

## **Adventures in Mission: Celebrating the Gift of Caring Presence**

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### **Abstract**

This article gives the reader a profound glimpse of a zealous Redemptorist missionary. His personal accounts in doing missions in Cebu and Negros in the past 20 years highlight the essential gift that one can ever give to someone: the gift of caring presence. In an engaging writing style with a tinge of humor, he narrates how he strives to: a) accompany the believer in his/her journey of faith, and b) to strengthen the bonds within the community. Also, he provides several anecdotes about the people (e.g., the homeless, the sick, troubled family, the learned church-goer) he had encountered, who somehow challenged – and likewise affirmed – the missionary task he embraced as a missionary priest. Following an “experiential framework,” the author beautifully weaves his experiences, the scriptures, and popular religious practices in a coherent narrative that will inspire anyone who sees the value of the vocation of a missionary today.

### **Introduction**

After 20 years of conducting Redemptorist-style missions in both urban (Cebu) and rural settings (Negros Oriental), I offer the following reflections. These reflections are discursive and descriptive rather than analytical. I offer various scenarios and, hopefully, some food for thought. Whatever I may have to offer over the years, I consider that I have gained far more, mostly in meeting people, often in quite dire straits, who were able to maintain a certain dignity and grace, and who keep a will-to-live almost in defiance of their circumstances. Among the muddy paths of the hills of Negros or the garbage-strewn alleys of Cebu squatter areas, let me assure you that there are people of truly noble humanity. What follows is an outline of my goals and methods, descriptions (narrative) of certain situations and events, interspersed with personal testimonies, and some learnings I garnered through the various experiences. This article has three headings: 1) Visitation, 2) Scripture, and 3) Popular Devotions and Celebrations.

For those seeking some detailed statement of Vision-Mission or rigorous methodology, my approach will seem simple, even verging on the simplistic. This eschewing of a more detailed “scaffolding” for my ministry may be partly a matter of personal temperament, but is also due to the fact that for most of the time I was on the missions alone, with just the occasional

visits, for a week or two, from our postulants in Dumaguete, and part-time lay cooperators in Cebu. My companions were my guides (usually lay ministers, catechists, others active in the life of the Christian community), and they often played a significant role in the atmosphere that was created and the celebrating of the various events.

After meeting the parish priest and various parish groups in a preparatory phase, an area would be chosen where I would begin. And from there, I would move from one village (*barangay*) to the next. My goals were twofold: 1) to accompany the believer on his/her “daily walk with the Lord”, and 2) to strengthen the bonds within the community. To achieve or at least strive for these goals, my approach consists of the essence of simplicity: meet people in their homes and organize various gatherings, to celebrate and fortify our faith.