

# PILGRIMS ON A MISSION

## **Bows and Arrows: Community and Travelling Missionaries**

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### *Personal Profile*

I was born on the Canary Islands, Spain, to Lucas and Araceli, the eldest of five children in a middle class family. My childhood and early adolescence are inextricably linked to the sea and to my parish church, St. Francis, with Don Juan at the helm. I retain many fond memories of those days — daily prayer with my family; frequent attendance at Mass; and caring for Manuel, a friend of mine who lived with his parents in some caves in a ravine: mother would invite him to eat, play and bathe in our home. We loved him very much. Later, I learned that Manuel means “God is with us.”

When, at the age of fifteen, I began working as a catechist, I joined the others in proposing to our parish priest that we carry out our catechism in the fishermen’s district, since their children typically didn’t come up to the main office. It was there that I came face-to-face with the harsh realities of extreme poverty, profound human suffering, and premature death. This is when I first posed the questions, “Why is the world like this, my God, why the gross inequalities, some with so much and others with so little?” It was in those days too that I began to identify passionately with the life of Christ. I kept the Bible under my pillow and I dreamed of its teachings. I assailed my parents with questions: “Why do we have so much and they so little? What is the reason that Christ was born poor? Shouldn’t we do as the Bible tells us, and dedicate our resources and our lives to the service of the needy?” My parents, in their infinite patience, did their best to respond to my inquiries. Thus it was in this period of my life that I became familiar with the foundational experience of love towards oneself, one’s family and others.

I studied physics in Seville. Seeing so many of my peers at the Colegio Mayor involved in promiscuous sex, drugs and alcohol caused me much confusion and pain. It was a difficult experience. My lifejacket of salvation at this time was the university group run by Fernando García S.J. We met once a week to celebrate the Eucharist and to socialize, and twice a week we performed pastoral work with Gypsy children as well as with the elderly from a local retirement home.

My four-year relationship with my girlfriend was also a vital influence on me at that time. She was instrumental in helping me to realize my missionary vocation. Initially, as lay volunteers, we had wanted to go to Africa together; but after a long process of reflection, it became clear that we were being called in different directions, and she told me: "Fernando, you must find your own way, and pray for me that I may find mine." Though we loved each other very much, we sensed, as we meditated on the presence of Christ in our lives, that we were being called to separate destinies and we decided to break up at that point. Instead of Africa, I went to Paraguay.

### *On the Road with the Society of Jesus*

I arrived in Paraguay in January of 1985 in the company of Jesuits, and shortly thereafter I entered the novitiate. They were the final years of the Stroessner dictatorship — poverty, fear, repression and injustices were a part of everyday life. As a novice, my apostolate work was carried out among a community of poor farm-workers, severely exploited by the local landowners. The injustice of it all made my blood boil.

During the month of my apostolate I began to call everything into question, seeing these poor Christ-figures in the midst of injustice all around us. I asked myself, "What have I done for Christ? How is it possible that, given all this injustice and oppression, Christians, priests and religious, are not being murdered everyday for protesting against this situation?"

In the junior novitiate, the rector wouldn't allow me to participate in the political mobilizations because he was afraid that, as a foreigner, I would be expelled from the country. My peers, however, were participating in protests against the dictatorship; and I was supporting them with my prayers in the chapel.

It was during my studies in philosophy that I became an activist. Along with other students, we formed a group of non-violent activists called

the Monsignor Romero League of Thought and Action. There is where I learned to practice the Gospel of non-violence, to turn the other cheek, to be as gentle as a dove and as clever as a serpent. Out of that experience, the Paraguayan Society for Peace and Justice was born.

It was also during the time of my studies in philosophy that I lived immersed in the poor urban community of the “Northern Marshes,” in Asunción, a flood zone within the city located near the Paraguay River. During the second year of studies we also began serving in the “Southern Marshes,” one of the trash dumps in Asunción. It was a very moving experience, walking the downward slope from the high part of the city to the lower flood plains. I felt an intense degree of spiritual consolation and gratefulness to God for being able to leave the university and go down to the marshy areas where I would live among the least of God’s people - meeting God there in the dumps, not high in the heavens: how ironic! We were also blessed to have the chance of living in those shacks for five months when the rainy season was its height. It is hard to describe the joy and confirmation in my vocation that I felt in those challenging circumstances, and I recalled the words of Arrupe: “May our discipline and institutions live up to the greatest challenges the world has to offer, yet, more importantly, may our way of life testify to the Gospels that we preach.” And I was also reminded of his additional advice: “It is true that we value teaching in the university, writing articles, researching in institutes of social studies; however, we should always keep our feet planted in the mud, alongside the least of God’s people.” This is the way it must be for me, or else I find myself unsatisfied. The professors who most influenced my life were those whose teachings were rooted in a profound social commitment, including community outreach among the poorest of the poor. And my own best achievements in philosophy stemmed from the joys and pains that I experienced in my apostolate work.

For my teacher’s certificate, it was proposed initially that I should study at the College of Christ the King, but I explained to the Provincial that I had been praying for an opportunity to have an outreach experience among the rural peasants and farm-workers, where I was hoping to learn Guaraní and about their way of life. The Provincial agreed, and I lived for a year in a small town with a family of sixteen. We all slept in one room on leather mats, the two smallest ones sleeping right beside me. I couldn’t fall asleep those first nights. It was moral indignation that kept me awake - the two little ones were pressing up against me trying to catch some of my body

heat, and I wept tears of indignation at the injustice of this family's situation. "Why, my God, is there so much inequality in this world?" I would ask myself, as I lay awake during the night. With the rural peasants I learned quite a bit — how to work the land, to plant and harvest cotton, rice, beans and corn; and to chew "pety" (tobacco), though the first time I tried this I felt queasy and vomited, causing all who witnessed my reaction to break out in uproarious laughter.

I began to study theology in Brazil (ISI) at that point. This was a tough time for me, the time when I experienced that greatest crisis of my life. The cause of my crisis may have been the contrast or the distance that I felt between the cold, complicated reasoning of our theological studies in comparison with the simple, warm, communitarian missionary work that I had been engaged in earlier. By the grace of God and through the assistance of four Jesuit professors, as well as the children of the streets, I was able to survive this period.

In the third year of my theological studies, I performed my three-day devotional Exercises of renewal under a bridge, alongside some of the street children with whom I had developed a tight friendship. I often asked them to pray for me in those days. To find food to eat they had to go around stealing — a common plight for many children in those parts. I contributed to their food supply with regular donations of bread. Whenever they saw me feeling sad, they would make a circle around me and recite the Our Father. Without any mystical visions, yet with great clarity, I felt that through their mouths God was telling me: "I want you to serve Me through these little ones; you're confused right now about the studies you are presently carrying out, but it is vital that you should finish your training in theology." The little ones saved me. Thanks to them, the "faces and voices of God," I made it — *not without bruises* — to the end of my theological studies.

At the end of my studies, in order to help me recover from the crisis, the Provincial allowed me to make a four-month retreat in the South of the Brazilian Amazon. I had to go to Bolivia and then return to Paraguay, crossing the Chaco. With a backpack on my shoulders, I left, feeling the strong desire to find God once again among the simple folk. I was in the company of Don Pedro Casaldáliga and the Sisters of Foucault (Tapirapé Indians) as well as my Jesuit companions from Mato Grosso (Rikbatska Indians). Often I had to sleep wherever I could find a place to lie down. A few times I ended up sleeping on the doorsteps of parish churches, and people would toss coins at me as they entered. How much good that

experience did me! How much I learned! Ascending to La Paz, Bolivia, on the wooden flatbed of a truck, it was so cold that I thought I would freeze to death. Many families were travelling with us but they were all wearing coats and I was wearing only the light clothing that I had worn in the jungle. I survived, thanks mainly to the canvas canopy stretched over the flatbed. In Qorpa, near Lake Titicaca, in the company of Father Pepe H., I stayed with the Coca growers, and he encouraged me to contemplate everything there from the “high plateau inside oneself.”

Throughout that pilgrimage I recalled the revelation of la Storta many times: “I want you to serve Me in them.” I felt a strong calling to be where the crucified ones of the earth are.

Upon returning to Paraguay, I was assigned to our missions in San Cayetano, one of the trash dumps of Asunción. The work and the experiences of those years had a profound impact on my life. The workmen in the garbage dump would bring home the dead babies found in bags in the trash dump to pray for their souls. They would wash them, clothe them, make a little coffin for each, “baptize” them, watch over them all night in prayer, and then bury them in their backyards near the flowerbeds: this being the customary burial for the “Little Angels” in Paraguay. How much humanity there was in those garbage dump workmen!

In my vocational process, it was never clear to me that I should be a priest. From the time of my novitiate up until after my studies in theology, being a brother was all that I felt called to be. Working in the trash dump, the workmen began to urge me to become a priest so that I could celebrate the Eucharist there among them. That is how the years went by, and my apostolate in Christ of Solidarity parish began taking shape. One fine day, I went off to do the Spiritual Exercises with one who had been my teacher in the novitiate, Father Tomás, and as a theme of discernment he proposed that I should consider an apostolate in the remote regions of the Amazon in Brazil. The Spirit was moving me in a new direction now, and I felt within me a voice telling me: “I want you to be ordained.” With many tears and without a single doubt or even the ability to doubt the calling coming from within me, I went to Tomás to tell him of this. We both cried with pleasure, thanking God. I wrote a letter to the Provincial, telling him about what had happened and saying that — *if he and his advisers agreed that it was the right thing to do* — I believed that God was calling me to be ordained a priest. When he asked me where the ordination should take place, I told him that I would have to consult with the workmen at the trash dump, since

they were the ones who had been God's mouthpiece for me in the first place. The workmen at the trash dump agreed that my ordination should take place there, the very place where I had first sensed the calling to become a priest, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 1997. The majority of my Jesuit companions from the province were present. That day we converted the trash dump into a grand cathedral. A few ecclesiastical officials protested, saying that it was not a worthy place for such a ceremony.

After four years of practising the Exercises of discernment and volunteering, I was finally assigned to the "Distrito dos Jesuitas da Amazônia" (DIA), in October of 1998. The chance had come to once again take up my backpack and sail down the waterways on a new two-month-pilgrimage, headed for Manaus, the headquarters of the DIA. I crossed the Paraguayan and Bolivian Chaco, and I climbed up through the Chiquitos Reservations — founded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Father José de Arce Rojas S.J., a missionary from the Canary Islands, the very same island where I was born, in fact — and I visited Trinidad and Moxos. How moving it was to sense the spirit of our Jesuit forefathers among those communities. If they could do it, with God's grace and in conditions much more precarious than the ones in which we found ourselves, then why couldn't we?

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As we traversed those jungles, I couldn't help reflecting on the fact that God had been so good to us and to me. In response to the harsh reality in those impoverished rural areas, the question arose: "How might we serve and assist these the least of God's people, in a place where the wounds of history run deep and human dignity is generally threatened?

At last, after six days on a boat down the Madeira River from Porto Velho, I arrived at Manaus, on the feast of St Francis of Assisi, August 4, 1998. During those two months, my fundamental sense of being on a pilgrimage never waned. "I will reveal myself to you in the Amazon:" it was not hard for me to imagine myself following in the footsteps of Ignatius. The moment would inevitably come in which "one had to close one's eyes and jump," leaving behind all securities, leaving behind those spaces that are controlled and familiar, letting oneself be guided, and planting "the seeds of Faith" in new lands, alongside the poorest of the poor — those who are excluded, those who are estranged — with the only certainty being that

God would not let the seeds we sow spoil; rather, they would germinate and grow.

I consider myself fortunate as a Jesuit to have been able to spend fourteen out of my twenty years in the Society joyously engaged in missionary work among such poor and remote communities. The wisdom of Arrupe is always with me: “All should act on behalf of the poor, many should be near to the poor, and a few should be as the poor.” But why are there so few of us now among the poorest of the poor, when there should be so many? And everyday there are fewer and fewer! It is true that the temptation constantly arises — as I see it — to rise up the administrative ranks, to assume managerial posts charged with preserving our institutions; but the danger is that we may lose sight of our most radical mission, whereby “all should act on behalf of the poor.” How do we discern and decide on the institutional forms that will be most helpful in advancing our mission of acting on behalf of the poor, being near the poor and being like the poor? How do we weave the interpersonal and inter-administrative networks — within and without the Jesuit Order— aimed at stimulating transformational synergy focused on the purpose of advancing our dedication to the poor?

### *Missionary Travels in the Amazon (DIA)*

My pastoral mission in the DIA is the most challenging and innovating that I have ever carried out as a Jesuit. The DIA was created in May of 1995, in the province of Bahía. Father Claudio Perani S.J. was the first superior. The total area of the DIA measures 3,100,000 square kilometers (six times the size of Spain!). It is an immense region in the heart of the Amazon with 8.5 million inhabitants, belonging to a great diversity of indigenous communities (more than 100), as well as immigrants from various nations and “caboclos” (mestizos).

The “Travelling Missionary Project” was created in order to meet the challenges presented by this region, a decision taken at the first conference concerning the DIA, in June of 1996. The project takes its inspiration from Jesus, particularly his itinerant way of life (“from village to village”) and his way of announcing the Kingdom of God. Of course, we were also inspired by the lives of some of the first Jesuits, those who travelled about the world as “light cavalry” and as “pilgrims,” at the service of the Church and in the imitation of Christ. It was very inspiring then, to learn of

the great mobility of the first brethren who came to this Amazon region in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Inexhaustible, they traveled in small boats with sails and oars, visiting all the towns and villages along the great fluvial network of the Amazon. They went up and down the Amazon River, from the Atlantic to the Andes. To this day it is difficult to get to some of these places; imagine what it must have been like for them in those days. In my travels I always try to remember those first inexhaustible itinerant brethren, and then the impossible doesn't seem so impossible.

The document of the bishops of the Amazon that states: "The Church becomes flesh and pitches her tent in the Amazon" (1997), also served as an inspiration for us. We had to use light equipment and manage with as little as possible in order to have the greatest mobility in our mission. And as a theologian friend of ours, Father Paulo Suess, used to say, "If the early Church was made on the road, then the Church in the Amazons was made on the river."

Various bishops and institutions were of great assistance to us in the development of our mission to carry out pastoral work in these distant communities, and the question was raised: "Why not place ourselves at the disposition of the communities, organizations and institutions of the region, with light and mobile services?" And we decided to follow our natural intuition to "support the initiatives of these entities," to "put ourselves on the side of" these institutions and communities, so as to complement them in their efforts.

At the beginning, the enthusiasm, courage and independence of Father Claudio Perani was essential to our efforts. With only twenty Jesuits in the DIA, he allowed three for the Travelling Team, telling us: "Commit yourselves to traveling all over the Amazon. Visit the communities, the local churches and organizations. Observe everything attentively and listen carefully to everything the people tell you - their demands and their hopes, their problems and solutions, their utopias and dreams. Participate in the daily life of the people. Observe and record everything. Take down what the people say to you, their very words. Don't worry about the results. The Spirit will take care of you, showing you the way." Then, opening the map corresponding to the DIA with a great smile, Claudio concluded: "Begin wherever you can!"

Initially, the mission was difficult for me. I arrived in Paraguay, offering my services to the indigenous peoples. They had written to me about the possibility of serving in Alto Solimões (on the triple Amazonian



border of Peru-Columbia-Brazil). I was excited about this idea and dreamed of founding a fixed and normal pastoral community, inserted among the Indians. But Father Claudio told me that he didn't have anyone to join me in setting up such a community, and that if I wanted to, I could join up with one of the teams of the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI, organ of the CNBB), or else I could join the recently formed Travelling Team. His proposal frightened me: joining a Travelling Team to work with any and all the indigenous peoples of the Amazon? If it had already been so difficult for me to learn Guaraní in Paraguay, how was I going to handle traveling among so many distinct peoples and cultures? I asked Claudio to give me a month for consultation, prayer and consideration of the proposal. During that period, the first thing I did each month was to pray over the map of the Amazon. At first I couldn't even open it: it filled me with great fear and my stomach turned at the thought of all that immense territory, seven times larger than Paraguay. Rivers and more rivers, jungle and more jungle: a territory where I knew no one. Where should I even begin? Yet the words of Father Claudio resounded again and again, "Begin wherever you can."

Then gradually I started opening up the map and studying it little by little and I began to overcome my fears. Deep inside me, with each passing day, I felt more and more convinced that the Lord was inviting me to embrace this project, to enter those jungles and submerge myself in those rivers, to plant the seeds of the Faith in those distant lands, even without understanding fully or having total clarity about what I was trying to accomplish. I recalled the following words: "One has to be buried like a seed in order to germinate," and "I will reveal myself to you." After considering the proposal in consultation with various individuals and organizations — many didn't seem to understand what it was all about — and praying hard, I decided to join up with the Travelling Team, because something told me deep inside my heart that it was God's will.

The first Travelling Team was made up of two Jesuit priests, Albano and Paulo Sergio (January 1998). Their mission was in the "favelas" on the peripheries of Manaus, and also with the riverside villagers on the banks of the rivers. In October of that same year, Sister Arizete C.S.A. and I joined, hoping to work beside the indigenous communities in coordination with the CIMI.

During the two first years of the project (1998-1999), each one of the members lived in his or her respective communities and we joined up

to travel, plan and evaluate as a team. This brought about certain difficulties with the communities to which we belonged, since the operations of each institution were somewhat disrupted by our comings and goings.

At the end of 1999 and beginning of 2000, reinforcements came: we were joined by Father Paco S.J. and Sister Odila F.S.C.J., as well as Tadeu and Claudia (laypersons). Each had been sent by a distinct institution. Together we brainstormed and finally decided to create the “Tent of the Travelling Community of the Holy Trinity,” with the objective of carrying our itinerant missionary work, and as a space in which to share our faith, life and pastoral vocation. We searched for a base of operations in the poor neighborhoods in Manaus, and found three shacks in a cluster: one for the men, one for the women, and one for the common activities of kitchen and chapel. Around us was a drug-dealing neighborhood, the unofficial name of which was “mouth holding a puff of smoke.” Our neighbours were fighters, poor people who had come from the interior. They took us in as if we were family and they helped us to learn to live there. Living in the community was a voluntary choice within the greater Project of Travelling Missionaries. As part of our pastoral community, we keep a small office offering assistance with employment or job placement.

An important step was taken in 2002 when the four institutions participating in the project joined forces to constitute an “inter-institutional network of services.” It was wonderful to see that the project also came to be supported by institutions other than the Jesuit Order and that there was collaboration and cooperation among a variety of organizations and institutions. It was particularly the women, those who had come from other sources, who helped us to see that this was truly an inter-institutional endeavor. The fact that the Jesuits had a minimal presence in this area, with minimal human and economic resources allocated to the Project, meant that we had to rely to a large degree on outside volunteerism, and we were very blessed in that sense. In our community we strove for a sense of solidarity, a place without bosses or proprietors, where we all helped to sustain each other, where there was mutual reciprocity, and where our identity would be defined according to the deeds of the group as a whole. This was the first time since I had become a Jesuit that I had ever experienced being in an environment where the Jesuits were not solely in charge of the community in which I lived.

Throughout the four “inter-institutional” meetings that we have held during the eight years since the initiation of our mission, the group of

participating institutions has grown from four to fifteen. In the beginning, no one could have imagined that this little experience would have awakened so much interest. This has startled us a little and we are forced to ask ourselves the question: "What is it that this proposal has that makes it so attractive?"

We have all learned so much in the midst of this diversity of human, spiritual and economic resources. Life and work in an inter-institutional setting was not part of our training as Jesuits, and I had to adapt to the new circumstances. So often one feels the need to shape the other according to his own likeness and image, wanting the other to be like him, and because of this the other person may not be able to contribute with his or her own richness and difference. Our community of the Holy Trinity has been a source of inspiration for me, in that it is an authentic attempt at finding unity in diversity.

As we went along we defined the general objectives of the project: "To listen, awaken, motivate and support the people, projects and initiatives along the riverbanks, among the indigenous villages and marginalized urban

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communities, through travelling missionary work and in collaboration with sympathetic people and units, so that ultimately, we all become agents of our own liberation, agents of our own histories and agents of the Lord; the objective being, therefore, to evangelize, humanizing even the most violent and aggressive environments, where there are great injustices and terrible sources of oppression, where human life is threatened, cultures disrespected and human rights

ignored."

Our specific objectives are as follows: "1. To learn about the daily lives of these people and how to serve them best. 2. To contribute with tailor-made assistance. 3. To progress in the formation of insertion communities, aiming at the propagation of the Faith through pastoral service in conjunction with popular movements, social organizations and indigenous groups. 4. To facilitate the exchange between the numerous social institutions already in existence with the aim of increasing solidarity and cooperation among them. 5. To systematically assess and evaluate the conditions of work and life in the places in which we live in order to best serve the people and social institutions there."

Little by little, we began to define some methodological principles as well: “Stay right beside the people, not a step ahead, not a step behind. The pace should be that of a canoe, with praxis and theory being the oars sending us forward. Moreover, we should ground ourselves in the logic and the worldview of the indigenous peoples, the marginalized urban residents, and the villagers of the riverbanks: deflating our egos, becoming smaller so that they might become larger; reciprocity and interdependence; listening and dialogue; insertion and acculturation; to register, systematize and assimilate our experiences; to exchange ideas and form networks.”

Another important step was starting the project we call “contemplating” the Amazonian reality and discerning the “unique faces” of its inhabitants, a process through which we would satisfy our calling from God to “implicate” them in our lives. We first had to respond to the question of agency: “With whom will we align ourselves?” - rather than “What are we going to do?” Our inspiration comes from the “Contemplation of the Incarnation” (SpEx 101-109) and Loyola’s emphasis on “times, places and peoples.” So we asked ourselves: “Who are the most marginalized in the Amazon today?” The faces of the people in the urban ghettos, the indigenous peoples, and the villagers of the riverbanks were the ones that came to mind. In the Amazon there are profound inter-relations among all three of these historical agents. That is why the Travelling Team is divided into three subgroups, one for each of the types mentioned. Together we try to study, understand and evaluate these three social groups, in order to serve them better.

It was a wonderfully new experience for me as a Jesuit to be active in a place where there were few preconceived notions clouding our discernment and our choices. Everything there had to be constructed from scratch and that is why we could “waste time” searching for unique solutions to the unique challenges facing us. I recalled the words of Arrupe: “I’m not worried about the Jesuit who makes a mistake, I’m worried about the Jesuit who tries to solve today’s problem with yesterday’s solution.”

In between our missionary travels, , all the members of the Project meet three times a year for ten days to rest, evaluate, study, plan, pray, converse and live the communal life. Every two years we go on retreat as a group, and each intermediate year we do the same with our respective mother institutions.

Having spent eight months out of the year with a backpack over our shoulders, we enjoy the opportunity at these meetings and retreats to

evaluate our “itinerant spirituality,” as we lived it and found sustenance in it. “We had been traveling both internally and geographically, letting ourselves be carried along by the winds of God, discerning his Will among the common lives of the poor, the estranged and the marginalized.” This form of spirituality is one which follows the cycle of Incarnation-Death-Resurrection, and one which requires a constant “stepping outside of oneself in order to walk out and join the other or serve the other: it requires mobility and lightness, connectedness and reciprocity, acculturation, intercultural and ecumenical dialogue, friendship, solidarity and fraternity, as well as good humor for laughing at our own limitations and those of others.” We try to live a “spirituality defined by a sense of ‘being with.’” Being with others, the beloved of our Lord, where the ultimate Other is most assuredly present... “Being with those whom nobody wants to be with, being where nobody wants to be and being as nobody wants to be (Father H. Pepe S.J.).”

The Travelling Team sees itself as a catalyst for inter-institutional cooperation and services, something of a small catalyst in the midst of a larger and more complex social system. The Team is more like a thread than a spool in the network, like a group of bees pollinating the forest of fruit trees, more like a needle and thread for sewing than a woven cloth, more like a seed than a plant, more like light cavalry than heavy artillery or snipers, more yeast than dough, more salt than food.

The Itinerant Project is open to laypersons and religious persons from diverse congregations, to priests and to others who want to join forces with the marginalized urban working-class, the indigenous and the riverbanks dwellers all over the immense Amazon region. Their respective institutions send each of the participants in our programme to us and fund their participation.

At present, our Team consists of fourteen brethren, a mixture of lay and religious, from eight institutions (Sisters of St. Agustin, Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Sisters of the Holy Trinity, the World Pastoral Commission, the Indigenous Missionary Council, the German Jesuit Society of Volunteers, Marianists and Jesuits). And there are various other organizations and individuals that would like to join in our proposal (first in line being the Missionaries of Consolation and a diocesan priest from Perú). The Travelling Team has in two nuclei: the “Holy Trinity,” with its base in Manaus (Brazil), and with seven members; and the “Three Borders,” with its triple base in Tabatinga (Brazil), Leticia (Colombia) and Santa Rosa (Perú),

also with seven members. Additionally, there are some other members who collaborate on a part-time basis.

Soon we hope to go about creating small “travelling cells” on the borders of the Amazonian countries because these are the most strategic places, where the wounds run deepest, and where new and creative possibilities of service lie before us. Besides the bases at Manaus and at the triple border Brazil-Perú-Columbia in Alto Río Solimões, we are also collaborating at the triple border Venezuela-Guyana-Brazil, and beginning to visit yet another triple border, Bolivia-Perú-Brazil, in order to look at possibilities of starting up another Team base there in the near future, depending on the interest generated among the pre-existing pastoral organizations in the region. Of course, our perspective will remain the same, always striving to serve and support the needs of the local churches, pastoral organizations, poor urban communities, riverbank dwellers and indigenous peoples. And this we will do by exchanging ideas, creating networks of solidarity, and enriching our lives together.

As the local troubadour sings: “The dream that is dreamed by one man doesn’t amount to much, while the dream that is dreamed by all comes true.” Or, paraphrasing the great poet, Antonio Machado: “Pilgrim, there is no fixed road laid out before you; you will create your own road as you make your pilgrimage.” So let us start off now on our pilgrimage, pulling oars alongside the peoples of the Amazon.