

From the Director

We are a missionary Church

The Church is on mission and has been since it began. We can rejoice and be glad for what God has done in our midst. We also believe that God will continue to be present to us, work amongst us, and inspire and energize us into the future. It has always been like that and will be so into the future.

God's work never stops. At the end of time, we will hear the words, "When I was hungry you fed me." We will be very surprised at this because we thought it was just another act of charity. We ask, "What are you talking about, Lord?" The answer comes back, "Whatever you do to the least of my sons and daughters you do to me." We are blind to the God who creates, saves and transforms us. We are blind to what God does in and through this body that we call "The Church".

We as the People of God, as the Church, can do better. If we paid more attention to what God is doing amongst us, we could cooperate more. If we sat in prayer and listened more carefully, we would not head off in the wrong direction. If we learnt to discern the voice of the Good Shepherd amongst all the other noise in our lives, we would be able to follow and not get lost. So yes, we can do better. As we learn from the Gospels, "the Kingdom of God is here but not yet".

The Church has done and continues to do good things. Why? Because God's mission has given us the energy and the vision to educate thousands of children throughout the country. The people who work in Catholic Hospitals and those that serve the poor through many different organisations are all missionaries. The people in parishes who have reached out to the rest of the community in times of crisis are all doing God's work.

What about the people who read *The Far East* magazine and support the Columban appeals for financial support for men and women serving in the poorer countries of the world? Of course, they are missionaries too and have been so for the past 100 years.

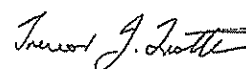
As Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Lk 4:18). We do this work, we are engaged in this mission because we are led by the Spirit to do so. The Spirit dwells in the deepest levels of our being. We sometimes call this "our spirit" or "our heart". It is where the mystery of God and the mystery of each of us fuses. We struggle to find adequate language or imagery to speak of this union with God.

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We should not be surprised, I suppose, if we find it hard to talk about God and us. The best example of God and us is Jesus. In the early days of Christianity, there were serious discussions about how we could talk about Jesus. One of the Councils of the Church, held in a place called Chalcedon, in 451, came up with 'one person, two natures'. I am not sure how much that helps each of us now, but it was the best answer available at the time.

If it is hard to talk about us and God, and Jesus and God, it is even more difficult to talk about the Church and God. At least it seems so to me. I like the many suggestions being made to change some of the structures of the Church. I believe some of them are inspired by the Spirit. However, purely structural change is like improving our bodies without talking about our souls. At times in our lives, the emphasis needs to be on our bodies but at other times, the emphasis needs to be on our souls.

If the Church became more missionary, we would be a better Church. It would have more soul. If we as the People of God reached out to the poor, the lame, the blind and everyone else with the same tender compassion as God does, then we would be a more missionary Church. We could become more what God invites us to be.



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