



# Conference on World Mission and Evangelism

*Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship*

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## Missional Formation Plenary - Action and Reflection

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The Gospel narratives call us unequivocally to a life of discipleship and servanthood. This is made clear not only through the direct words of our Lord Jesus but also through his many parables. “You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.....” he says in John 15:16 and again in Mark 8:34, “If any man would come after me (i.e. be my disciple) let him deny himself take up the cross and follow me”. That Jesus was very serious about the absolute need for self-denial – taking the path of the cross, of humiliation, rejection and death is made clear in his reference in Luke 14:26. If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple”. This then is the absolute call with which Jesus beckons those who wish to follow him. In the words of Bonhoeffer, “when Christ calls a man he bids him come and die” – there is no room for cheap discipleship.

Very often in the gospels this decision to follow Jesus follows an encounter, a transformational encounter with him. Notice how drastic that transformation was in Matthew who left his post at the custom’s house, “got up and followed him” or Zacchaeus who declares that he would restore “four fold what he had wrongly taken”.

The encounter brings salvation or liberation as it did to Zacchaeus and his household. Salvation not only in a purely individual sense but also a freeing of his spirit opening his eyes to the societal sin by which he had unjustly enriched himself. So this salvation was a wholly liberating experience.

At Jesus’ baptism the gospel narrative tells us that the heavens opened and a voice proclaimed: "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.". It was thereafter that Jesus withdrew into the wilderness to reflect on the form that his future ministry would take in the light of this proclamation. Rejecting the temptations of the use of power for his personal satisfaction, the use of His special relationship with God for a display of ‘showmanship’ and the shortcut and easy way to messiahship –the way of public adulation that he was offered, he resolutely chooses the alternative way of suffering and the cross. And so in the synoptic gospel he very often prefers to refer to himself as “son of man” "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45).

In my own diocese when we gather in Council every year, we set ourselves a theme, a vision to inspire us in our work in the coming year. This theme focuses our minds and permeates our thinking and action. “Intentional Christian Discipleship in a nation of many differences” is what we decided upon in 2016. In my own reflections to the Council I said, and permit me to quote, “The Father, commissions His apostles not to make CHRISTIANS but DISCIPLES. This is to be done by Baptizing and Teaching women, men and children to observe Jesus’ commandments. They are promised the supportive presence of the Risen Lord until the end of time for this to be achieved.

Those who believe and are baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit will upon entering the church also enter into Communion with the Father, with the Son and with the Holy Spirit. Thus the Church is before all “a Communion”. The first invitation which Jesus our Lord offered to those who showed interest in his life and teaching was to follow (to be a disciple), and that was quite literally what they did on the roads and through the villages of ancient Palestine. But it was not just a physical following – the following also involved a radical turning around of lifestyle, worldview, and spiritual orientation. Discipleship takes place when individuals and communities intentionally, sacrificially, and consistently live every moment of their daily lives in commitment to following Jesus. Jesus asked all those who follow him to fulfill what he had commanded. One becomes a Disciple of the Risen Lord, not through baptism alone which is an external initiation rite that visibly makes one a member of the “Jesus Community”, but by observing or being ‘baptized’ into the teachings and practices of Jesus of all that has commanded.

True Discipleship will certainly change the lives of individuals, families, churches, communities, nations and the world. The tragedy and the painful state of our churches today is that our churches are filled with so many nominal Christians but with only few disciples. Jesus is in need of authentic disciples to carry forward His Mission.

The discipleship which is cast on us at our baptism has both an internal and external dimension. Our inner, personal discipleship arises through our prayer life, our study of and reflection on the scriptures, through the sacraments and worship and through our sharing with fellow believers. We are additionally strengthened through our discipleship within our families and in our worshipping communities. This results in our discipleship in the footsteps of Jesus, bearing witness to the values of His kingdom in our communities, wider society and in our nation. Finally, this discipleship which we show forth in our lives throughout our earthly pilgrimage is offered to God at the end of our life’s journey as a witness to our faithfulness to his call. So, even as on the cross Jesus’ words and the manner in which he died convinced the Roman centurion that “Truly this was God’s son” (Mark 15:39), so men ought to recognize that we have truly been disciples of our master.

It is said that when the evangelist Stanley Jones asked Mahatma Ghandi why he did not become a Christian, Ghandi had replied *“Oh, I don’t reject Christ. I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ”*

Let us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus be forever shamed and challenged by these words and be ever mindful of the fact that the world judges our profession of faith through the lives we lead.

The nature of our discipleship is not one that we can consider as forever fixed or static. We need to discern the mind of the Master, prayerfully, through our meditations on scripture and our interaction with the Jesus Community. “What would Jesus have done” must be constantly in the forefront of our thinking through the many varied and complex challenges which we face today. These may be as existential as the very practice of our faith and discipleship in hostile and dangerous circumstances, or stark, as we boldly stand for the values of God’s own realm, confronting evil, injustice and intolerance, or when we are called to grapple with issues that face our societies; gender discrimination and sexism, racism, the abuse of power, destruction of God’s own creation, the natural environment, the huge and growing disparities in wealth and those which we sadly find within our very churches, unjust power structures, the abuse of children, the lure of pomp and wealth...

St. Paul enjoins us “...be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom 12:2). So in summary God calls to us is to be true discipleship of Jesus, choosing the way of servanthood, of humility, self-emptying and the cross, -- for the servant is not greater than the Master.

“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to the Father who is in heaven” (Mathew 5:16).

Thank You.