others painful and negative feelings:

1. **Anniras** seems to be having a rough time at her work place, and she decided to talk to **Kenny** about her situation:

**Anniras:** Kenny, I've something bothering me; Subbi, a colleague of mine at work has a nasty attitude towards me. There hasn't been a day I greet Subbi and he will not look up to respond to my greeting, at least to see who is greeting.

Anniras experience  
at her work place





Worst still, he formed the habit of walking away from me while I deliver a message to him or ask him a question concerning our work. This has been an everyday occurrence because the office is in such a way that I deliver messages daily to him and ask some explanation about our work in the office.

He does this every day and it's becoming terribly hard for me. I feel bad about this. I've even tried to dialogue with myself, looking for the cause of his behaviour – could it be that I'm not polite enough, but I feel I am. I really can't understand him. Is there anything else you would suggest, Kenny?

**Kenny:** Anniras, I feel you've taken the right steps already. But, you might try dialoguing with him and see what happens.

2. Uju shared with Sonny, her course-mate, her dissatisfaction with herself and with Zigie her friend who challenged her for not bothering to communicate with her since she moved to another country.

Uju: Sonny, a friend Zigie writes to me often, and I like to hear from her, not only because she is my friend, but also because she writes very well and clearly too. She is so gifted in her ways of expression that I always wished the letters were longer. She will blend the whole thing with a good sense of humour. She has a very nice way of telling me how she feels about me. She knows how to talk to people, and she is also very insightful too.

But recently she reacts when she feels that I am nowhere fulfilling her expectations, and she caringly confronted me and wrote:

Zigie: Uju, I know you're very busy, and I'm very much aware that you've a very tight programme, but I'm beginning to wonder why the gap is so long on your part. I appreciate the occasional greeting you send me through some of our acquaintances who visit this City, but you can't guess how happy I'll be if one day I received even a card from you.

Sonny: Uju, how do you feel about Zigie's reaction?

Uju: Sonny, I feel Zigie has said it all. I feel she is right for feeling the way she is feeling right now. She expressed her dissatisfaction with me for not writing or communicating with her upon all her steady communication especially through letter writing. Zigie is correct in her expression because most of the time, I hide behind a tight schedule and busy programme. It seems I feel that Zigie writes to me because she is idle or that she can't stay without communicating with me. I feel it's all my fault.

Many people are like Uju and Zigie. Many suffer what Zigie suffers. Many people are like Uju, because some people have told themselves that they are not able to reciprocate communication. They take that position either because they are too lazy or because they feel that the other person will be in meaningful existence unless the person is in communication with him or her. It is good to notice those who appreciate you and like to be in communication with you. It is difficult to tell a person that you love him or her if you do not notice him or her.

3. **Sally**, a student of psychology and a member of a group, is having a rough time with the co-ordinator of the group. Sally decides to share his experience with Gera, a Lecturer he trusts. Gera has been a safe person for Sally.

**Sally:** Gera, I've been having a painful experience for two months now. Our course group co-ordinator Koki picks on me most of the time. He tends to belittle my contribution to the group. He never even believes I can contribute anything to the group. If anything goes wrong in the group, he will shift the blame on me. This worries me, and I've had so many sleepless nights because of this. I feel that my patience is over, I'm dying to let him know my feelings. I'm just ready to confront him.

**Gera:** Sally, you said you would like Koki to know your feelings about his behaviour towards you. But, I'm suggesting a little exercise. Sally, I suggest that you finish twenty-five litres of water before disclosing your feelings to Koki.

**Sally:** Oh, what a difficult task! Twenty-five litres of water in a day! I feel that twenty-five litres of water in a day is too much because I'm not a greedy water

drinker. It's like asking the impossible from me. I'd need days to finish such a task.

When the Lecturer, Gera, was asked why he made such a suggestion, he said that he did it because he picked from Koki's tone of voice that he was very angry. So, it was obvious that it was going to take a number of days to finish twenty-five litres of water. By the time he finished twenty-five litres of water, he must have calmed down, and had time to reflect. Then, like an adult, wanting to talk to an adult, he could invite Koki for a dialogue in which he could disclose to Koki his feelings about his behaviour to him.

Gera, the Lecturer and a safe person for Sally, feels that the approach he used will dispose Koki to listen to Sally, and I guess it will have a positive result.

It does not pay when you are rude to people. It is always better to be constructive in your use of emotions and feelings. If Sally had talked to Koki with the amount of anger, Gera, the Lecturer observed in him, he might have regretted having taken the steps at all.

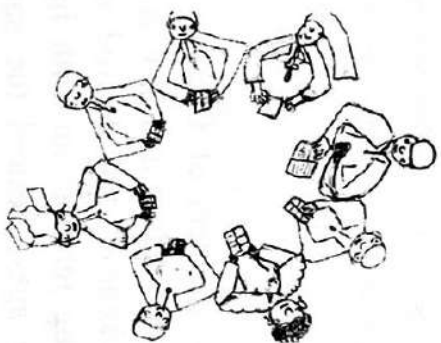
When you feel angered or hurt, it is always better to calm down, reflect well,

before you invite or approach the person who hurt you for dialogue. In some cases, it is even better not to seek any dialogue. It is better sometimes not to express the feelings. In some cases, the quest for dialogue and expressions of feelings of anger and hurt can cause more harm than the good desired. It is better sometimes to keep calm. It is always better to keep quiet and try to contain the hurt or whatever feelings. Sometimes, you actually feel better when you do not say anything.

But, if you choose the dialogue approach, it is better to come from an adult. This means that you dialogue with the person, instead of talking to him or her like a parent, or a grown-up scolding a child. Any dialogue with this approach may not bear any lasting fruit, if it does bear at all. To approach anybody for a dialogue when you are in a rage is a fruitless effort.

It is always better to reflect, give yourself enough time, before you enter into dialogue.

## 5. WHY OVERSEAS MISSION?



Asking  
the  
Gospel

### Non-Verbal Objections to Overseas Mission

Some people may argue that the people of a nation or a country are better suited than any foreigner to take the **Gospel** to their own people. This is because they know the language, and they are familiar with the complicated parts of the culture, and every day new language development. Some of us, especially in the developing countries, might feel that our material and spiritual needs are so great that we can not



afford to send some people, even our best workers, to overseas mission.

### **God's Desire**

In the early chapters of **Genesis**, we read how God created **Adam** and **Eve** in his own image and likeness<sup>9</sup> and desired that they be in a loving relationship with him. God, through the ages, desired the same relationship with every human being.

In the same **Genesis** we read the story of how God's beautiful plan was misunderstood, but the interest God has from the beginning never faltered. He continued to seek his own, and this made him choose one man, **Abraham**, through whom all the nations on earth will be blessed.

**I shall bless those who bless  
you, and shall curse those who  
curse you and all clans on earth  
will bless themselves by you.**<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> **Genesis** 1: 26-27

<sup>10</sup> **Genesis** 12: 1-3

God was concerned with not just the few, not those who knew him or those who are already in a loving relationship with him, not those who obeyed him, but he was concerned about all people on earth stamped with his image.

God's plan continued to manifest itself in the calling of the **Israelites** to be his special people<sup>11</sup>, people meant to teach the nations about God. God's desire was that the life of the **Israelites**, both as a community and individuals, would demonstrate his glory and holiness. God meant that the life of the **Israelites** would be so beautiful and so attractive and inspiring, and they would be so balanced and just, that other nations would long to join them and learn God's ways, and walk in his path.

Just like the prophet **Isaiah** foretold in his early ministry, when he had the vision of **Jerusalem** acting like a magnet to all the nations of the world, drawing them together, all nations streaming to the **Mountains of Yahireh's** house:

**Many people will come to it  
and say, let us go up to the**

<sup>11</sup> **Exodus** 19: 6

**Mountain of Yahireh, to the  
house of the God of Jacob  
that he may teach us his ways  
so that we may walk in his  
paths.<sup>12</sup>**

God's goal did not materialise. The life of the elected people did not reach the beauty God had in mind for her. Israel failed to be a light to the nations as was God's plan. She failed to bring God's blessing to all the nations of the world.

However, God continued to long to be in an intimate relationship with his people. So he sent his own Son, Jesus Christ of whom the prophet foretold:

**Here is my servant whom I  
up hold, my chosen one, in whom  
my soul delights.**

**I have sent my spirit upon him,  
he will bring fair judgement to  
the nations. He does not cry out  
or raise his voice, his voice is not  
heard in the street, he does not  
break the crushed reed or snuff  
the faltering wick. Faithfully he  
presents fair judgement; he will**

**not grow faith, he will not be  
crushed until he has established  
fair judgement on earth.<sup>13</sup>**

This servant in whom God delights, has a task to accomplish. His task was not only for the chosen one of Israel, but also all the Galilee people, all humans.<sup>14</sup>

We shall recall how the blessed Simeon holding the baby Jesus in his arms caught a hint of what God was about to do, and exclaimed in delight:

**My eyes have seen the salvation  
which you have made ready in  
the right of the nations.<sup>15</sup>**

We read that at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Matthew recalled the words of the prophet Isaiah:

**Galilee of the nations!  
The people that lived in the  
darkness have seen a great light.  
On those who lived in a county of**

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<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 2: 2 & 3

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<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 42: 1-4

<sup>14</sup> Luke 3 : 6

<sup>15</sup> Luke 2: 30-32

**shadow, dark as death, a light has dawned.**<sup>16</sup>

During his earthly life, Jesus' actions declared that no one is outside the love of God. He broke down many existing barriers. He broke both social and racial barriers. Jesus refused to consider the disciples suggestion to call down five of the Samaritans because of their insulting behaviour.<sup>17</sup>

Jesus was conscious of his role – he came not to destroy souls, but to save them. Jesus' miraculous healing was for **Jews and Gentiles.**<sup>18</sup>

Jesus' love and ministry was all embracing. He gave his disciples specific instructions concerning the continuity of their mission.

### **Missionary Interest**

Concerning missionary interest, I would like to borrow the sayings of the

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<sup>16</sup> Matthew 4: 15 & 16

<sup>17</sup> Luke 9: 52-55

<sup>18</sup> Luke 9: 52-55

Greek philosopher, **Socrates** who said that an un-reflected life is not worth living. So, like Socrates, I would like to suggest that as an individual, as a group or as a religious congregation, who is interested in overseas mission, to create space in order to sit back and reflect on how he or she or they first got interested in the overseas mission.

It is easier to presume that those involved in this mission were motivated by the vision from the **Gospel**, but sometimes you hear people say things like, "*Some overseas missionaries have other interests apart from the vision from the Gospel*".

Whatever people say, the good news is that most of the overseas missionaries are motivated by the vision of the Gospel. However, if along the line some of them seem to have other interests apart from the vision of the Gospel, they may have a reason for such and may seek a way of going back to the original vision of the mission.

## **Mission Focus**

Jesus' great commission has a focus. He commissioned his disciples to proclaim the good news of the Gospel to all nations.<sup>19</sup> The proclamation of the Gospel message of Christ must correspond to the stretch of Jesus' jurisdiction and this means that every person on earth must hear about it since **Jesus is the king reigning over all.**

The gospel message was that the disciples – the missionaries – were to proclaim that human being were created in the image of God. God continued to long for a loving, intimate relationship with every human person in every country, and he made the relationship possible by sending his own son, Jesus, who died and was gloriously raised. Through the person of Jesus, God reached his people, and taught them about his love.

The risen Jesus gave his parting instructions to his disciples – his followers – to go to all the nations and proclaim the Gospel. Jesus' message was not:

**Unless everyone in your country  
or nation gets converted and  
believes in the Gospel, do not go  
to another country or nation,  
but go to all nations.**

Africans and other nations of the world are no exception to this powerful instruction of Jesus.

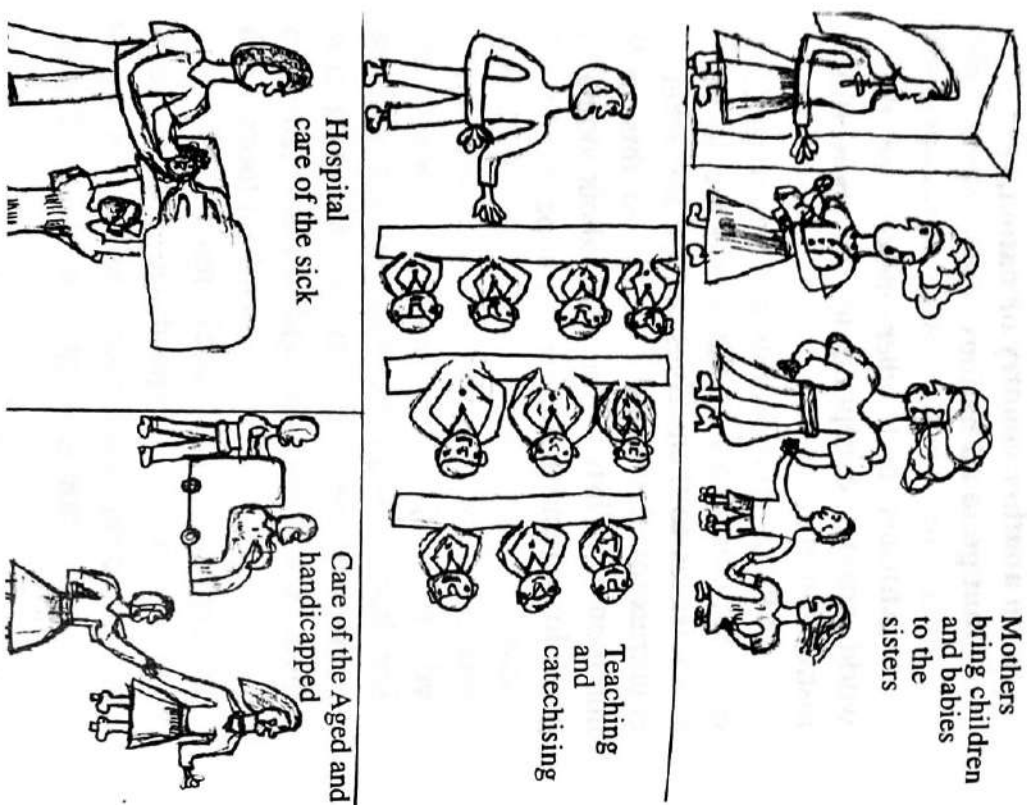
African missionaries and missionaries of other continents of the world are to be missionaries to themselves and to any other countries of the world. They do this in imitation of Christ who went about doing good, loving and giving people hope.

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<sup>19</sup> Luke 24: 44-69



# Example of diverse Apostolates of Daughters of Divine Love Congregation



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*Thanks Giving*



**Sr. Chilota Elochukwu**

*Lord, you know me through and through. The Good Shepherd you are, is outstanding in me, in the way you have carried me all along. On my part, you know my desire to love you; but my love for you is still weak, full of unfaithfulness. In spite of this, you have carried me in your shepherding hands all these years. Your love, Lord is eternal. I thank you, Oh my living God.*

**SISTER CHILOTA  
ON SABBATICAL**





# Tools for Growth and Relationships

## Themes

Chilota in her book, *Tools for Growth and Relationships*, covering many themes, created an awareness. The awareness moves towards empowering her readers with coping skills that will lead them to seek direction and towards change.

Chilota drawing from her experience, and from the experience of many others presented deep and helpful insights, that have the capacity to renew the lives of individuals and improve their daily interaction.

Chilota did a graduate and post-graduate studies in Theology.

She is currently taking further studies in philosophy and Spirituality in Gregorian University. She trained in Growth Facilitation (Spiritual Direction), and she divides her time among studying, writing, private Workshops, and Growth Facilitation — sharing with individuals.

Margaret O'Durphy