

**The Big Picture and the Long View:  
The Global Situation & Long-Term Challenges for the Church and the Congregation**  
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As we face the worst crisis in our lifetime there is a need to exercise strategic leadership which require looking at the big picture and the long view. This means looking at what is happening in the present from a broader perspective considering the various interrelated dimensions (noting the threats and opportunities). This also means responding the long-term challenges – the long view.

**A Holistic View of the Global Situation**

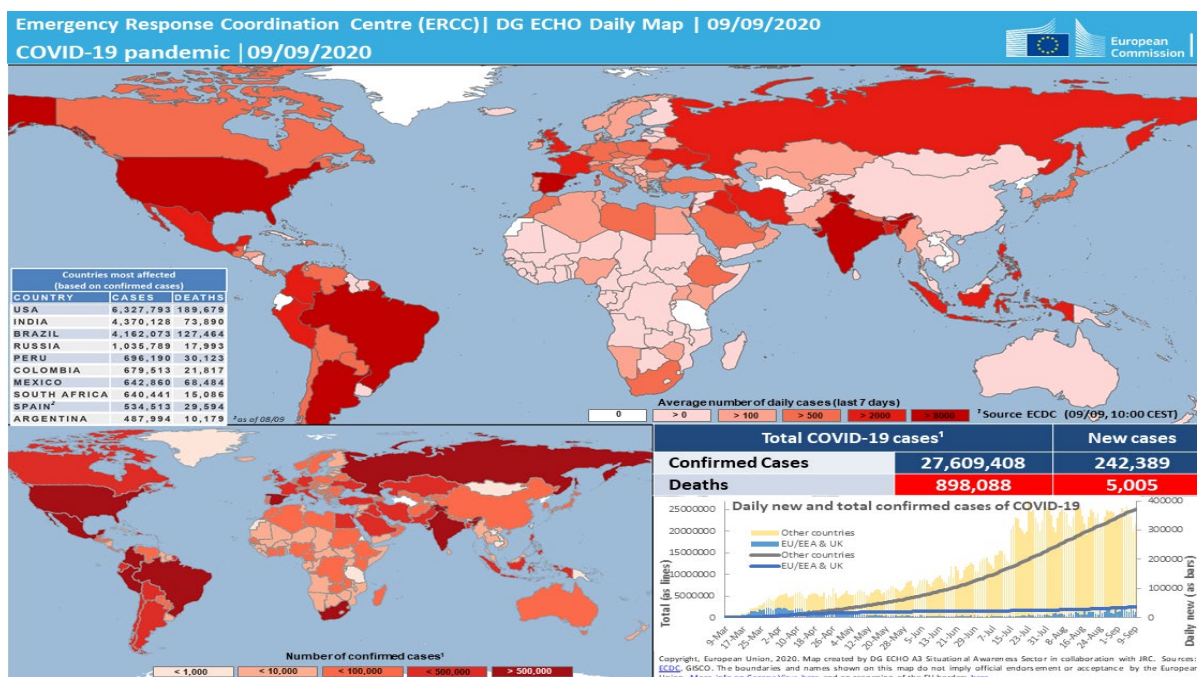
We live in the time of the Covid-19 Pandemic. This is a time of global crisis – not just a health crisis but also economic, political, geopolitical, and social. Before we can answer the question of how we can we fulfil our mission in this time of the pandemic and beyond we need to analyze the situation from a global and holistic perspective. We need to look at the big picture. This is what strategic thinking and acting requires especially those in leadership position. What I would like to present is a holistic view of the global situation. This is by no means comprehensive or in-depth. I am not an expert, but I have tried to sum up and bring together the assessments of various experts in their own field.

In analysing the global situation the following areas need to be considered:

- Epidemiological
- Economic
- Ecological
- Geopolitical
- Political
- Social /Cultural
- Ecclesial

**Epidemiological**

After nine months since the Covid19 outbreak which started in Wuhan (China), the virus has spread all over the world and there are no signs of slowing down. (take note of the red areas)



Let us look at the total numbers so far and the top ten countries (as of September 28, 2020)

	Cases	Fatalities	Case/Fatality Rate
World	33,383,773	1,003,382	3.00 %
USA	7,325,115	209,502	2.91
India	6,087,454	95,678	1.60
Brazil	4,736,831	141,776	3.01
Russia	1,159,573	20,385	1.75
Peru	805,302	32,262	4.07
Colombia	813,056	25,438	3.16
Mexico	730,317	76,430	10.53
South Africa	670,766	16,398	2.41
Spain	716,481	31,232	4.62
Argentina	711,325	15,749	2.06

Since Sept 28, the total number of cases has reached over 33 million and almost a million fatalities. The CFR is 3.08%. The US has the highest numbers. Over 7 million cases and over 200,000 deaths. This is followed by India with over 6 million. And Brazil over 4 million. Let us look at this in 5 areas corresponding to our conferences:

Continent	Cases	Fatalities	CFR
Asia-Oceania	11,598,058	212,495	1.8
Europe	5,443,488	232,411	4.2
North America	8,780,029	308,204	3.5
South America	7,949,827	249,775	3.1
Africa	1,465,994	35,457	2.4

Let us look at North America:

Countries	Cases	Fatalities	CFR
United States	7,325,115	209,502	2.9 %
Mexico	730,317	76,430	10.5
Canada	155,415	9,317	6.2

With over 7 million cases, the US has been at the epicenter for many months although the CFR only 2.9%. Canada has lower CFR Mexico the highest CFR of 10.5%

Let us take a look at South America:

Countries	Cases	Fatalities	CFR
Brazil	4,748,327	142,161	
Colombia	818,203	25,641	
Peru	808,714	32,324	

Argentina	723,132	16,113	
Chile	459,671	12,698	
Bolivia	134,223	7,900	
Ecuador	134,965	11,280	
Dominican Republic	108,783	2,054	
Venezuela	73,528	614	
Haiti	8,624	221	
Cuba	5,141	116	
Surinam	4,836	102	

Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Argentina and Chile have very high number of cases and fatalities. And Haiti, Cuba and Surinam have the lowest number of cases and fatalities.

Below are the numbers in Europe focusing on the areas the presence of the Congregation:

Countries	Cases	Fatalities	CFR
Spain	748,266	31,411	
France	552,832	31,808	
United Kingdom	439,013	42,001	
Italy	311,364	35,851	
Germany	288,618	9,545	
Ukraine	204,932	4,065	
Belgium	115,353	9,987	
Sweden	90,923	5,880	
Poland	88,636	2,447	
Portugal	74,029	1,957	
Ireland	35,377	1,802	
Slovakia	9,343	44	

Spain, France, UK, Italy and Germany have very high number of cases and fatalities. Western Europe was the epicenter of the pandemic in March-April was thought to have the pandemic under control but there have been spikes recently many of them linked to vacationers who caught the virus and brought it home, as well as young people socializing. There is fear of a 2<sup>nd</sup> wave.

Below are the numbers in the Asia-Oceania conference (as of September 28, 2020).

Countries	Cases	Fatalities	CFR
India	6,145,291	96,351	
Philippines	307,288	5,381	
Indonesia	278,722	10,473	
China	85,384	4,634	
Japan	82,131	1,548	
Singapore	57,715	27	
Australia	27,055	882	
South Korea	23,699	407	
Malaysia	11,034	134	
Thailand	3,559	59	
Sri Lanka	3,363	13	
New Zealand	1,815	25	
Vietnam	1,077	35	

The countries least affected are Vietnam, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and Thailand. These countries have been successful in containing the spread of the virus. India has the highest number of cases and fatalities and it continues to spread exponentially after overtaking Brazil as the 2<sup>nd</sup> after the US. The Philippines comes 2<sup>nd</sup> after India, overtaking Indonesia. It has the longest lockdown of all countries and there are no signs of containing the spread of the virus.

Below are the numbers from Africa:

Countries	Cases	Fatalities	CFR
South Africa	671,669	16,586	
Nigeria	58,460	1,111	
Ghana	46,444	299	
Kenya	38,168	700	
Ivory Coast	19,641	120	
Madagascar	16,348	225	
DR Congo	10,624	271	
Mozambique	8,288	59	
Zimbabwe	7,816	228	
Malawi	5,770	179	
Angola	4,797	176	
Benin	2,340	40	
Burkina Faso	2,028	57	
Togo	1,749	47	

Only South Africa has been affected severely. The other African countries appear to be doing fine. These countries have previous experience of dealing with epidemics like the SARS, Ebola, etc.

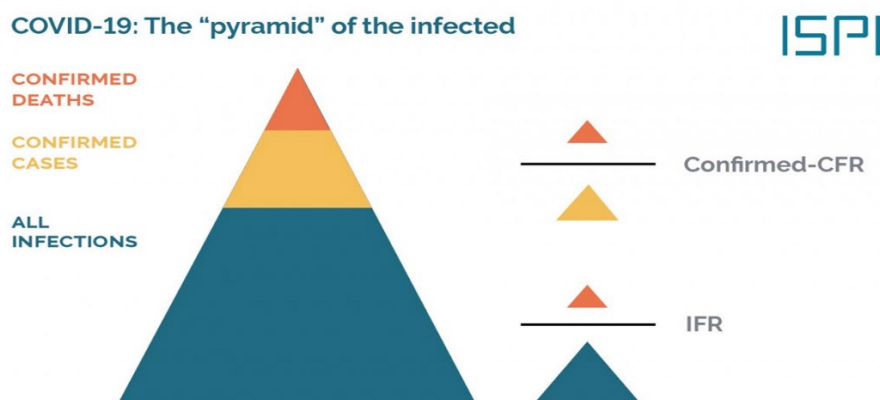
Here is the summary of WHO weekly report as of September 21, 2020:

- An increase in the weekly case incidence across all WHO regions in the last seven days except African region.
- The Americas (North and South) continue to carry the highest burden of COVID-19 globally, accounting for over 38% of all new cases reported in the past seven days, although the region has reported a 22% decrease in new deaths.
- The European Region showed the greatest rise in deaths in the past week, with a 27% increase compared to the previous week.
- The South-East Asia Region has an increase in new COVID-19 deaths, with over 9000 deaths in the past week, accounting for 25% of all reported deaths and surpassing 100

000 total COVID-19 deaths since the beginning of the pandemic. In addition, the region accounts for 35% of new cases reported in the past week.

- The Eastern Mediterranean and Western Pacific regions have a slight increase in reported cases and deaths over the last three weeks.
- The African Region continues to show a marked decline with decreases of 12% and 16% in reported cases and deaths respectively in the past week.

The number of cases of infected and fatalities can be considered as the tip of the pyramid:



The number of infections could be 20 times higher since not all have been tested and reported. There are many asymptomatic cases. Those vulnerable are the elderly and those with weak immune system due to other sickness (hypertension, diabetes, obesity, etc.).

The number of fatalities could be higher – especially with those who died at home and not reported. Even if we double the number of fatalities – it would still be a small percentage. If we accept the estimate that the actual infection rate could be much higher, the mortality rate could be much lower.

Compared to the Spanish flu in 1918-1919 which infected over 500 million with 50 million fatalities, the number of cases and fatalities from Covid-19 at present is very low (over 33 million infected and over 1 million fatalities) & the recovery rate is high. The most recent strain of the virus appears to be highly infectious but less lethal. Persons who are healthy with normal functioning immune system tend to survive infections. It is not the virus that kills but the body's overreaction to its presence.

The curve has been flattened in most of Europe and many parts of Asia but not in the US, Brazil, India, Philippines where the virus continues to spread rapidly. The lockdown, physical distancing, and other safety measures (facemask), tests, contact tracing, etc. may have helped countries that adopted these measures. But once the lockdown eased, new outbreaks have been reported thus the restrictions are again imposed in these areas. There are new spikes in Israel and Hongkong as well as South Korea (coming from the US base) and in Galicia, Spain. In China, there have been new outbreaks in Beijing. In Inner Mongolia an outbreak of Bubonic Plague has been reported. A second or even third wave cannot be ruled out like the previous pandemics.

There are 240 vaccines in early development, 40 in clinical trials and nine in final stage of testing (phase III). Without waiting for the results of phase II Russia and China have approved vaccines which is very risky. The most advanced is AstraZeneca developed by Oxford

University. These are expected to be made available by mid-2021. It will take over a year to mass produce and distribute these vaccines. However, their effectiveness cannot be guaranteed especially with the mutations of the virus. According to WHO the virus might only be totally defeated in 5 years. Meanwhile, we have to learn to live with it and use protective measures like social distancing, facemask, handwashing, etc.

The world is facing a global health crisis but has been lacking a global coordinated response. China and the WHO have been blamed for the pandemic for failure to warn the world on time. The US has withdrawn support and funding for the WHO. The UN passed a resolution calling for an investigation of how the crisis was handled especially at the inception period in Wuhan. Leaders of various nations can also be held accountable for failing to see the catastrophic threat and act immediately once the pandemic was declared.

### **Economic**

COVID-19 pandemic has caused massive disruptions to markets, supply chains, and world trade. The lockdown caused a stand-still in the economy world-wide. People stopped working and stayed at home. Factories, offices, shops, businesses, hotels, restaurants, schools, churches, etc were closed. Travel has been restricted or suspended (land, sea and air). Production and distribution stopped or slowed down (the supply side) and consumption dropped (demand side). Almost all the industries are affected: manufacturing, service, tourism, airlines, entertainment, sports, oil, etc. This has led to bankruptcy, unemployment, debt. The worst affected are the poor – the daily wage earners, the informal sector. Even those in small and medium scale industries have been severely affected.

There is economic recession, contraction, and possible depression. This is the worst global economic crisis since the Great Depression of 1930s according to many economists and the IMF. The global economy will shrink/contract by -4.9%.

The possibility of a quick recovery (V-shaped recovery) is farfetched. It will take a decade or more to fully recover from the economic crisis. Recovery will depend factors such as on how long it takes to defeat the virus, the resumption of high consumer demands for goods and services (which is not very likely with less income, less expenses, saving for uncertain future, etc.). In a capitalist system growth (GDP) depends on high levels of consumption.

According to the World Bank: “Partly owing to an unprecedented weakening in services-related activities, global trade and oil consumption will see record drops this year, and the global rate of unemployment will likely climb to its highest level since 1965. The outbreak of covid-19 and the wide-ranging measures needed to slow its advance have precipitated an unprecedented collapse in oil demand. They also resulted in a surge of oil inventories, and in March, the steepest one-month decline in oil prices on record. In 2020 the highest share of economies will experience contractions in annual per capita GDP since 1870. The share will be more than 90% higher than the proportion at the height of the Great Depression of 1930-32.”

The pharmaceutical industry is profiting from the health crisis. Digital-based industries and commerce are the big winners during this time (Amazon, Google, Facebook, Netflix, Zoom). Their net profits have increased by billions in so short a time. The stocks of Tesla continue to rise – with the production of alternative sources of energy (electric cars and trucks, long-lasting batteries, space projects, etc). Businesses and corporations continue to work online. This will accelerate other businesses to engage more actively in the digital world and



accelerate the 4th industrial revolution. Robotics and 3-day printing are thriving. Many businesses are no longer reliant on physical office state as many can work at home.

De-globalization is under way. The economic recession and possible depression could result in the breakdown or collapse of neo-liberal globalized capitalist economic system.

The disruption of supply-chain and the slow-down or stoppage of production as well as the decline of consumption and demand makes it difficult to recover. This leads to bankruptcy, shut-down of businesses, rise of unemployment, increasing poverty, and food scarcity. The pandemic manifests the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots.

Below are rates of contraction and unemployment in developing countries:

<b>Country</b>	<b>Contraction % (Negative GDP growth)</b>	<b>Unemployment %</b>
Latin America & Caribbean	- 9.4	
Brazil	- 9.1	12.2
Mexico	- 10.5	3.3
Middle East and Central Asia	- 4.7	
Saudi Arabia	- 6.8	5.7
Sub-Sahara Africa	- 3.2	
Nigeria	- 5.4	23.1
South Africa	- 8.0	30.1
Philippines	- 3.4	17.7
Indonesia	- 2.8	5.0
East Timor	- 4.8	4.5

The developing economies in Latin American, Asia and Africa are affected the most even in countries where the rate of infection and fatality is lower than the developed countries. Those dependent on Overseas Foreign Workers remittance will be affected most since many of them have lost their jobs and sent home.

Europe which has been on a long-term recession before the pandemic is not spared from the economic crisis. Italy, Spain, France and Great Britain are being hit hard and so also are the US and Canada.

Below are the rate of contraction and unemployment in developed economies:

Country	Contraction (negative GDP growth)	Unemployment
US	-8.0	11.1 %
Germany	-7.8	3.9
France	-12.5	8.1
Italy	-12.8	11.1
Spain	-12.8	14.5
Japan	-5.8	2.6
United Kingdom	-10.2	3.8
Canada	-8.4	13.7
China	1.0	5.9
India	-4.5	8.5
Russia	-6.6	6.1

The collapse of the oil industry is affecting not just Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Russia but also Nigeria and Venezuela.

China, which is touted as the second largest economy is not spared from the economic crisis as production slows down and the demand for its products decline. With capital flight, rising unemployment, and inability to take care of a billion citizens who remain poor the ruling Communist Party tries to tighten its hold on power as anti-China sentiments spread globally. Its dream of becoming the dominant digital superpower thru Huawei 5G project has suffered a setback with the opposition from US, Great Britain, and other European countries. It is deeply in debt. Its 1% GDP is the lowest in four decades.

Vietnam and Taiwan have been able to effectively stop the spread of the virus and have not been seriously affected economically by the economic crisis. They are benefitting from the relocation of manufacturing hub and re-structuring of the supply chain from China to nearby countries. But since they are dependent on exports, the demand for their goods remain low and will not stimulate production. So full recovery will be slow. Most of the large companies are also relocating to India which will contribute more to its development.

Developed economies (USA, Western Europe, Japan) have poured in trillions of aid and stimulus package to their respective countries to keep industries afloat and help out citizens. Developing economies have not been able to do as much and cannot expect external/foreign aid. The good news is the IMF has approved immediate debt relief of 25 developing countries.

The emergency package/ bail-out are increasing public debt which will require raising taxes. Individual/personal indebtedness is also increasing. The coronavirus is revealing the extent of the inequality within society and between nations. The ranks of the poor and employed are dramatically increasing all over the world. According to the UN the pandemic will seriously increase world hunger (in 2019 there were already 690 million who suffered from chronic hunger, due to the pandemic 130 million more people will be added- FAO): 381 million in Asia, 250 million in Africa, 48 million in Latin America. Even in developed economies like the US, 28 million people will be evicted from their homes and increase the number of homeless people.

This crisis is bringing out compassionate response from some big business corporations with developed CSR (corporate social responsibility) components. They not only help their employees but contribute to civil society and Church efforts to address the pandemic crisis.

### **Ecological**

The effects of the lock-down (less economic production, less use of transportation, less demand for oil, less release of GHG) have been beneficial to the environment.

The skies are clear, the rivers are clean, the birds and bats fly freely in the air, the pangolins can freely frolic in the forests, etc.

While mining and reforestation were expected to slow down, they continue in some parts of the Amazon and the Philippines. Resistance and protests against these have been suppressed due to the lockdown. The glut of oil and the temporary collapse of the oil industry has hastened the search for alternative sources of energy. While the earth has been given a temporary respite the ecological crisis and global warming continues. The UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) which was scheduled to be held in Glasgow, Scotland in Nov. 2020 to finalize concrete measures to address climate change has been rescheduled to Nov. 2021 due to the pandemic.

The continuing contact between wildlife and humans due to deforestation is a threat to the spread of new viruses which are zoonotic.

### **Geopolitical (International/Regional)**

There is an absence of a coordinated, global response to the health and economic crises. The United States which has the status of the sole global superpower maintains an isolationist (America-first), unilateral stance, unwilling to exercise leadership at the global stage. The US has withdrawn support and funding for the WHO which the president blames for its inability to stop the spread of the virus at its inception and for being beholden to China.

With the end of the cold war due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, supporting Europe economically and militarily is no longer part of the US strategic interest. It is no longer committed to NATO and is withdrawing some of its troops from Germany. The European Union which was formed to bring together various nations in Western Europe and become a political-economic superpower that can compete with the US is failing. The Brexit is a clear indication. The European Union is unable to maintain a united approach to the crisis leaving each nation-state to fend for itself and resurrecting national borders.

G7 is history and G20 does not function. The United Nations, the Security Council and the World Health Organizations are not addressing the crisis and thus the absence of international coordination and solidarity. The only resolution from the UN Security council is the appeal for a global ceasefire.

The system of an interconnected global political and economic order is threatened by fragmentation and the resurgence of nationalism and protectionism.

China with its ambition of supplanting the US as a superpower tried to fill up the vacuum but is failing. Instead it is facing hostility and isolation. The trade war between US and China is turning into a cold war.

China has tried to project its power through its Belt-Road Project and the control of the South China Sea through building up military bases in the disputed islands, the imposition of total control of Hongkong, border conflict with India in the Himalayas. Chinese navy have been conducting exercises in the area, especially near Taiwan.

The US is challenging China by repositioning its naval and military power in the region, conducting freedom of navigation exercises as well as war games. Its new strategy is to contain and disrupt Chinese hegemonic ambitions. The US has warned China of dire consequences should it continue to militarize the disputed islands. Nearby countries like Vietnam, Indonesia and Japan are also resisting.

The South China sea is becoming the latest hotspot which could trigger armed hostilities. China is unable to assert its hegemony in the region, except the Philippines where Duterte has earlier expressed its independence from the US and close relationship with China. China is exploiting the resources of RP – mining in the country, control of vital industries, construction projects and a plan for offshore drilling of oil. Duterte earlier announced the termination of VFA with the US but suspended its implementation due to pressure from the military and the heightening of tensions between US and China.

### **Political (National/Local)**

Each nation-states/government are acting on their own to contain the spread of the virus and address the immediate needs of the people and the economy (e.g. release of state funds, aid, stimulus rescue package, etc.).

The effectiveness depends on the quality of leadership. Inept and authoritarian political leaders and systems responsible for the spread of the virus are being unmasked. (China, US, Brazil, Philippines). In countries where corruption is rampant financial aid for citizens are pocketed by government officials. PPEs are often overpriced.

Effective and democratic leaders are shining forth (most of them women). Countries like Germany, Taiwan, Japan, Korea and New Zealand are successful in containing the virus without draconian measures and resorting to authoritarian rule. The situation worsens as many governments with inept leaders are incapable of dealing effectively with the health crisis and the consequent economic crisis.

The emergency powers granted to national leaders is paving the way for increasing authoritarian rule at the national and local levels. A virtual martial law is imposed to enforce the lock-down or quarantine. Abuse of authority and violation of human rights are becoming prevalent.

Thus, under the lockdown various governments were able to impose repressive laws and moves (the security act in Hongkong, the anti-terror law and shutting down of mass media in the Philippines, etc.).

According to UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michele Bachelet that governments “are using health emergency measure to justify repression and expand their powers.”

The fortunes of incumbent leaders who have failed to show competence and compassion will be affected in the coming elections. They could be voted out of office.

Despots who have consolidated their power still face dissent. The pandemic is igniting social unrest and protests against incompetent, corrupt and authoritarian governments in various parts of the world (Israel, Serbia, Philippines, Lebanon, Israel, Bulgaria, Iraq, India, Peru, US). (CNN report).

### **Social/Cultural**

The lockdown and the physical distancing are leading to ambiguity in social relations. On the one hand it has led to a sense of isolation and loneliness due to lack of social and interpersonal contact. It is disrupting the sense of community (if it exists). Public gatherings are either forbidden or limited as the lockdown is eased. It is changing how people interact in social settings (keeping safe distance, no more hugging and kissing, no touching, etc).

The closure of schools and the use of online classes is affecting interaction among students and between students and teachers. The lack of games, sports, live concerts and entertainments are also affecting social interaction.

The lockdown is bringing families together (more time for parents and children to interact). In dysfunctional families it has led to increase of domestic violence.

In some areas, neighbors who have not seen each other are able to establish connection by entertaining each other from their rooftops and balconies.

The digital technology/social media enables people to overcome physical distancing and makes it possible to remain connected with families, friends and colleagues, getting news and information wherever they are.

Virtual communities and groups continue to thrive thanks to the internet.

### **Ecclesial**

The Church like other institutions all over the world has been affected by the pandemic. Many priests and religious have been infected by the virus and over a hundred (most of them elderly) have died in Europe and other parts of the world. Two cardinals were infected but were able to recover.

The churches have been closed and public masses were cancelled. No collection, no income. There is proliferation of on-line masses.

The response of the local Churches varies depending on their vitality. In places where they are thriving and active, the local Church in collaboration with civil society groups are mobilized to give aid to the poor who are mostly affected and to front-liners. Kindness centers have been set up in parishes – to care for the poor and homeless who are worst hit by the economic crisis.

In areas where authoritarian regimes have made use of the pandemic to violate human rights some bishops, priests and religious are exercising their prophetic role.

The Pope Francis is the only world leader that is providing a semblance of leadership, albeit moral and inspirational, in the midst of the pandemic. His prayer and blessing from St. Peter's which was broadcast all over the world made an impact on millions of people. He has also sent PPE and equipment (respirators) to some countries. The pope has expressed support for the UN/Security Council appeal for global ceasefire. In his address to the UN on Sept. 25,

2020 #109 he urged for a multilateral action to address the pandemic crisis and avoid isolationist and nationalist stance. He is also promoting the appeal for universal basic income. With the aid of various working groups (COVID-19 Commission)/dicasteries in the Vatican, the pope is coming out with his vision of the post-pandemic world.

As the pandemic rages, the Church continues to address the ecological crisis. How this can be implemented in the time of the pandemic and beyond remains the Church's concern. 2020 has been declared as *Laudato Si* year and the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Development has come out with a roll-out plan. There are various groups and movements in the Church involved in promoting integral ecology – GCCM, Sowing Hope for the Planet, etc. The Vatican Secretariat of State has come out with a document on the implementation of the *Laudato Si*.

Meanwhile, the right wing/conservative/traditionalist groups continue to mount a well-organized and well-financed opposition to Pope Francis reacting to his efforts to reform the Church and his apparent liberalism and progressive stance, the sacking of conservative cardinals (Burke, Muller, et al), *Laudato Si*, *Amoris Laetitia* (considering communion for the divorced & remarried) and the Extraordinary Synod on the Amazonia which discussed among other inculturation, possibility of ordaining married men to the priesthood (*viri probati*) and women deacons.

On the other hand, the progressive and liberal groups have started to express disappointment and dissatisfaction over the following: making a final stand re: the communion for divorced and remarried, for not making a stand on the ordination of married men (*viri probati*) and the ordination of women to the diaconate in *Querida Amazonia*, and for choosing a title for the forthcoming encyclical that is not politically correct - “Fratelli tutti” – which appears to exclude women,

Pope Francis defies being labelled as liberal or conservative. While trying to reform the Church along the lines of Vatican II, he does not want to see a divided Church. He avoids the culture wars that has become prevalent in Europe and North America where the Church is on a decline in terms of number and influence.

The Church has become truly global and the center of gravity has shifted towards Latin America, Asia and Africa where the Church continues to thrive and grow. Preparations are underway for the next Synod of Bishops. The theme: Synodality – Communion and Participation, this is part of his efforts to reform Church governance emphasizing collegiality and decentralization.

### **Summing up the Big Picture:**

The virus continues to spread globally but the number of cases and fatalities is remarkably low compared to the pandemics in the past. However, the economic, political, geopolitical, and social fallout are severe and unprecedented due to the draconian measures taken to contain the spread of the virus. As the virus continues to spread, major changes are taking place. It is accelerating deglobalization and the 4th industrialization. The situation remains uncertain, complex and ambiguous for the next ten years. We cannot predict accurately what will happen in the future. Whatever happens, we live in a time of transition – from the old to the new. It will no longer be business as usual. The Church as well as the religious institutes need to face the challenges of the changing situation in the years to come.

## **The Long View: Challenges for the Church & Congregation in the Long Term**

After looking at the big picture – analyzing the present global situation from a holistic perspective – epidemiological, economic, political, geopolitical, social-cultural and ecclesial, let us now consider the long view. We are not just responding to the challenges at this time of the pandemic but in the years to come. A long-term view is necessary. We are not only looking at the next 2-5 years but within the next two or more decades.

We live in uncertain times. We can't accurately predict the future. All we can do is to consider various scenarios – the worst-case and the best-case scenarios. Strategists often begin by looking at the worst-case scenarios so that we can all be prepared for whatever happens – good or bad. Others would just consider the major trends – what will most likely happen based on their assessment of what is happening at present and the possible outcomes if the trends continue. These are the challenges that the Church and religious institutes face in the long term:

1. Healing a wounded world
2. Promoting communion and solidarity
3. Listening to the cry of the poor. Addressing growing poverty and inequality
4. Listening to the cry of the earth. Addressing the continuing ecological crisis.
5. Exercising the Prophetic Role vis-à-vis authoritarian regimes
6. Promoting active nonviolence amidst violent conflicts
7. Facing the demographic crisis: a rapidly aging and shrinking population
8. Addressing mass migration
9. Adapting to new technologies (the digital world and 4th Industrial Revolution)

Faced with these challenges how can we fulfil the mission of the Church and the religious institute?

### **Healing a Wounded World**

The whole world is sick and needs healing. The most immediate need is to care for those infected by the corona virus, providing assistance in their healing process. Those who have lost loved ones have to go through a grieving process. Those who died were hurriedly cremated or buried without the usual rituals. People need to be in touch with their grief otherwise this can go on for years without closure.

Those psychologically affected need counselling. Their lives have been shattered by the pandemic and the economic crisis. They are depressed and filled with anxiety. For some suicide can become the way out.

Many are going through a spiritual crisis as for they feel God's absence or silence. Where is God? Why did God allow this to happen? Why has God abandoned us? Why is God not answering our prayers for deliverance? These are the questions that confront the Church and every religious. Pastors and theologians are grappling with these questions. Does God really intervene in human affairs? If yes, how? If no, why? This may lead to a crisis of faith if not adequately answered.

### **Promoting Communion and Solidarity**

There is a trend of increasing fragmentation and division among nations and within nations. The process of deglobalization is underway as each nation/state takes care of itself.

Nationalism and protectionism are again on the rise. Even the United Nations is not functioning as it should, and the European Union can hardly get its act together. The United States is dis-united and so is the world. Thus, there is no global coordinated response to the pandemic crisis, the economic recession and possible depression, the increasing poverty and hunger as well as the continuing ecological crisis.

Social/physical distancing could become the norm. This means avoidance of face-to-face interaction, large gathering, etc. The sense of isolation and loneliness may dominate. Even the sense of trust is being eroded as people suspect that they can be infected even by the member of their family, circle of friends or community.

Can the Church and religious institutes present all over the world promote communion and solidarity at the local, national, international levels? How can this be done?

### **Listening to the cry of the poor. Addressing growing poverty and inequality**

The pandemic has triggered economic recession and even depression (worst-case scenario). More and more people will become poor, go bankrupt, be unemployed, face hunger, will become homeless. Many will be burdened with debts. The inequality within nations and between nations (economic, social, racial, gender, etc.) is widening. Besides immediate aid and relief what programs and structural changes are needed?

### **Listening to the cry of the earth. Addressing the continuing ecological crisis.**

While the earth has been given a respite during the time of the pandemic, our common home continues to be threatened by climate change. If global warming is not kept to 1.5 or below 2.1 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels within the next decades the world will reach a point of no return. Extreme weather patterns are becoming a new normal (droughts, floods, superstorms) and sea levels will rise that will inundate coastal cities.

In *Laudato Si* Pope Francis warns about the climate emergency and calls for ecological conversion and the need to act to avert the catastrophe that will destroy humanity and other living creatures. What action and lifestyle can we adopt? How do we help mitigate the disastrous effects of global warming?

### **Exercising the Prophetic Role vis-à-vis authoritarian regimes**

Under the pretext of addressing the pandemic crisis, some governments/political leaders have expanded their power and imposed authoritarian rule, violating human rights, restricting freedom, etc. How can the Church and religious institutes exercise their prophetic/critical mission? How can we become the voice of the voiceless? How can we express our solidarity with the victims and those who are resisting tyrannical rulers? Are we ready to face the consequences of fulfilling our mission?

### **Promoting Nonviolence amidst Violent Conflicts**

The pandemic has triggered social unrest among the people who have suffered so much, who have seen and experienced the glaring inequality, who have been angered by the incompetence, corruption and brutality of those who rule over them. Others witness the destruction of the environment and resulting ecological crisis. More and more people are struggling for social change. This can lead to a spiral of violence –between those who want change using violence and the violent reaction of the state. What can we do to promote active



nonviolence? How can we inspire others to walk the way of peace as they struggle for social transformation, for justice and equality?

There are regions where armed conflicts could break out – South-East Asia (around the South-China Sea), Ukraine/Russia border, China-India Border, Taiwan straits, etc. What can we do to promote peaceful resolution of these conflicts and avoid escalation that could lead to war?

### **Addressing the coming demographic crisis: an aging and shrinking population**

Neo-Malthusians have made us believe that the world is facing a population explosion. Many economists believe that this is causing poverty. Many environmentalists believe that this is also contributing to climate change. Aggressive population control has been promoted, including contraception and abortion.

On the contrary, the population of many countries, especially in Europe, are aging rapidly and are shrinking. The fertility rate is below 2.1 with many as low as 1.3-1.6. The family size is getting smaller, there are more older people than younger people. In the next twenty years, the population will peak at 8 billion and then start to shrink irreversibly. This may sound good. Fewer mouths to feed. But this will have grave repercussion at the economic, political, geopolitical, cultural, and ecclesial levels.

With less consumers and less human resources the economy cannot grow. Many developed economies will shrink and continue to experience recession. Fewer younger population will have difficulty supporting the larger older population. Social security and health care systems cannot be sustained with less people paying taxes.

Nations with superpower ambitions will grow old before they grow rich and powerful (China, Russia, European countries). Large armies will also shrink. Countries with large number of younger people and with more natural resources will have a comparative advantage (US, Asia, Africa, Latin America)

The local Churches in countries with small families and aging population will have a problem recruiting vocations and replacing aging clergy and religious. They could die out. This is already evident in Europe which has become a post-Christian country and where only the elderly go to church.

The Church's center of gravity has shifted to Latin America, Africa and Asia which has younger population and more numerous members. But in 30-50 years they will also face the same problem of aging and shrinking population if/when the fertility rate goes below replacement levels.

### **Mass migration**

Mass migration will accelerate in the post-pandemic period. Various factors contribute to mass migration: the economic hardships, climate change, armed conflict, and the rising demand for labor in developed economies facing demographic crisis. Many people are constrained to escape intolerable situations and seek better conditions.

Large scale urban migration will continue due to the effects of climate change and poverty. Rural areas are becoming depopulated. Others will move to other countries where there is demand for foreign labor due to an aging and shrinking population. Areas of destination for migrant labor: Europe (especially Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Poland), US, Mexico. This will become a reality with the de-centering or re-shoring of the supply-chain and bringing back factories closer home. There will also be an exodus from Hongkong to UK, Canada, US,

Taiwan. Those in central American will migrate to Mexico which is becoming the manufacturing hub of North America as well as South America.

Due to mass migration, Europe will become more multicultural and multi-religious. Migrants coming from Catholic countries can add vitality to the local Church/parishes in Europe and North America (from Mexico, South America, Africa, Philippines, etc.) The Muslim population will also increase especially in Europe (by over 10 percent – UK, France, Germany, etc.) This is already happening in US and Canada.

The challenge for the Church and religious institutes: assisting migrants as they settle down in their new home countries, pastoral ministry among Catholics, conducting ecumenical/interreligious dialogue, etc.

### **Adapting to Rapid Technological Change**

The pandemic has accelerated the engagement in the digital world and the 4th industrial revolution. The new information and communication technology is changing the way we interact with one another – beyond the limits of space and time. Social media becomes the normal way of interacting.

The coming 4th industrial revolution with e-commerce, robotics, 3-day printing, Artificial Intelligence, etc will revolutionize the economy, education, etc. These are disruptive technologies that that can bring progress but requires new competence and skills as well as increase unemployment.

How can we adapt to these technological changes and make use of these in our ministry and mission? How can we make sure that the poor will not be left behind?

### **Carrying out the Mission of the Church and the religious institute amidst the crises and changes in the World**

The next two decades or more will be a time of great changes. In view of the challenges of the future that have been discussed so far, the overarching question is: how can we carry out our mission in the time of the pandemic and beyond?

In this changing situation, how can we proclaim the Word of God? How can the mission of evangelization, education and catechesis be carried out? How can we become truly prophetic? What changes are needed in our schools and universities?

How can we build up Christian communities and the local Church as communion of communities in our parishes, mission stations and in post-Christian/secularized Europe?

What kind and form of liturgical/sacramental celebrations can we come up with? How can we carry out the mission of human promotion – of integral human development, the work for justice, peace and integrity of creation, etc. How do we minister to a people who are mostly poor, hungry and victims of violence?

In an era of dwindling and aging clergy and religious especially in Europe and North America, how can thriving apostolic units (especially in Asia, Africa & Latin America) where vocations are increasing engage in reverse mission? How can we enable active participation of the lay faithful – women and men - in our mission?

The coming years and decades will no longer be back to normal or business as usual. The Church and Religious Orders need to plan for the future will all these challenges in mind constantly considering the big picture and the long view.

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In 1989, he studied at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, California, and received his licentiate in theology in 1991. He finished his doctorate in theology at the Gregorian University in Rome in 1995.

From 1995-2011 he was assigned in Davao as theology professor and academic dean at St. Alphonsus' Theological & Mission Institute. He was also engaged in parish ministry, Christian-Muslim Dialogue, Peace & Life Advocacy, environmental activism and the campaign against Extra-Judicial Killings.

Del 2011 al 2017, he was the executive secretary of the Committee on Basic Ecclesial Communities of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines from 2011to 2017 and started a life of solitude, silence and prayer as a hermit for four months in 2018 before he was forced into exile due to assassination attempts by death squads.

He is at present the executive co-secretary of the Commission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation of the Union of Superiors General in Rome.

Two of his books have recently been published by the Claretian Publications:

1. *The Journey towards a New Way of Being Church,*
2. *The Priesthood in a Church Renewed.*