

# **Journeying with the Youth: Stories as Mission Frontiers**

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## **Abstract**

The ministry to the young can be more effective when there is “nearness and proximity.” It must include listening to stories for it is the beginning of evangelization. This paper is a story of a missionary who in his immersion had accompanied the young people of the Integral Educational Academy in Sri Lanka. It narrates his adventures in journeying with the youth and how he was able to creatively connect with them through their diaries and daily interactions despite the cultural barriers. Inspired by his experience, he then proceeds to theologically reflect on the Church’s missionary mandate to journey with the youth which entails confronting the manifold challenges that young people face today.

## **Introduction**

The Redemptorist Congregation’s missionary thrust of giving priority in journeying with the Youth this quadrennium<sup>1</sup> and this year’s celebration of the Year of the Youth have inspired me to reflect on my journey with the Sri Lankan youth in the Integral Educational Academy. It is an essential task on the part of the church to continually find ways on how to effectively do its ministry to people, especially the young. The church’s mission is to bring the message of the Gospel alive in the lives of people, both young and old, not only in words but most notably in actions. As Bryant L. Myers beautifully put it:

*They must be learners who are always seeking new insights from Scripture, from the community and development research. They must be people who document, who ask questions, who listen to the stories of the people, and who spend time with the people in reflection. There must be a passion for discovering meaning. What have we learned? What worked? What did not? What did we miss? What is God saying to us in all this?*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Communicanda 1. *Revitalizing our Vita Apostolica: Priorities for Restructuring for Mission* (Rome: 2017), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (New York: Orbis Books, 2015), 226.

The greatest challenge therefore for those who are called to ministry in the church nowadays is to live the message of the Gospel in their lives. It is an invitation for ministers to become genuine witnesses of the Gospel. The message of love, mercy, and compassion should first and foremost be seen and felt in the life of those who serve the church, for as the old saying goes: *nemo dat quod non habet*.<sup>3</sup>

I arrived in Sri Lanka on July 14, 2018. I was anxious because being sent in a mission for the first time on an alien soil was literally stepping into the unknown. However, the feeling of excitement for new encounters and new experiences kept me moving. On October 4, 2018, after spending two months of working with Caritas Sethmini,<sup>4</sup> the bishop of Ratnapura, Rt. Rev. Dr. Cletus Chandrasiri Perera, OSB decided to send me to Buluthota for a new assignment.

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<sup>3</sup> An old Latin dictum which literally means “no one gives what they don't have”.

<sup>4</sup> Caritas Sethmini is the Social Arm of the Diocese of Ratnapura whose mission in the social field is based on the Gospel values and universal solidarity towards all members in the diocese. Its office is located in Eheliyagoda, Sri Lanka.