

# One Church, One Journey

A process of ecclesial renewal  
2020-2024

Message of His Grace,  
Archbishop Charles Jude Scicluna  
On the official launch of the document

# ONE CHURCH, ONE JOURNEY

It is with much pleasure that today, the solemnity of the most Blessed Trinity, I am formally launching the document “One Church, One Journey.” The document is a hopeful vision for the Church in Malta and initiates a process of renewal inspired by this hope.

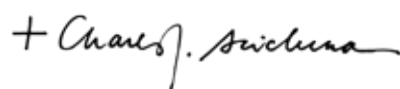
I am grateful to the many who contributed to bringing this document to life, including its multiple revisions especially after the sudden changes that we all experienced during these past months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

‘One Church, One Journey’ offers a vision of becoming “church” rooted in that promoted by Pope Francis in particular in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*. Its presentation of a process of renewal is a local interpretation of the Pope’s own desire for renewal for the Universal Church. The document also indicates the specific processes that the Archdiocese is committing itself to start and implement in these next four years.

I call upon all entities of the Church in Malta—parishes, religious congregations, schools, lay movements, families and all others—to be imbued by the spirit

of this vision and to journey together as one Church on this process of discernment. The renewal that we all hope for is not something being “imposed from above,” but will flourish organically, in all sectors of the Church, as it grows and unfolds in many aspects.

As from today, this document is accessible online on the website of the Archdiocese of Malta [church.mt](http://church.mt). I invite you all to browse through it and to ponder it personally and in your small communities so we all participate in and contribute to this process of ecclesial renewal. Enlightened and led by the one Spirit, as one Pilgrim People, we will continue writing the story of our local Church that began when St. Paul, the Apostle himself, was welcomed on our shores. Always grateful that he brought to us the Word of salvation, we ask for his intercession to continue protecting our country and the Church in Malta.



Today, June 7 2020, St. Paul’s Grotto,  
Rabat, Malta





# Welcome

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**A**t the Diocesan Assembly of November 2018, when the local Church reflected on our present ecclesial reality by looking back at the outcome of the **2003 Documents of the Diocesan Synod**, Archbishop Charles Jude Scicluna proposed the **Lukan post-resurrection narrative of the disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24:13-36)** to inspire a process of ecclesial discernment towards pastoral reform.

The following year, a draft document of this “process,” a method of reflection divided in eight steps, was presented at the Diocesan Assembly of 2019. Its intent was that, eventually, it would guide every entity in the Church in the same process towards communal discernment. The document evolved over months through many encounters with constituents in the Church that offered a snapshot of the spiritual reality of the local Church. Hence, it was also moulded with the specific intent of eliciting growth in attitudes and practices

that require special attention among the People of God in Malta.

The Diocesan Assembly of 2019 was in itself an important step in this ecclesial discernment as those present—representatives of all sectors in the Archdiocese—prayed, reflected and conversed together on the process, taking their insights to the whole Assembly.

These insights, together with many others that were shared by persons and groups between November 2019 and February 2020, were collated, reflected upon, and in these past months—especially in light of this experience of COVID-19—distilled as the concrete pastoral initiatives that the Archdiocese commits itself to implement in these next years.

These commitments are also being presented on this website to model to all other entities in the Church how the eightfold process of ecclesial reform leads from spiritual renewal to pastoral action. All parishes, schools, religious congregations, lay movements, ministries of service, and every other Catholic entity in Malta are being invited to participate, in their own unique way, in this process of ecclesial discernment towards pastoral reform. Thus, ecclesial renewal will flourish organically, in all sectors of the Church, not because it is imposed from above, but as it unfolds in many aspects.

This process will be truly ecclesial, rebirthing us as “One Church, One Journey,” because led by the one Spirit, who is Life and always promises to give us life in abundance. It is only in the Spirit that the Church is purified and

that we become true missionary disciples of Christ in our land. The same Spirit emboldens us to remain committed on a journey that demands resilience and creativity that God’s Kingdom may be truly manifested in our midst.

**Ecclesial renewal will flourish organically, in all sectors of the Church, not because it is imposed from above, but as it unfolds in many pockets.**

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The Bishops’ decision to offer to the local Church a “process of ecclesial renewal” is also in light of Pope Francis’ insistence that the Church must initiate life-giving processes in a spirit of discernment and constant dialogue.

Thus, in light of this new reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Archdiocese is formally initiating this “Process for Ecclesial Renewal,” so, even in these dark times, we continue writing the story of our local Church that began when St. Paul, the Apostle himself, was welcomed on our shores. This “Process for Ecclesial Renewal,” is both a vision of the Church we hope to be, and the concrete steps for our renewal—each community in its own unique way—but that, as we share in the same Spirit, truly makes us one pilgrim people, “One Church, One Journey,” in Malta.





# A “pilgrim people” in Malta

The Church missioned to witness the Good News in word, gesture and deed

## The Icon of Emmaus

**T**his past year, inspired by the “Icon of Emmaus,” many bodies of the local Church have reflected upon their hope of deepening the inculturation of the faith in today’s Malta. Led by Bishop Joseph Galea-Curmi, a process of indepth listening with priests, religious and laity was initiated to deepen the meaning of the word Christ is speaking to the Church in Malta through the Emmaus pericope. Not only could we, as a local Christian community, whose faith has deep historical roots, identify with the disciples—man and woman—who left Jerusalem disheartened



and afraid to walk to Emmaus; but we could also begin to taste the conversion they experienced when the Risen Christ encountered them on their route and, filled with new zeal, they returned to the flock in the Holy City.

**The eightfold process that was formulated is a description of the necessary markers of a synodal journey—a desire and deeply held hope that, just like the disciples of Emmaus, each one of us among the baptised in Malta recognises our deepest fears, angst, disappointments and suffering ... and rejoices! Together we are being invited to a journey where, as pilgrim people, we renew our vocation as missionary disciples on our land.**

Part of this journey might entail coming to terms with our weakness and vulnerability; with our unfaithfulness or pride; with how we have failed to be salt, light and leaven in this land, but instead thought we could witness the gospel merely by being “Catholic Malta” and by propagating attitudes

of rigidity. But even if, like the disciples of Emmaus, we have tasted the bitterness of death, like them we are being invited to experience the resurrection and to be reborn as Christ’s Church.

Indeed, the disciples of Emmaus encountered the Risen Christ at their darkest hour. Likewise, it is in our own “Maltese” hour of darkness that Christ is inviting us to a renewed discipleship, to a life bestowing evangelisation, to service rendered from the heart, and—like Nicodemus who went to meet Jesus in the darkness of night—to a new birth in the Spirit for the Church in Malta.

**This process is thus  
not a series of tasks, ... but  
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This is the hope and the challenge that our Shepherds proffered to us when they chose the Emmaus account as inspiration for our personal and communal discernment as Church: that we appropriate fully our identity and calling as the People of God in Malta, who as sinners are missioned to evangelise the land. In one Spirit, we are encouraged to spread our branches wide, to touch all aspects of life in our land and seas, and thus to shelter, to beautify, and to become a sign of new life in present day Malta.

**This process is thus not a series of tasks, as though the Church were a “project” of ours, but it is an invitation, so that, as disciples, we may once again, sit at the Master’s feet and listen to what He has to teach us.**

The **four attitudes**, inspired by Pope Francis’ programmatic Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (November 24, 2013), that the local Church is being invited to embrace and apply to our daily living, are direly needed in our country. Only a Church that

can understand deeply her vocation to be light of the world and her mission to be salt of the earth can fulfil this need. We are not called to impose our beliefs and opinions or, even worse, ourselves, but, as leaven in dough, we are called to die so that the bread is transformed into the food that gives life to our brethren (Maltese or otherwise). **A Church that listens, welcomes, accompanies the other (as we take care of one another) is also a Church that opens wide its doors and goes forth to spread the Good News.**

## **COVID-19: A challenge that emboldens us**

It is also a sign of the times that the local Church—together with the Universal Church—is being challenged to be creative, by stripping down to the bare essentials of the Gospel, at this extraordinary moment in our recent human history: the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Church, called to be “the body of Christ” in her witness of his salvation, is being challenged to lead the world through a process of renewal, where our very experience of being human, of being “embodied spirits,” needs to be “born of water and spirit” (Jn 3:5) as we reevaluate how we have been living as one global community, as one community of nations, in a world mediated by digital technologies. Pope Francis’ teaching in *Laudato si’* (May 24, 2015), for a conversion to a profound “integral ecological flourishing” in distinction to lifestyles dominated by a “technocratic paradigm,” is being

revealed to be more urgent than ever.

Indeed, it is perhaps the most profound irony that, while we are living the unnatural situation of human isolation, out of a profound desire for mutual solidarity and social responsibility to protect our bodies (both personal and collective), we are also seeking to be more present to one another through an extended or “mediated” presence, that makes us experience the world as if we have transcended our very flesh.

**Let us allow the Holy Spirit to guide us along this eightfold process of renewal as One Church along One Journey!**

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This new human mode of being, where we experience ourselves as being so much more than our physicality, and still so vulnerable and conditioned by the flesh, is the profound paradox that is leading us to rethink who we are being called to be, as Church, in this new “digital” environment. Through our ecclesial witness of the Gospel, we are being called to “humanise” and steward to integral flourishing what so far has been lived, on a global and local scale, in an illusory manner in our economy, in our political systems, even in our daily lives.

This new challenge is of truly inculturating the Gospel in a new digitally augmented context that must not forget its rootedness in the particularity of every human story, of every human land, of every “people.”

The prophetic gesture of the Synod of the Amazon reminded precisely of this: every culture’s uniqueness bound to its land, to its history, to its worship, must not be forgotten, must not be washed away, as we enter more decisively in a global digital environment. Our temptation so far has been to follow the “modern” logic that pretends that land, unique stories and even physical bodies matter little or not at all. The challenge being revealed glaringly by a pandemic—no less—is that not only do they matter, but we must renew our commitment to honour our bodies, our presence in the flesh, as we also learn to take responsibility for our extended “flesh” through technological mediation.

Perhaps COVID-19 could be a learning experience for us, waking us up to drink of God’s mercy. It is indeed how we as Church are being



called to be renewed by recovering the essence of the Good News, and allowing it to transform us, to discern fresh ways of becoming true Christians in a new world: in our worship, in our prophetic speech and teaching, in our daily witness in concrete acts of charity.

Our local Church, our People of God has an important role to play because of the uniqueness and richness of our tradition; because of our extreme resilience and ingenuity. **Let us allow the Holy Spirit to guide us along this eightfold process of renewal as One Church along One Journey!** Our commitments as People of God for the next years will need to consider the new circumstances that will gradually unfold. Thus, we are being invited to a process of ecclesial discernment that is even more necessary to truly consider how the Spirit is guiding our people’s flourishing in this particular reality.



## Waiting eagerly for the Holy Father's visit to our islands

“They showed us unusual kindness” (Acts 28:2)

In this context of extreme challenge but, nonetheless, of an invitation to spiritual renewal as Church in Malta, it is indeed a blessing that our land can still hope to welcome His Holiness, Pope Francis, in the near future.

**The chosen theme** —“*They showed us unusual kindness*” (Acts 28:2)—reminds how the Church in Malta was born in that act of “unusual kindness” shown by the people on this land. Acting with “unusual kindness” is the gift and mission of the People of God in Malta to one another and to the Universal Church.

The heart of Pope Francis’ theology is an Argentinian appropriation of Vatican II’s theology of “the

People of God.”<sup>1</sup> As first presented in *Evangelii gaudium*, 217-237, on various occasions throughout these years of his pontificate, and most recently in the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia* (12 February 2020), the “new” teaching that the Pope is inviting us to ponder is that, as “missionary disciples,” we are never simply called or missioned *alone*. We are rather called and missioned as “a people”: and not a “people” in an “ideological” sense, but always in a “real” incarnate manner, and therefore as a people who “inculturates” the Gospel in their unique way.

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<sup>1</sup> Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 21 November 1964. In its second chapter it presents the Church as “the People of God.”



**An “incarnate” people is a “cultured” (“cultivated”) people: with roots deep in a land, a strong trunk that reflects its growth in history, and that always branches out in acts of worship (*cultus*) that bear fruit.**

The distinctiveness of this theology of being an enculturated “people of God” is reflected in the signature “cluster of concerns” of this Pontificate:

- the plight of displaced peoples (cut off from land and history);
- the care of our common home;
- the need to tend wounds in the “cultural” fabric, in particular deepseated conflict;
- the importance of openness to encounter and dialogue;
- the emphasis on initiating processes rather than dominating territories;
- the attentiveness to the little ones who, in their simplicity, express most eloquently their devotion to God.

The visit of Pope Francis to our islands—fragments of an ancient crossway between lands, right in the middle of a sea of ancient civilisations—gives the opportunity for a new articulation of the Pope’s “theology of the people.”

The “Maltese” who for millennia have lived on this land are not necessarily bound by blood, but, like a tree, they are rooted into the land, in history and through *cultus*. Being a “safe haven” in rough seas; a fragile space where civilisations encounter; puts the onus on all the people to “cultivate” their living together: by building a *polis* that can stand the test of time; through adapting justly to complex social relations;

through nurturing a shared horizon of meaning.

**That kindness  
is a mark of  
friendship extended  
to the “other”**

Most strikingly, Pope Francis had also initially chosen to visit our shores on Pentecost Sunday 2020, evoking a desire in the “people of God who gather on this land” to be *another*, “born again” or reborn “from above”.<sup>2</sup> He is helping us develop anew a sense of mission to “cultivate” all the people on this land by recalling our first encounter with the Gospel: “*Malat*, from which Malta derives its name, meant a safe haven in the culture and language of the ancient seafaring Phoenician people.”<sup>3</sup> As St Luke narrates in the Acts of the Apostles, what characterised the people of Malta is that “they showed us unusual kindness” (Acts 28:2).

**That kindness is a mark of  
friendship extended to the**

2 Charles J. Scicluna, Homily on Ash Wednesday, February 26, 2020, <https://church.mt/lent-is-the-spring-season-of-the-soul-when-we-are-born-again-the-archbishop-on-ash-wednesday/>

3 <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2020-02/pope-francis-malta-apostolic-visit-scicluna.html>

**“other”; an arm reaching out to the “stranger” in perilous waters with the promise of fraternity. The Maltese Islands are not “a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:8). But they are a “safe haven” for true encounter, where peoples from all over the Mediterranean have come together, set roots, exchanged their cultures and knit one story to become “one people” whose defining characteristics are resilience, ingenuity and generosity.**

It is thus a trauma to our very being a “Maltese” people when fear, covetousness, violence and division rupture our social fabric, tearing us apart: one (or a group) against the other, seeking to outdo and overcome those whom we make our enemies.

It is not diversity that threatens our unity as “one people.” Rather, for millennia, differences—whether ethnic, cultural, or even religious—have been grafted onto an everstronger trunk and have

enriched the soil that has fed our identity as uniquely open and adaptable to new experiences and challenges.

**As today’s secular Malta opens its shores to more migrants; as our small nation becomes increasingly plural and cosmopolitan, we are challenged to recover that original promise of being a “safe haven” and to be renewed as a symbol of unity-in-diversity in a global digital context.**

**Malta, the island at the heart of the Mediterranean, can be a model of encounter, dialogue and reconciliation. What we live face-to-face, we can extend to our digital presence.**

**This responsibility falls more decisively on the “people of God” on these islands who, through their “unusual kindness” shown to the Apostle himself, today are called to witness Christ’s healing presence through listening, welcoming, accompanying and going forth.**



## An invitation for a synodal journey 2020-2024

*One Church, One Journey* invites all the People of God in Malta to a process for ecclesial renewal that can grow organically. The process is to be taken as a synodal “journey”—following the same synodal method of the Maltese Diocesan Synod 1999–2003—spanning not only space and time, but introducing us progressively to the complex reality in which we are living and, thus, ever deeper into the challenge of becoming “a pilgrim people”. Therefore, every step indicates the same number of points which open us to reflection: from the first unequivocal step, to the eighth step which are being presented as the eight ways through which we can truly become a Church that discerns; a Church who, like an orchestra, can perform harmonious music through diverse instruments since it is directed by the same Holy Spirit of God.

**The Holy Spirit is the power, hidden in our hearts, who unites us and emboldens us to tread, even in the deepest darkness, through all challenges, to heal and sustain one another and those entrusted to us in our land. He lights every step of the way; He is the fire that never dies away; through Him we “wear Christ,” embodying Him. Just as our Master bestowed tenderness to all those he encountered, so we gaze at those who cross our path.**

Thus, inspired by Christ’s encounter with his disciples on the road to Emmaus, and while remembering the birth of the Maltese Church by showing “unusual kindness” (Acts 28:2), we will continue to drink from the source of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be renewed as God’s Holy People in this land. Each of our local communities will continue the



journey of communal discernment **to listen, welcome, accompany and go forth** in concrete ways in our local “field hospital” where Christ desires to meet all suffering men, women and children through “his body and bride,” the Church.

**While studying the eightfold process presented at the 2019 Diocesan Assembly, in the next four years:**

- every home and small community who gathers in Christ’s name,
- every lay movement,
- every religious congregation,
- every ecclesial institution that serves society—especially the many Church schools and institutions of *diakonia*—and
- every parish,

needs to seek to be attuned more faithfully to its particular gifts and charisms of the Holy Spirit and **to discern** the call to do greater things in Christ’s name:

- **by listening to his Word** and growing in our **contemplation** of the divine expressed in our prayer and communal worship; from this wellspring of Life, we can open our hearts to truly **listen to one another and to the signs of the times**;
- **by welcoming strangers** in our midst, and thus seeking concrete acts of **healing and reconciliation** especially in service to the most vulnerable;
- **by accompanying one another** to actuate concrete reforms in the process of Christian lifelong **formation and personal and communal integration**;

- **by being sent forth** and thus discerning the concrete ways in which we are called to **evangelise** and **witness God’s salvific mercy through concrete acts of service**.

In the context of our witnessing as a Church, we recognise the value of **powerful gestures** that are prophetic signs of truth, justice, healing and reconciliation. Gestures speak not only in a way that moves, but in a way that exposes structural sin, that challenges deeper reflection and that proposes discernment for a way forward that conforms more transparently to the Good News.

As disciples of Christ, we must also emulate the Master, who

- chose to save through **obedience**: hence we must choose God’s will and his glory and flee the temptation to desire our own glory, to serve our own interests, or to instil rivalry and division because of our hardened heart;
- chose to save by **becoming poor**: hence the importance of a dignified elegance, of

Each of our local communities will continue the journey of communal discernment to listen, welcome, accompany and go forth in concrete ways.

a sense of measure in an otherwise consumerist world, of a beauty that attracts simply without ostentatious display;

- chose to save **by relating with friends:** hence the central importance of relationships, characterised by a disinterested love, each according to his/her state;

- chose to save by living **in the world,** by touching its wounds and by taking on 'the smell of his sheep': hence the call to become one with the complex realities of the world and to become light, salt and leaven—a sign of true hope for our land.



A photograph of a massive, ancient tree with a thick, gnarled trunk and sprawling branches. The tree is set against a background of dense green foliage. The trunk is covered in rough, textured bark and has several large, hollowed-out sections. The branches are thick and twisted, extending outwards in all directions. The ground at the base of the tree is covered in dry leaves and twigs.

# The Eightfold Process



1. The heart of the Christian life is the encounter with Christ who calls us to himself and sends us forth.
2. It is fulfilled by proclaiming the Good News (**Evangelisation**) through concrete acts of charity (**Diakonia**).
3. The experience of Christ forms us as a **“Holy People of God”** who:
  - seeks integral ecological **flourishing** through an active stewardship of our land and relationships;
  - is **reconciled** with its history and lives in the hope of the resurrection;
  - **celebrates** the Paschal Mystery in gratitude for all the gifts received.

Christ invites all missionary disciples to participate in his salvific mission of healing and renewal.

4. The Church is called to live the **four ecclesial dynamics**, that Christ teaches us in the story of Emmaus:
  - **to listen (to his Word);**
  - **to welcome (the “poor and the stranger”);**
  - **to accompany (one another); and**
  - **always to go forth (without fear).**

Thus, the Church is missioned to stitch tears in our cultural fabric, to heal hearts and minds, to renew relationships with God and one another in our land, and to initiate processes for spiritual transformation.

5. That we may resist the temptation to fragmentation and of building ghettos in

the *ecclesia*, we recall how as **disciples**—*sinner*s who are called by Christ—we are all **bonded as one in the Holy Spirit to be missioned in distinct but complementary ways:**

- as ordained ministers;
- through the different charisms of the religious;
- as lay ministers;
- as Christians in society;
- as those who, through questioning their faith or seeking it, live their one baptism (or desire for baptism) from the peripheries.

6. Our witness of the Good News must be lived in synergy in all the **distinct “spaces”** in which the Church seeks **to sow seeds to grow “in time” in today’s Malta:**

- at the peripheries,
- in “the city”,
- in digital spaces,
- in state institutions,
- in ecclesial structures, and
- in the domestic sphere.

7. Experiences of **suffering**, which shock, traumatise and stultify (see Lk 24:17), are always the *kairos* where Christ desires to encounter every man and woman to offer his healing and build his Church. Thus, as People of God we are first and foremost missioned in the “field hospital after the battlefield” where suffering is greatest. There, wounds can be nursed to health to become marks of his glorified resurrected body:

- wounds in our memory, personal and collective;
- wounds in intimate relationships, especially in our families;
- wounds in our ecclesial structures and institutions,

- stemming from a history of clericalism;
- wounds in the People of God of lethargy or misdirected zeal, of strife and division;
- wounds in our public life, especially our tribalism, greed and political corruption, *omertà*, hatred and discrimination;
- wounds in our ecology, the uglification of human spaces and all kinds of sensory and mental pollution in physical and virtual spaces;
- wounds to our individual and collective soul as we engage in mindless activity that disconnects from the transcendent love of the Father and impoverishes our ability to contemplate the beauty of God.

The way the “People of God” gives witness to Christ as his Church is always dynamic. In considering the needs of the “poor” whom Christ desires to encounter first; in tending to their flourishing and ongoing formation; the Church is Christ’s hands and feet in the world, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

8. **To be missionary disciples is to be attentive to a process of co-creation with the Holy Spirit that demands ongoing personal and communal discernment in the ecclesia:**

- Personal discernment in my private affairs;
- Personal (and communal) discernment on behalf of those I am entrusted to care for;
- Personal (and communal) discernment to govern institutions for the common good;
- Personal (and communal) discernment to steward the earth;
- Ecclesial discernment in the domestic Church or small Christian community;
- Ecclesial discernment in the parish;
- Ecclesial discernment in the religious congregations and lay movements with ties to the universal Church;
- Ecclesial discernment on behalf of the Archdiocese.

As a particular community of disciples being missioned in today’s Malta, we embark on a process of ecclesial discernment that reflects Christ’s desire for our:

- *contemplation (a Church that **listens**)*
- *building communion through reconciliation (a Church that **welcomes**)*
- *formation (a Church that **accompanies**)*
- *service and mission (a Church that **goes forth**)*





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# Our (re)encounter with Christ

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Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. (Lk 24:31)

**T**he Evangelist Luke constructs the Emmaus pericope as a prototypical narrative of the encounter of Jesus' disciples with the Risen Christ. The disciples, who had followed the Nazarene itinerant preacher, healer and miracle worker—a “prophet” whom they believed to be the Messiah promised to Israel (Lk 24:19, 21)—were devastated, disillusioned and afraid after the shock of his sudden crucifixion. Like Peter himself, who went back to his business after their Teacher's execution (see Jn 21:13), they also left Jerusalem. They seemed oblivious to the women's testimony and to the empty tomb (see Lk 24:22-24). They not only hoped to

pick up the pieces of their lives, but, more likely, to save their own skin. In their belief that the Lord was dead, the community itself was breaking apart: each fending for themselves; each doing their own thing and going their own way. *Only in Christ could they be one.*

On their journey away from Jerusalem, the Risen Christ seeks them and walks all the way with them. He even explains to them the Scriptures about himself (see Lk 24:27), as he had done many times before.

But they failed to recognise him. Their eyes remained blinded; their faith indifferent.

It took one slight gesture of kindness and hospitality towards the stranger (see Lk 24:29)—one gesture that broke through their self-referentiality—for the Risen Christ to reveal himself to them.

It takes but one seemingly insignificant sign of our willingness to see him, for Christ to open our eyes.

But as “their eyes were opened and they recognised him,” they could only bear to witness his glory for just one fleeting moment. “He disappeared from their sight” (Lk 24:31). The light of his transfigured presence was too much to bear until they would be perfected by receiving and embodying the Holy Spirit as the *ecclesia*, the “Holy People of God.”

That one moment of encounter with the Risen Christ was enough to transform the disoriented disciples walking to Emmaus into true “missionary disciples” (*Evangelii*

*gaudium*, 24, 119-121, 173) and the seed of the *ecclesia*.

- They are emboldened to return to Jerusalem there and then (see Lk 24:33);
- they receive the Holy Spirit from Christ himself who reappears to the group reunited in the Holy City (see Lk 24:36);
- they witness his ascension (see Lk 24:51).
- In response, as the remnant of Israel, they worship at the temple in Thanksgiving (see Lk 24:53).
- Thus, they anticipate the Last Days that, as Luke recalls from the Prophet Joel, are inaugurated in the descent of the Holy Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2:17).



The disciples who had followed Jesus, but were lost and afraid at his death, become the first “body of Christ” witnessing the joy of his salvation to the world. They not only proclaim the Good News to the desolate, but, in the power that descends upon them, they heal the

sick, raise the lowly, forgive sins and build communities of friends where there are “no longer Jew or Greek, ... no longer slave or free, ... no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). As Jesus had promised them: “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these... **If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it**” (Jn 14:12-14).

**The miraculous gifts of the Spirit bestowed on the chosen ones—“To each is given the**

**manifestation of the Spirit for the common good: to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues” (1 Cor 12: 7-10)—spread like wildfire as the Church takes root all over the known world... including on our own island.**





## A Church that proclaims and serves

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They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem. (Lk 24: 32-33a)

**U**nder the loving gaze of the Mother of God, the Church of St Paul continues to proclaim and serve. The Maltese people have been blessed with receiving the salvific Word from the Apostle himself and of living it in acts of faithful and generous service. Acts 28 testifies to our kind hospitality to Paul and the other captives and soldiers who survived the storm. **Our ancestors were not only among the first to receive the Gospel:**



**they lived it by offering refuge to the stranger.** And, notwithstanding our turbulent history, we also sought to continue the tradition through the centuries, in particular by tending the sick and healing the wounded who come to our shores, a service epitomised by the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St John and Jerusalem (The Order of Malta). Today, we are challenged to carry

on supporting migrants who risk their lives in our waters or who seek a new life in our land. We continue to care for the sick, for the poor, for those who feel broken by life among us.

Above all, we are called to place the safeguarding of human life and human dignity at the centre of our proclamation and service.

## **Our Church continues to bear fruit through the spiritual wellsprings of Evangelisation and Diakonia**



In the last century, the wellsprings of Evangelisation and *Diakonia* overflowed as St Ġorġ Preca nurtured a spirituality of catechesis that enriched our parishes and, increasingly, other nations. Likewise, much of the post-Conciliar renewal of the local Church has been nurtured through praying with the Word in many new lay movements. Monsignor Giuseppe De Piro and others established religious orders of men and women missionaries who seek to serve brothers and sisters wherever the Spirit sends them.

Monsignor Mikiel Azzopardi founded *id-Dar tal-Providenza* that continues to serve the most cherished of our children through the kindness of the Maltese people.

To this very day, the Maltese Church, in collaboration with the Maltese State, continues to support the neediest: whether in homes for the elderly, in caring for the dying, in raising children who originate from difficult backgrounds, in helping those with material needs or problems with addiction, those who

suffered domestic abuse, or those who are seeking to rebuild a home as migrants and refugees.

The Word proclaimed bearing fruit in the concrete acts of mercy of our people, can also be read in our very landscape shaped over the centuries.

Religious monuments tell the story of salvation and celebrate the glory of God in stone, art and national treasures. Much of our religious heritage, recalls our special prayers to Mary, Mother of God, who interceded for us to experience God's grace in moments of extreme hardship—of illness and death, of hunger and poverty, of siege and war. Innumerable times in our long history, when our forebears trusted that only God could sustain them in moments of trial, Word and Charity, **Evangelisation and *Diakonia* were the two hands that built our Church as, in turn, it raised her arms in thanksgiving and worship.**

**Today, Malta may not be experiencing the ravages of extreme famine, plague or strife. Nonetheless, our people's soul seems weary because of indifference; perplexed by rapid cultural change; exhausted through the pace of our new lifestyles; burdened by silent suffering. Our psychological wounds seem as perilous as the physical wounds of the "field**

**hospital after battlefield." It is just as critical that they are urgently sutured and nursed.**

Our psychological wounds  
seem as perilous as  
the physical wounds of  
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battlefield."

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**As the local Christian community yearns to taste again the transformative power of the encounter with Christ, and as it seeks to nurture its weary spirit through his Word and to be reformed through imitating his self emptying love, we must not only read the signs of the times, but remember who we were called to be as the one Holy People of God on this island.**

**Only thus can the Church be missioned anew in today's socio-political reality.**





3

## One Holy People of God in Malta

24

“We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” (Lk 24:21)

**T**he Christian life is cruciform. In daily life, we journey **horizontally**, moving from our homes to workplaces, from our schools to leisure places, from our churches to the peripheries, and increasingly even in digital spaces. We journey ahead while constantly aware that our story of faith, passed on to us by our ancestors, opens us up **vertically** to the hope of the *Parousia*. “*Time is greater than space*” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 222-225) because time bridges every moment of our God-willed created existence to the *eschaton*. But that existence is ordered to community as God is Communion; that “life” given finds its



fulfilment in ecclesiality, where we are transformed to a *Holy People* of God bound in the love of the Holy Spirit and the joy of the original *kerygma*. The universality of the Church rests upon the manifold unique expressions of being “God’s Holy People.”

Catholicity is the testimony of each of humanity’s distinct “peoples”, who *together* embody the dazzling beauty of God’s salvation and divinisation promised on all flesh.

“As this broken bread was once scattered on the mountains, and after it had been brought together became one, so may your Church

be gathered together from the ends of the earth unto Your Kingdom” (Didache 9.4).

The uniqueness of every people is expressed in **its particular culture**. In being the “whole greater than the sum of parts” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 234-237) that reflects a people’s ethos or soul, culture is also the rich soil in which the people’s distinctive witness of the Good News grows to bear fruit.

**Three aspects build a “people” to become a true ecclesia, a unique “Holy People of God”: their land, their history, their expression of faith.**

## **The harmonious and integral way in which the people live on their land**

In his encyclical *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis calls for an “ecological conversion,” where just relations among all members of society—indeed, how they come together to build a “civilisation of love”—also assume a devoted stewardship of the earth and the natural environment. Greed plunders not merely from the possessions of

others, but ultimately from the earth itself. It destroys economic, social and political relations. But finally, it destroys the people themselves who become disconnected from the “mother”—the earth, the sea, the air—that gives them life.

Being attuned to how all is interconnected—to how the unique





identity of a people flourishes through the particular physical, social, cultural reality that they are gestated into—allows them to be truly sensitive to how God encounters his people in their particular reality. As Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, God

encourages their personal ongoing conversion, to become a people who build a nation, that contributes to the healing of the whole ecology. Pope Francis encourages an integral ecological conversion that places human life and human dignity at the centre.

## **The people's history**

Every generation must aim not only to bear and nurture its children, but also to undo the mistakes of the past, to finish what their forebears left undone, and to fulfil their hopes and aspirations. History shapes us not only in our bodies—we carry the genes of those who came before us—but it also recreates our collective soul, as we carry the remnants of stories that shaped past lives and we are entrusted with passing them on to future generations.

History is, after all, about the realm of the dead still palpable among the

living. In our Christian tradition, it is about the souls for whose purgation we pray that they may see God face to face; it is about the saints whom we venerate and whose intercession we humbly ask for. Ultimately, it is about the “communion of saints” who truly worships together not only across space, but throughout time and for eternity.

But being anchored in our history is not about being nostalgic for the past; it is about receiving our stories, consuming their pathos, and learning their (often) harsh moral lessons, to live together responsibly



in the present. Dismissing the past, on the other hand, or pretending it never happened, is enslaving; because what fails to be appropriated will exert its influence deterministically, robbing a people of its freedom.

This dynamic is nowhere as evident as in division and strife that perpetuate mutual (blind) scapegoating and cycles of violence and brokenness. **Breaking such cycles is not about dismissing differences, but about working through them through dialogue, healing and reconciliation.**

## **The distinct ecclesiality of every People of God is known through the way they worship**

Popular devotions, as expression of the People's spontaneous prayer chiselled in memory because inspired by their lived realities, reveal the most intimate aspect of their relationship with God. Prayer that emerges spontaneously and naturally from the culture is a rich expression of how God encounters the People, at *kairos* moments of their ecclesial journey, deepening their faith. **Whether through praise or lament, petition or thanksgiving, popular expressions of the faith, echoing the story of salvation, can reflect the community's authentic becoming a Church: as God's chosen Holy People.**

But when disconnected from the lived memory of the whole Church in Scripture and Tradition—that is, when popular local expressions become mere “traditions” that perpetuate *pika* or serve the market economy rather than God—the People's prayer is not only impoverished, but the “body” itself becomes fragmented. Then, the Church betrays herself: whether through reducing prayer and liturgy to mere ritual; through the factions' drive to one upmanship;



or through hedonism replacing devotion. **Reconnecting with our spiritual roots—with our**

**ancestors' memory of being "one Holy People of God"—becomes essential.**

Our ecclesial roots of **land, history and prayer** remind us:

- that we must appropriate a posture of **reconciliation**—of stitching of tears within our past, with each other, with the rest of creation, and ultimately with God;
- that we must invest in the **formation** of every disciple called to be like Christ to serve as his “body” to be stewards of culture;
- that, like Mary, we must turn our gaze to the Father as we are emboldened to be grateful and, without ceasing, **contemplate** the mercy He has shown upon us, His People.
- Only thus can we be **missioned** as the body of Christ in our land.





4

## The pastoral attitudes of Christ in Emmaus

29

Jesus himself came near and went with them. (Lk 24:15)

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. (Lk 24:27)

**L**ike other peoples, our land, history, worship and mission are always threatened by the dangers of voraciousness, division and pride. Through the gift of Christ's healing and redemption, we must take stock of the new threats to our cultural fabric and seek to (re)build one home and story, marked by the desire for transcendence.

Through keeping her gaze fixed upon **Christ, the True Teacher**, the Church learns the attitudes that allow our culture to become more authentically human.

**Four pastoral** attitudes from the narrative of Emmaus challenge us to learn how to be a People of **contemplation, reconciliation, formation** and **mission in these times**:

## A Church that listens

Pope Francis stresses the importance of a Church that listens. First and foremost, “We need to be constantly trained in hearing the Word,” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 174) in order to become God’s Holy Assembly.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.

He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.



The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” (Jn 1:15, 10-14, 16-18)

“Listening” is how we become attuned to God who speaks to us, his People, in salvation history. First, he spoke “through the prophets,” anointed to be his messengers; but in the end times, He sent his only Son, the Word made flesh, to dwell among us. His Spirit of Truth, who remains in the world, continues to witness to Christ and to comfort his Church.

In the Scriptures, we listen to God’s words echoing in the history of the world and in the heart of all those who desire to “become of God;” to “come to know him” as He has made us first. Without pondering the Word of God in the Scriptures; without being formed to be Christlike through encountering him in the concrete stories of the Gospel, our ears remain deaf; our eyes remain closed; our hearts hardened, to the grace that God desires to pour upon us. Without the living Word of God, we shrivel and die.

But “their hearts were burning inside” as the Risen Lord broke open the Scriptures to the disciples of Emmaus. The Scriptures soften our hardness of heart, opening us up to the Other and to all others whom God has loved from the beginning.

In the encounter with the Word, our hearts expand and overflow. Creating space for the other to be “other” in our lives is about “taking them in” and walking in their shoes, as the Risen Lord walked with his disheartened disciples. The Christian, by virtue of being the disciple of the Word made flesh, is formed to be truly attentive to the other and, therefore, to “listen” to them.

“We need to practise the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur. Listening helps us to find the right gesture and word which shows that we are more than simply bystanders” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 171).

Listening is an attitude where one puts their whole self at the disposition of the other; where all one’s energy and attentiveness are given to the other. It is opening up the space within oneself where the other is truly safe, knows that he or she is seen for who they are, and, therefore, feel cherished.

**The fruit of an ecclesial listening attitude is to grow in our common prayer, that invites us to deeper discernment and contemplation.**

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A Church that listens is a bonded People because they have created a shared space to know one another: “*I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father*” (Jn 10:14b-15a). But **the Church that**



**listens across divisions**—especially with those who may feel excluded from the sheepfold—also puts into practice what Christ demanded of his friends: *“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd”* (Jn 10:16).

Building bridges through dialogue reconstitutes an *ecclesia* measured not by badges of belonging, but by the desire for a shared spirit of friendship and collaboration. **The fruit of an ecclesial listening attitude is to grow in our common prayer, that invites us to deeper discernment and contemplation.**

## A Church that welcomes

In the Emmaus narrative, Christ “opened the eyes” of the disciples when they were willing to “break out” of their cocoon of sorrow and see the “other.” *The attitude of “welcome” is about turning one’s gaze out of oneself*—even if the very recognition of “otherness” makes one appreciate how much “they” are like oneself. The moment one risks breaking open one’s enclave and walk out the door to relationship, one also discovers their true self. **The fruit of an ecclesial welcoming attitude is true reconciliation.**

Thus, Pope Francis writes, “The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 114).

A people willing to welcome others grows to be more confident of their unique gifts—and, paradoxically, in and through the very acts of offering them. Through concrete gestures of welcome that reveal our desire to extend friendship to the religious other, to the non Maltese other, or even to the brother or sister that past hurts, *pika*, or merely different outlooks and opinions have

taught us to mistrust, **the Maltese Church becomes like “bread that is broken” to rediscover her original calling remembered in Acts 28:** that of sharing the Good News through serving all, by serving everyone without discrimination.



## A Church that accompanies



Becoming one “Maltese” people despite our differences is a continual process of mutual growth that always implies suffering. Nature always craves equilibrium—even when that equilibrium perpetuates systemic sin and dysfunctional structures that control cycles of violence rather than resolve them.

**To heal long term prejudice—that “structures of sin” may become stable “structures of blessing”—demands going through difficult periods of purgation.**

*Accompaniment is about this willingness to suffer together for the improvement of another.* It is about facing the storm without which there can be no promise of lasting peace.

A Church that accompanies reenacts the sacrifice of the cross, where the innocent victim broke through the impasse of death by

allowing darkness to fall on earth. For it was by descending to the deepest darkness that the Son of man would free Adam and all humankind from Hades. As Jesus himself says, *“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptised, and what stress I am under until it is completed!”* (Lk 12:49-50).

Accompaniment is the courage to walk with another through the perilous but necessary path of death and rebirth. In the early Church, it was lived in the adult catechumenate, where the catechist, sustained by the whole community, personally imitated Christ the Pedagogue, by accompanying the catechumen’s passage of dying to oneself to rise with Christ at baptism. It was also lived in repeated communal gestures of penance and

purgation that marked the Church's desire for ongoing purification.

"The Church will have to initiate everyone—priests, religious and laity—into this 'art of accompaniment' that teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3:5). The pace of the accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life" (*Evangelii gaudium*, 169). This is what the Church is called to

offer people, with sensitivity and full respect. "Without detracting from the evangelical ideal, we need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively occur" (*Evangelii gaudium*, 44).

That journey from the cross to the resurrection, from death to rebirth, from old life to new life, continues to characterise the Christian life in its praxes for lifelong formation and in the sacraments, in particular the "source and summit" of the Christian life, the Eucharist.

## A Church that goes forth

Until the last days, the Church's mission of preaching the Good News of salvation and of actuating it through the willingness to welcome, listen and accompany, remains ongoing. As Pope Francis exhorts: "I dream of a 'missionary option', that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation" (*Evangelii gaudium*, 27).

It also takes missionary disciples to the ends of the earth (Mk 16: 15; Acts 1: 8): for it is in the forgotten peripheries, in the most unseen places of suffering, that Christ chooses to encounter first. The Church's "option for the poor" echoes Jesus' own ministry: "*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I*

*have come to call not the righteous but sinners*" (Mk 2:17). Thus, as Pope Francis insists, it is from the peripheries that the Church is enriched and strengthened. The poor are the Church's blood because theirs is the deepest faith.

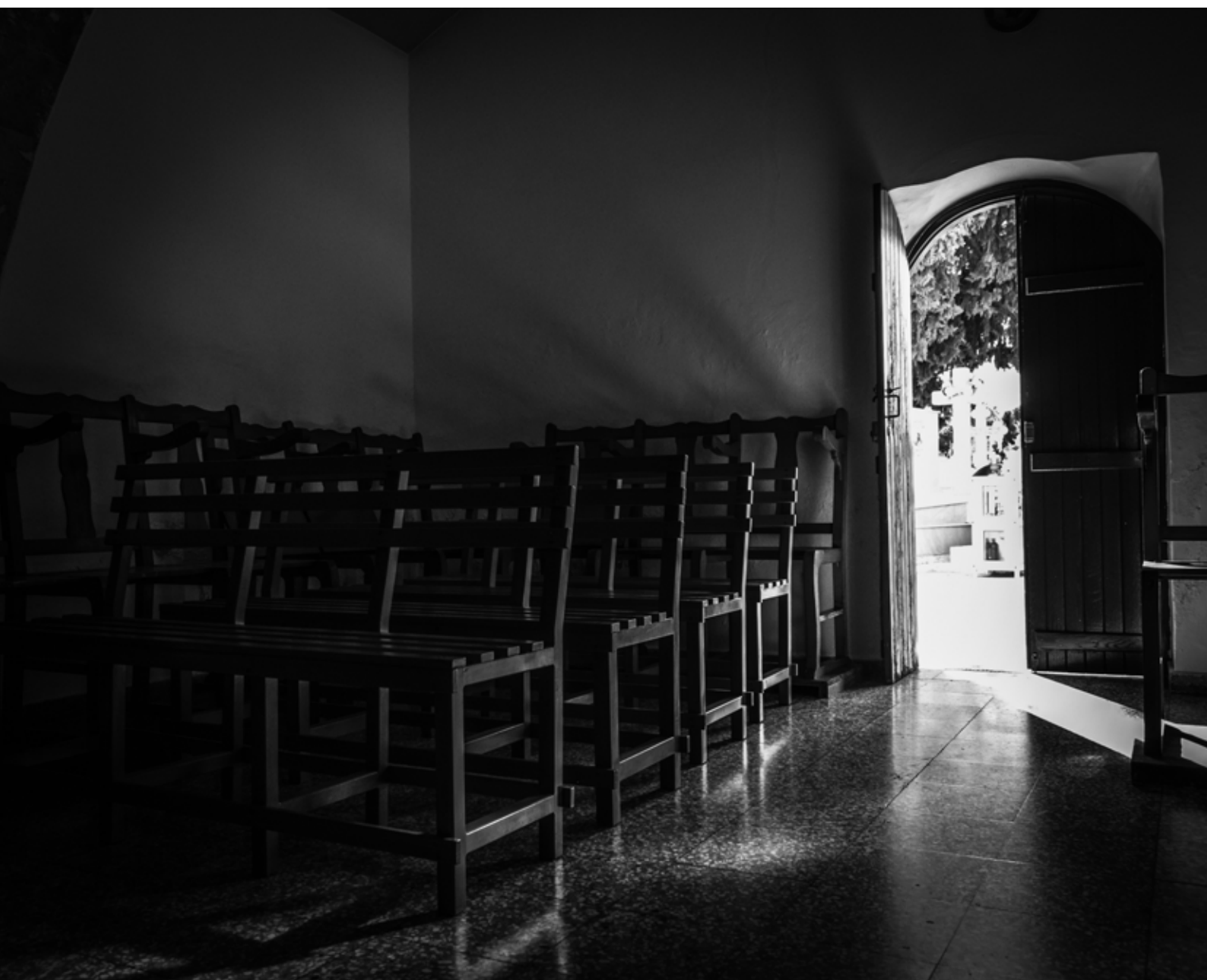
**In the unseen, the  
"disposables" of a  
technocratic economy  
and human vainglory, the  
Maltese Church  
is sent forth.**



The People of God in Malta must seek and reach out to the new peripheries in our context. It is this attitude of going forth that helps the Church venture in the peripheries or in new sociocultural environments, to seek those who are distant, and to be ever ready “to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way’” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 33).

Perhaps our peripheries are literally encroaching on our shores, as they have throughout our history. Or perhaps they are emerging right in our midst, in our very neighbours, that through our busyness, our mad pursuit to riches, status or latest lifestyle fads, we no longer quite see.

**In the unseen, the “disposables” of a technocratic economy and human vainglory, the Maltese Church is sent forth.**





# The People of God

36

That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.  
(Lk 24:33)

**A**s the People of God **goes forth** to proclaim the Good News through gestures of **welcome, listening and accompaniment** that bring **reconciliation**, seek **formation** and invite to **contemplation**, we become **one body of Christ** who, under the leadership of the one Head, the Archbishop, are empowered *to serve according to our particular gifts*.

Our one people brings together **five key charisms**, each according to the distinct roles played by its members.



## Holy Orders and the priesthood of those who mediate between God and His People

The Church is herself the sacrament of God's presence in the world. In her sacramental life she manifests most fully different aspects of God's love for his People, and how God's Holy People, the Church, his Bride, seeks to return the love of the Father poured upon her. That divine love lavishly poured out is indeed revealed in fullness in the God Man, the Christ, who not only saves, but is the Icon of the Father made flesh. Jesus Christ, both Lamb and High Priest, remains with his Church till the end of times and his living presence, continues to be made visible in the priesthood of his People, and indeed, sacramentally, in the priesthood of the ordained.

The sacramental priesthood of the ordained is crucial to the Church, since in the sacraments, tangible signs of God's presence among us are bestowed upon the world. Most

centrally, the Church celebrates the Eucharist as the "source and summit" of the Christian life since, it not only brings the People of God together, it makes them "one" as God is Trinitarian *koinonia*. Together with the other sacraments of initiation, it builds the People of God as the one "body," just as the sacraments of healing strengthen the Church that always depends on God's mercy, in both body and soul. Marriage and Holy Orders, on the other hand, bridge the Church of today with that of tomorrow, not only by being a lifelong promise of fruitful love and selfless service, but also by being a symbol of the People's ongoing faithfulness.

Still, the sacraments are not the only way that the Church reveals God's love and gathers to pray: all our witness of the Good News, all our prayer, the lifeblood of the Church,





is communal in Christ, insofar as we are truly open to the one Spirit who builds us up to become one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

The priestly presence in the Church's authentic expression of faith, in particular in her life of prayer, reminds us of the complementarity between Christ and his Bride, between the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit, for the whole world. Thus, it seeks to recover and to purify the Church's style of leadership, the language of its teachings, but also our People's devotions as they emerged at different points in our history. It seeks to nurture new expressions of being Church in the world through

the presence, words and prayer as they arise in People's hearts today. It harmonises all expressions of reflection, prophecy and worship, the way multiple voices become one choir and multiple instruments in one orchestra, praising God.

But it is also not about diversity for diversity's sake, nor about traditions to satisfy our nostalgia; pruning is as necessary as watering and enriching the soil, for the tree to bear good fruit. And leading the Church's prayer life also implies the discipline of standing for what truly nurtures the People's devotion and not merely for doing what is deemed popular, likeable or scores points.

## **The prophetic charisms of, male and female religious, who, by consecrating their lives to Christ, witness to the hope of the eschaton**

The vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, in a lifestyle dedicated to prayer and service, symbolise with laser-sharp clarity how the Church ought to prefigure the Kingdom. Every consecrated person is like the flame of a candle that burns with courage and persistence in pitch darkness. For the People of God, called to live their life in the world, they are also the living reminders that their true home is "in heaven".

In turn, each religious congregation manifests a particular charism that the local *ecclesia* has not only inherited, but also needs to cultivate in the present times. Our local Church is blessed with many religious orders, male and female. Living these different charisms in faithfulness and with transparency

manifests to the whole People of God what crucial aspects of the local Church's ministry they must nurture for others: contemplation, teaching,

**Each religious congregation manifests a particular charism that the local ecclesia has not only inherited, but that needs to cultivate in the present times.**

healing, spiritual discernment  
spirits, serving the lowliest, spiritual  
accompaniment, educating our  
children.

The perseverance of living the same  
charisms with authenticity and

creative adaptation over centuries,  
and therefore under shifting cultural  
challenges, also models to today's  
Church how to inculturate the  
Gospel anew in Malta.

## The variety of lay ministries within the Church

Becoming a Holy People of God  
with a mission rests on two  
complementary, centripetal and  
centrifugal movements. Both are  
primarily the vocation of the laity.

First is the daily, but hidden, ministry  
of the many Christian parents  
called to nurture the “domestic  
Church” over which they preside.  
This ministry is indispensable and,  
still, the most fragile especially  
in our challenging times. The  
whole ecclesial community  
must offer mutual support and  
accompaniment to parents as they  
raise their children in the faith. The  
Church is made of families, and  
motherhood and fatherhood are the  
most foundational ways in which we  
imitate in love, in the divine *caritas*  
that is mercy, the Fatherhood and  
Motherhood of God and the Church.

This foundational ministry of  
formation is also extended and  
sustained by those who help  
Christian parents most closely:

- the key ministry of catechists  
in parishes, and of teachers  
and other professionals  
especially in Catholic schools,  
whose primary purpose is  
to nurture in our children a  
Christian ethos;
- of youth ministers and

family ministers, spiritual  
directors, pastoral counsellors  
and others who serve by  
accompanying families in  
different phases of their  
lifelong formation.

These ministries must be  
strengthened, since youth are the  
hope of the Church; guardians of  
her Tradition, but bold enough to  
adapt with most flexibility to the  
inculturation of the Gospel in our



times. Especially in their relationship with grandparents, the Church is reborn with every generation, while remaining faithful to the apostolic *kerygma*.

The mission of lay ministers is also vibrant in the Church through their participation, by virtue of their baptism, in Christ's priesthood. Many men and women, often behind the scenes; quietly serve in their parish life through various liturgical and prayer ministries, in particular through the particular charism of their lay movement. **Lay movements are a wellspring of life in the Church offering richness**

**of diversity that spreads in many homes and to the peripheries, recalling the original desire of Christians who came together to break the Word and become friends in the Lord.**

The laity also serve in works of charity: through parish social ministries offered to the community at large as well as in their professional services in Church institutions.

Ultimately, the service of the laity must remain oriented to the Church's primary mission of witness in the world.

## **On being Christians in the world**

Christians do not separate themselves from the world through clothing or markings because their home and mission is the world itself which they are called to sanctify. Thus, what distinguishes the Christian in the world is always the sign of the Good News, the joy expressed as the mark of the Kingdom: God's everlasting mercy towards the world. As Karl Rahner SJ put it, Christians in the world are "mystics" through everything they do; they infuse all their action with God's mercy wherever they are.

Christians are professionals, artisans, labourers, homemakers and pensioners, and in their spheres of life, they are called to work not only with passion, creativity and integrity, but also in solidarity, always oriented to the well-being of others and seeking the common good. They should actively organise the grassroots and participate in civil

society, not just out of a sense of justice, but ultimately a sense of hope, trust and love. Their calling to renew the world must be lived with temperance, by denying the urge to personal success or vainglory. It must be lived with courage, by being resilient in the face of adversity of all kinds, but also by

**The Christian vocation  
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politics.**





pursuing the less popular path that chooses the well-being of the most forgotten over the comfort of the crowds.

The Christian vocation in the world reaches its pinnacle in their willingness to serve the whole “city” in the art of politics. At all levels of political participation, the Christian must reach out to dialogue, seek creative solutions to conflict that

benefit all, and decide prudently with a vision for the greater good.

The inculturation of the Gospel in the Maltese context of today is ultimately not about how many are baptised or call themselves Catholics, but about how we together, as People living on this land, embody the hope of the Kingdom at all levels of our society.

## **All people of goodwill seeking the Truth**

The Church is not just a community of the holy: it is also sinners who fail in their discipleship, but who, nonetheless, persist in trying. It is also those who struggle and therefore question what is truly “the good life”: insofar as they remain faithful and committed to the search for Truth, they are also seeking to have their eyes opened by Christ.

The early Church recognised these paths of seeking the Truth and of returning to the fold through the Catechumenate and the Order of Penitents. New forms of these paths are being retrieved in

today’s Malta: *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is growing slowly but steadily. Just as pivotal is the accompaniment of those who, for various reasons—some because of personal hurts suffered; others because of disillusionment with the institution; still others because, at some point in their life, their faith was tested or became lukewarm—identify as “lapsed Catholics.”

Often these members, who sometimes out of personal conviction push the “boundary” of being Church, are our family members, our friends, our

colleagues. The very relationships that bind us to them are signs of how the Holy Spirit remains at work: not only so those pushing the boundaries may return to “the centre” through formal ecclesial practices; but also for those who see themselves as being “in the centre” to question the authenticity of their witness, and their willingness to be challenged to truly be purified in their discipleship. In the words of Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, the second century bishop who not only developed the understanding of the faith but shepherded a Church of martyrs:

“For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and **where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace**; but the Spirit is truth. Those, therefore, who do not partake of Him, are neither nourished into life from the mother’s breasts, nor do they enjoy that most limpid fountain which issues from the body of Christ” (*Adversus Haereses* III.24.1).

It is not necessarily the closeness to visible ecclesiastical structures that marks the authenticity of our ecclesial witness, but the heart being transformed by the Spirit, often in mysterious ways.



6

## A missioned “People of God”

43

Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. (Lk 24:35)

**B**ecoming the Holy People of God bonded in the power of the one Comforter (*Parakletos*) and Teacher assumes being attentive to where the Holy Spirit desires to birth and sustain the “body of Christ” in our midst.

There are **six distinct spaces** in present day Maltese society where the Church must discern which best practices constitute the witness of Christ’s reconciliation, formation and contemplation through concrete gestures of listening, welcoming and accompaniment:





## Peripheries where the vulnerable dwell

The privileged space where Christ desires to encounter his chosen ones, to offer them new life, is precisely in their vulnerability, in the midst of their suffering. Thus, the disciples' mission of witness must be first and foremost "in the field hospital after the battlefield" because that is where the greatest human desire for the God who saves is.

But in a land where we often claim to know everything about each other, it is not always immediately apparent where the "peripheries" and those suffering are. The poor are always among us and today we have our fair share: migrants who have been traumatised through perilous journeys; the homeless and those living in less than dignified conditions; those struggling with addictions or other debilitating physical and mental health conditions; the elderly and single parent households unable to make ends meet; children and youth who feel disheartened for the future.

Even so, stereotypes of "the poor" might not always suffice, for suffering can also be hidden where one least expects it. We can become "blinded" or "indifferent" in particular to what we are most used to seeing: the elderly combatting loneliness; those mourning grieving the loss of a loved one; the child suffering emotional neglect; the neighbour struggling with abuse at work; the family caught in marital conflict; the new mother with no support; the victim of domestic abuse; the colleague gripped with anxiety; the friends caring for an ill family member.

The primary responsibility of the Church is to be the "eyes that see" and "ears that hear" the cries emerging from the peripheries. There, we can be attentive and responsive to all the wounded among us—no matter how hidden their suffering might be.

## Spaces of leisurely encounter and business enterprise where people dream and seek to create their future

There can be no society without the spaces where people can come together to rest from their daily chores; dialogue about common concerns; exchange ideas; nurture a creative, entrepreneurial spirit; collaborate on joint projects; and build a better future together. A healthy society can flourish when men, women, and especially youth and children—and across generations—can dream together, construct stories together, and weave a shared identity through their creative spirit. **These spaces of encounter are where the Spirit desires to sow the seeds that will bear the fruit of tomorrow.**

Through all her members, the Church must not only participate in public debate to collaborate with all people of goodwill; she bears the responsibility **to be a space of dialogue and encounter where everyone, with no exception, is**

**invited to actively participate in the political and economic task of building a culture of integral ecological flourishing.**

Through her rich tradition of reflecting on human wellbeing, and of engaging with the arts and all natural and human sciences, the local Church has the duty to **cultivate a culture of encounter in the Maltese context that is increasingly ethnically and religiously diverse.**

This is especially true for our youth, whose natural disposition to explore, to think outside the box, to try new things, to reach out to others and, thus, like a wild bush, to spread their branches rapidly to build bridges and connections, is not only especially vibrant, but the essential building blocks for the future of society.







## Public institutions that regulate our life together

Public institutions like government, parliament, law courts, law enforcement, civil society, national security, healthcare and schools shape our life together and are responsible for safeguarding our future as a nation. Public institutions must not only promote justice: they must be seen as being just and in service of the public good. They must empower the vulnerable and give voice to the disenfranchised, so we can create and preserve a shared narrative of what makes us one people seeking to build a life in common on a small land that is part of the European Union and the greater commonwealth of nations.

The sustainable growth of our nation depends on our ability to collaborate together and with other peoples for the long haul, rather than be driven by shortsighted and egotistical wants. **All our institutions must educate for civic responsibility rather than instant gratification; to nurture an ethos of cooperation rather than competition; to seek an ecological conversion that considers the holistic and mutually dependent effects of our actions, rather than think narrowly by focusing only on what is of immediate concern.**

## Ecclesial spaces, in particular our parishes, lay movements and religious institutions

Nowhere is this process of educating more necessary than in our ecclesial spaces that must nurture a truly “Christian ethos” and therefore form our “Catholic” presence in society to be the “salt of the earth” and “light of

the world” (Mt 5:13, 14). If the “People of God” fails in our foundational mission to be reconciled and therefore witness the lifestyle of “the Kingdom” rather than of “the world”; if our “salt has lost its taste,” then “it



is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot” (Mt 5:13).

The Church, present in society through its manifold institutions, remains “relevant” insofar as her “public” institutional witness also conforms to the strict demands of the Gospel—not as a statement of rigid legalism, but as a true manifestation of justice that practices a “preferential option for the poor”; and of mercy that dares to go the extra mile in being welcoming, generous and kind to the stranger and neediest.

Through her institutions, the Church also has the responsibility **to form society to seek an objective common good**—not through forcing a vision of the good life upon others, but through the persuasive power of the “joy of the Gospel” itself. This experience of joy emerges most eloquently in **our public expression of faith** that, while reminding of the “Catholic” roots of our Maltese culture, still excludes nobody, but rather invites us to a deeper shared human experience.

## Domestic spaces

Who we are is revealed most clearly in our most intimate relationships. Our homes serve as the most foundational school to become persons in relationship who can grow to trust one another, collaborate towards a common project, but also resolve inevitable

conflicts, and, most crucially, forgive mutually inflicted hurts and disappointments. Domestic spaces dissolve if their members do not practice reconciliation as part of that process of cultivating the next generation. Moreover, **forgiveness—that is essential to personal and**



**communal healing—is only truly possible as a grace from God. Thus, our domestic spaces are the true barometers that measure the resilience of our nation and, indeed, the authenticity of our witness as “People of God” who reconciles, forms and can participate in God’s saving mercy.**

The sacramental nature of marriage that bonds the disciples, and on which the domestic Church is built, can inoculate against the many pressures that challenge family life

and personal relationships in today’s Malta. But marriage too must be lived authentically, and to succeed, it needs much support from all the Church and its structures. **Christian families are ultimately the very skeleton of the *ecclesia*, whose strength sustains the whole body.** The crises of love in family life are ultimately not only what could break us, but what can form us to become a purified “People of God”, truly able to love “in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health” and for the long haul towards the *Parousia*.

## Augmented digital realm

Each one of the “physical” spaces outlined is also extended “online” through the network of mediated human participation that is the internet. It is “the new world” expanding from the world we used to know. It is a web-like reality, of “ubiquitous connectivity and pervasive proximity,” where the patterns of social relations we were used to—hierarchy, authority, bureaucracy—give way to new modes of interaction; to new ways of collaboration, to new expressions of being human. This new environment—our own selves seamlessly intertwined with one another and our creations—reaches to the ends of the world and therefore urges us to reconsider even our own “Maltese” particularity.

“The only measure for properly evaluating an age is to ask to what extent it fosters the development and attainment of a full and authentically meaningful human existence, in accordance with the peculiar character and the capacities

Since in today’s  
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of that age” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 224, quoting Romano Guardini).

The new mediated reality we are immersed into is an invitation to humanise the capabilities of this “networked” and “artificially intelligent” culture. As such, it is also an opportunity to (re)discover essentially human characteristics



that today can and must flourish in a new way. **Since in today's connected world no one can be a stranger, we are certainly being invited to live experiences of authentic encounter, in openness to dialogue, and to together weave a more universal language of human solidarity and friendship.**

Indeed, the more time passes, the more the social spaces where people come together to converse, exchange insights, ideas and dream of a better tomorrow are "augmented spaces" where the digital realm extends our social, economic and political lives. Where we spend our time, where we gather for gossip, for jokes, for "news", for advice, for play, for togetherness ... has become the space where we are simply invited "to be community."

This is not to deny the richness of our immediate embodiment. But we are being invited to wonder at the emergent beauty of our extended minds, and indeed even extended

"bodies." Through screens of all sizes we can learn to reach out to one another and be the "communion of souls" we all humanly hope for and desire.

That "reaching out" is not in the same way we usually smile at one another, look in to each other's eyes, or shake hands. Likewise, coming together as "a community that prays" is reconceived "in accordance with the peculiar character and the capacities of that age."

But what we are discovering is a "new language" of shared memories, exchanged thoughts, fragments of feelings, experiences of being moved by beauty... that inspire us, make us our "selves", the "persons" who seek companionship. It is a language where what is in our minds and souls flows as evocative symbols, as veiled sensations, that together we seek to stitch as one narrative to make sense of our collective "new world."



Nonetheless, putting on the extended skin of our digital selves also poses new challenges: the “dominant technocratic paradigm” follows the logic of utility, reducing persons to data, and therefore to opportunities for manipulation and gain. Thus, social media driven by the logic of maximizing profit and of selling (or pushing) “information” to the highest bidder, are also becoming the means to “dictate” ideologies, relativised values, populist agendas, and therefore to limit the people’s freedom.

It is thus urgent to imagine a shared “global” life by cultivating the art of openness and dialogue across all differences of culture, religion and philosophical opinion. Social media pose a greater risk where the careful manipulation of our likes and dislikes, of opinions and preferences, shapes the people’s vision of ourselves more than reasoned persuasion. Because close immediate encounters tend to be emotionally laden, our new proximity gives rise to a new collective agonism and tribalism. Moreover, through the

use of algorithms and targeted propaganda, we can easily be manipulated emotionally to favour agendas that contradict reason and the common good. “Communication” in mediated spaces is thus, first and foremost, about breaking the shackles that intend to “sell” particular lifestyles, where the privileged gain even more at the expense of reducing the masses to mere numbers mined for data.

In this global “humanising” task, the Church has a duty to speak prophetically by insisting on the fundamental truths that are necessary for human flourishing. Moreover, the Universal Church must also speak with the language—and gifts—of each People so no one is excluded, and every culture is included. **This implies the enculturation of the Gospel in each particular reality, so together, in our mutual exchange in this new digital environment, can share authentically human gifts that enrich the “communion of peoples.”**



## The People's wounds

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“Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” (Lk 24:25-26)

**G**od's love for all men and women knows no boundaries. The Father sends his only Son that all may receive salvation, that all may become the “Holy People of God.” As the Father through his Son sends the Comforter (see Jn 14:16-17), all are invited to taste the joy of being reborn from above (see Jn 3:3) and of being filled with the power to actively participate in stewarding

a new political order and New Creation. As we read in the First Epistle to Timothy:

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. **This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.** For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all—this was attested at the right time.” (1 Tim 2:16)

In her missionary zeal, the whole Church as community of disciples begins by being attentive to the signs of the times and, more specifically, **to “signs” of woundedness where Christ desires to offer his healing.**

“Sometimes we are tempted to be that kind of Christian who keeps the Lord’s wounds at arm’s length. Yet Jesus wants us to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others. He hopes that we will stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune and instead enter into the reality of other people’s lives and know the power of tenderness. Whenever we do so, our lives become wonderfully complicated and we experience intensely what it is to be a people, to be part of a people.” (Evangelii gaudium, 270)

Indeed, we acknowledge that our fragility as a “people”—personal,

communal and ecological—is like that of shattered “earthen vessels.” We are broken and barely holding together as “one.” But the holy balm entrusted to the Church—that melted gold of God’s mercy that can mend the deepest fractures—demands that we **go forth**, “allowing Christ to burst out of our doors,” to become agents of healing. What could be thrown into fire as mere pieces of broken clay, in the hands of the Spirit and through the Church’s gestures of **listening, welcoming and accompaniment**, becomes a rebirth to new life; the “Holy People of God” that grows in reconciliation, formation and prayer... to be sent forth.

Left unattended our suffering deepens and alienates us even more from God’s desire to pour upon us his love. Thus, the Church has the duty to act decisively to care for the most wounded. The more abrasive and disjointed the broken pieces of our fractured hearts and relationships, the more the Church is called to serve selflessly and patiently, that God’s love is experienced as gold that heals and gives new, and ever more beautiful, life.

**Seven kinds of wounds** must be carefully tended in the Church’s mission of Evangelisation and Diakonia:

**God our Saviour, who  
desires everyone to be  
saved and to come to the  
knowledge of the truth.**

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## The wounds in our memory, personal and collective

None of us are immune from **memories** of violence suffered and inflicted; of hurts too deep to come to terms with or accept; of distress that cannot be quite acknowledged or expressed in words. These deep wounds, often first experienced in childhood, leave us vulnerable but also bitter; they bruise our hearts but also make us resentful. Unless one comes to a peaceful resolution with one's suffering, the effects of unresolved trauma can become contagious, passed on in families and tightly knit communities whose memories become distorted through unresolved grief.

Christ desires to liberate us, first and foremost, from these deepseated scars that hold us captive to harrowing memories. The Church's primary mission of hope is this exorcising of the past to heal the

deep woundedness of the heart that harms individuals and communities alike.

As Saint John Paul II taught the Church and the world:

"The truth is that one cannot remain a prisoner of the past, for individuals and peoples need a sort of "healing of memories", so that past evils will not come back again. This does not mean forgetting past events; it means re-examining them with a new attitude and learning precisely from the experience of suffering that only love can build up, whereas hatred produces devastation and ruin. The deadly cycle of revenge must be replaced by the newfound liberty of forgiveness" (Message for the XXX World Day of Peace, January 1, 1997).





## The wounds in our intimate relationships

No man or woman is an island and our very humanity implies the desire to be persons in relationship. As we seek to encounter one another, we do so through our deepest self: the stories that we knit to make sense of our lives, and the stories we share to make sense of where we are coming from and who we desire to become. Intimate relationships, especially with spouses and friends, with our children and siblings, shape us as persons, families and small communities. Through sharing a life together, we care for one another making the relationship an opportunity for mutual flourishing.

But if intimacy implies vulnerability, it not only opens us to the hope of being loved for who we truly are; it also poses the risk of being trampled upon and abused. Just as there is no truly intimate relationship that does not demand trust, so there

is no intimate relationship that does not risk betrayal.

Many of us suffer—sometimes in shame and hiddenness; other times publicly—from the wounds of broken marriages, betrayal in friendship, conflict in families, disappointment in partnerships, abuse in relationships where there is a power differential. Such suffering challenges us to receive the grace of forgiveness and to grow by investing courageously in new healthier relationships by still daring to be vulnerable.

But deep woundedness can also become a stumbling block to deeper personal integration. This is particularly true in families.

**Accompaniment in marital and family relationships is an urgent call to the Church**, especially since she herself cannot grow or

be authentic without schooling in sharing a life together, a home together, in becoming one community and family. **For better or for worse, what we learn in**

**our most intimate relationships is who we become in our ecclesial relationships**, whether in parishes, religious communities or lay movements.

## **The wounds in the Church as an institution, serving the Holy People of God**

The Church as “People of God” is called to be a “community of friends” who journey together. **The Church’s *modus operandi* and structures must reflect this seeking to be a “pilgrim people” who journeys together.** The local Church is wounded precisely where our structures, institutions and formal ways of proceeding do not facilitate, but rather **contradict an ethos of friendship and mutuality.**

In his *Letter to the People of God*, (August 20, 2018), His Holiness Pope Francis identified three deep wounds in the Church that are also our own: “*sexual abuse, abuse of power and of conscience.*” He also identified the root of these wounds as **the clericalism that characterises a way of functioning as “institutional Church.”**





Moreover, in Malta, the wounds of clericalism have taken on distinct forms that are particularly harmful because of our proximity to one another, of our turbulent political history these past hundred years, and the distinctiveness of our cultural dynamics often marked by a sense of existential need, the tendency to distrust the “stranger,” *pika* and even the urge to tribalise in us-against-them attitudes.

It is paramount that we acknowledge our frailties, that we name how we have inflicted wounds on each other in the past and, as Christians, to seek to engage in a long process of mutual listening, for seeking reparation, and, ultimately, of praying for the power of the Spirit to be able to forgive one another.

At the same time, we must also not create further divisions in our *ecclesia* because we fail to come together, to serve together or even

to pray together as brothers and sisters. **We must still learn to appreciate not only each other’s gifts, but the beauty of our particular callings—the distinct vocations of the clergy, religious and laity, that share in Christ the same priestly, kingly and prophetic roots, and a common evangelical orientation to preaching and service, just as our Master taught and served.**

As Jesus chided his disciples who disputed among themselves over who was the greatest: “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; **rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.** For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves” (Lk 22:25-27).

## **The wounds in the ecclesia, the Holy People of God**

The Maltese Church is not just suffering from institutional and historical wounds. We are also a People wounded by lethargy, a sense of loss and confusion, because we seem to give too much importance to our own meagre efforts, and not enough to how the Holy Spirit is already working among us.

We are also wounded through excluding specific groups in the very life of the Church when we fail to accompany them in their struggles, but rather simply marginalise them or appear to cast them out

through words that kill through condemnation rather than give life through Christ’s mercy and healing.

**Pope Francis invites us to ponder how salvific suffering is the deepest mystery of our faith.**

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Malta might no longer be *Kattolika*, but we should be grateful that this forced emptying of the “Church as an institution” implies the possibility of rebirth of the “Church as true communion”; as true leaven for a new culture of encounter, where we are not afraid of religious or political differences, but rather embrace all diversity as signs of God’s infinite creativity and beauty.

Our evangelical zeal must be rekindled through a sense of common purpose that is the Gospel itself: not our nostalgia about a “Church” long gone, or our enthusiasm for a Church in our own image, but through the humility of recognising how the Holy Spirit is seeking to rebuild the body of Christ in Malta.

The words of Pope Francis in the aforementioned Letter, show us the way of healing in our parish communities, religious communities, lay movements and as one “Holy People of God.” **They also invite us to ponder how salvific suffering is the deepest mystery**

**of our faith—including our local Church’s spiritual angst in times of “confusion”:**

“‘If one member suffers, all suffer together with it’, said Saint Paul. By an attitude of prayer and penance, we will become attuned as individuals and as a community to this exhortation, so that we may grow in the gift of compassion, in justice, prevention and reparation. Mary chose to stand at the foot of her Son’s cross. She did so unhesitatingly, standing firmly by Jesus’ side. In this way, she reveals the way she lived her entire life. When we experience the desolation caused by these ecclesial wounds, we will do well, with Mary, ‘to insist more upon prayer’, seeking to grow all the more in love and fidelity to the Church (St Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, par. 319). She, the first of the disciples, teaches all of us as disciples how we are to halt before the sufferings of the innocent, without excuses or cowardice. To look to Mary is to discover the model of a true follower of Christ.”



## The wounds in our social fabric

Every society is deeply wounded and ours is no exception. Indeed, it would be delusional on our part to pretend that our society is flourishing because we measure certain economic or social indicators but ignore other gauges of well-being. Indeed, even more dangerous are the dissonances and inconsistencies that we inculcate “as-a-matter-of-course”, when we claim to have an ethic of life or of social inclusion, or of free speech and democracy, but then, the facts speak louder than words as our actions betray glaringly our ideals.

The shocking assassination of a journalist and the murder in cold blood of a migrant of colour; the way many people take for granted “collective” practices like tax evasion,

graft and *omertà*, or how often they instinctively knit their social fabric through “friends of friends,” amoral familism, *pjaçiri* and the assumption that taking care of one’s own is more important than social responsibility, shows the gap between where we are and the Catholic ethos grounded in the common good, solidarity, the preferential option for the poor or even a basic civic sense where the “whole” (the wellbeing of the *polis* that serves all) is indeed greater than the sum of parts (or our individual interests).

This is not because “the [hierarchical] Church” does not “speak” on matters of the common good; but perhaps because we as the People of God, we ourselves in our social relationships, are



failing in our witness of the Gospel of life, both through the way we communicate, **but also through the very way we live.**

Even if “the Church”—in particular through her institutions—seeks to be light in our political and economic processes, “the Church” in her reality on the ground—our life in the city, on social media, our places of work, and our homes and personal lives— is urgently called to give sufficient witness to how the “Kingdom of God” becomes

incarnate through our concrete choices that welcome the stranger, accompany the vulnerable in all their needs, and listen to how our biases inflict wounds in the very fabric of our shared lives together.

A social and political conversion must begin with our being imbued by the Church’s social teachings that challenge each one of us, personally and communally, to be **a Church for and from the peripheries**, seeking their justice above our wealth, their well-being above our comfort.

## The wounded environment we inhabit

Wounds in our social fabric are also manifested glaringly in our very land butchered for economic gain; in our air that becomes hard to breathe because of pollution; in the chaos on our roads and in our surroundings that makes it so difficult to savour again the serenity that, in the past, we associated with the hidden elegance of our traditional villages or the rugged beauty of our natural landscape. We are living in an environment where ugliness burdens the soul and makes the

ordinariness of daily life that much more distressing.

These wounds to our senses and collective physical well-being are also augmented in the lifestyles we impose upon ourselves where there is always so “little time” for what is truly meaningful. It is as if the very landscape marked by technocracy imposes its tight fist around our very psyche, making us conform to its dehumanising logic. Instead of the human safeguarding land



through an ethos of mutual respect, the human savagely forces his way upon land, until the landscape itself rebels and forces its horrors upon the human.

This is the lament of the ecological encyclical *Laudato si'*, 106-110, that presents the “dominant technocratic paradigm” as having ravaged not only our environment, but our political and social structures and, ultimately, our very imaginary of a good life. Through the delusion that we are on a “path to progress,” we embark instead on a cycle of decline leading to suicide.

Nor are we spared of this same angst in the “alternate environment” that we created where the temptation is “to escape.” The digital context—the augmented reality, in which we spend more and more of our time, including the time to “socialise”—is also marked by the same aesthetic of crass excess; an ethic of display where “image” replaces reality, and “self-projection” replaces authenticity. In

this context, aggressive posturing and agonism—rather than dialogue and conversation—at times mark our presence even as “Church.” It is indeed scandalous when what we as Church are being called to witness to—a Church that listens, welcomes, accompanies and goes forth—becomes representative of opposition, of the erection of walls, of an attitude of belittling the other, and where we barricade ourselves in our certainties and with the few “like us.”

The call to stewarding creation must start from small daily decisions that we take as persons and in our communities. As Church in our small land, we trust that we can be sufficiently present in all society; that we can take concrete steps to reverse a cycle of ecological and cultural decline—offline and online—through a “mimesis of blessing.” To what extent are we willing to preach the Gospel of life—put our very selves on the line—where it is most urgent?

## **Our wounded spirit: the personal and collective soul disconnected from God**

The source of our woundedness is ultimately sin—the pride that disconnects us from God in Godself, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. When we act as if God does not exist; when, as Church, we separate our “spiritual” life from “earthly” concerns, we wound our spirit that naturally desires to seek transcendence and worship the Father. As our sinfulness penetrates every aspect of our being, it also

corrupts our desire for God and our own worship loses its freshness and authenticity.

This is the tragedy of the woundedness in our experiences of communal and personal prayer. Prayer in the home, as the family gathers, passes on experiences of devotion, and teaches the discipline of personal contemplation. But when the home ceases to be



a space of prayer—that is, with personal and family time dedicated to nothing but praise of God—then we fail to learn “how to pray” and even our public, communal prayer suffers.

Every religion, in her *cultus*, has the obligation to manifest her worship of God. Prayer is a public act, where God is acknowledged as infusing our reality, and thus as justly demanding our worship. Thus, the way that we, as People of God in Malta, are seen to be praying says a great deal about our understanding of God and our witness of the Gospel.

The way we celebrate our yearly liturgical calendar of praise is striking. The true peak of our faith—the Easter season leading to Pentecost—tends to be subdued in our collective experience of worship.

More evocative are the symbols of suffering—Our Lady of Sorrows and Good Friday—that seem to have a spiritual resonance in our land. Much more exuberant are the public religious festivals associated with our famous (or infamous) *festi* (village feasts).

Undeniably, *festi* bring people together binding them in a communal memory of celebration that goes back decades or centuries. That dimension of *festi* brings us back in touch with the deep wells of prayer that we have a duty to remember, honour and reenact.

But when our religious *festi* become displays of might disconnected from the communal memory of religious devotion; even when our daily and weekly liturgies become too focused on rubrics and externals to the



extent of becoming more akin to performance; or when our temples, memories in stone of our people's devotion, become the symbol of "the Church" that needs "care and maintenance" replacing the needs of the "ecclesial community" itself; the risk is of self-referentiality and of forgetting the Holy Spirit who defines the Church and is the source of her true worship and prayer.

Temple, ritual and external celebration should not replace the spiritual nourishment of the community that ultimately finds its roots in the Word of God, in the apostolic memory of the faith, and in the authentic celebration of the *mysteria* always made incarnate in a particular culture. Tradition cannot be reduced to traditionalisms; nor can prayer fail to be truly spiritually transformative leading us to experience slow purgation, and ultimately communion with the divine.

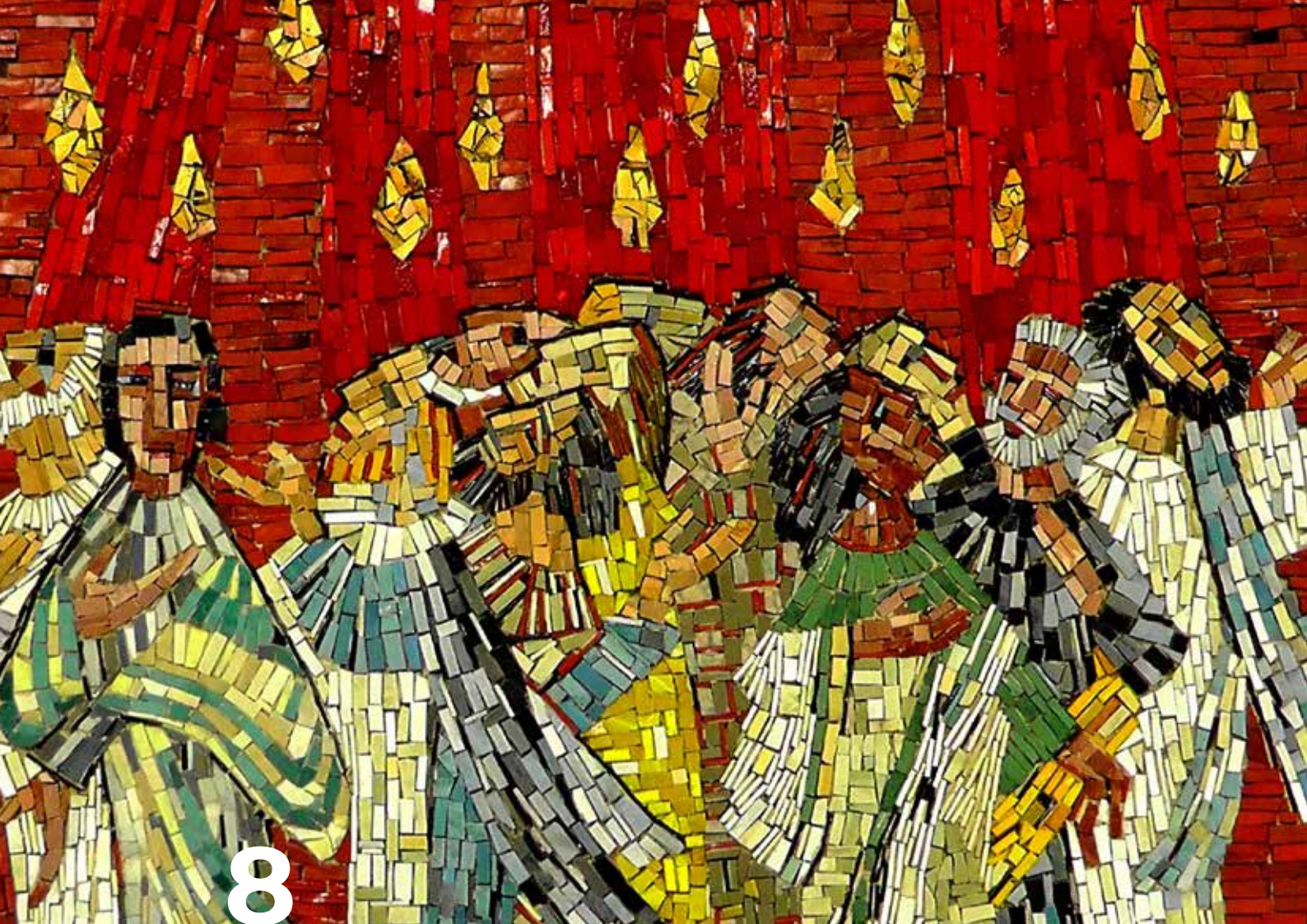
We tend to blame wounds to our communal and personal prayer on the ongoing rapid process of secularisation in our land. But secularity has many advantages, including an openness to the rights of all and the desire to live in peace notwithstanding differences. In our culture, we are still struggling to live a healthy separation of Church and

state where the secular and religious imaginaries can coexist and even allow space for each other to flourish for the common good. But there are positive signs of this growth.

Thus, the heart of spiritual angst might be deeper still.

It is true that secularism, in and of itself, tends to bracket out of consciousness the desire for transcendence in a radical pursuit of immanence that makes the human the centre of reality itself. But more serious than the threat of the secular, is when "the profane" takes on religious undertones or the "sacred" is commodified. In our hearts, the truly religious becomes constrained by an idolatry that stultifies the human spirit. Then, the risk is of "mere belief" being pushed as "reason"; of "personal preferences" being elevated to "ultimate desires"; and oppositely, of "the transcendent" being reduced to mere "ethics" or just a "choice among many."

This is the foundation of our deepening "culture wars" where sharp differences in our horizon of meaning, run the risk of becoming a profound wound among our people. We fail to have a common "open" narrative and remain a divided People.



# A discernment prompted by the Spirit

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When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him; and he vanished from their sight. (Lk 24:30-31)

**A** process of ecclesial discernment that renews the Church in Malta, is a journey on which we embark together prompted by the Holy Spirit to become a “Holy People of God” which witnesses to the joy which comes from our encounter with Christ. This:

- begins with our **personal encounter with Christ**;

- with acknowledging our being personally called as “**missionary disciples**” through **Word** and **Service**;
- while appreciating how our personal call is the communal call of the ecclesia, that has been lived in **our land across centuries** and **through communal witness and worship**;
- as we appropriate the ecclesial attitudes of contemplation, reconciliation, formation and mission through pondering Christ’s pedagogy—of becoming **a Church that listens, that welcomes, that accompanies and that always seeks to go forth and beyond**;
- as we become cognisant of the **diversity of gifts** of the one People of God;
- as we ponder the culturally textured “**land**” in which we are **called to serve**;
- as we ponder the signs of the times and recognise **the wounds that Christ desires to heal...then the duty of the Church is to act in a decisive manner.**

The Church does not act technocratically, by planning the ways “we deem best, or most efficient and expedient”, but through our **submission to Christ, our King, and his Holy Spirit whose “work” we desire to accomplish, whose “Life” the Church seeks to mediate.**

Acting as Church, that is, *acting as disciples of Christ who are sent*, demands judging and deciding not with our own (biased, because always sinful) eyes, but **with full attunement to the Spirit of God** who binds us as “the one Holy People of God.”

Submission to Christ,  
our King, and his  
Holy Spirit whose “work”  
we desire to accomplish,  
whose “Life” the Church  
seeks to mediate.

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This process of submission and empowerment is what we term “discernment.” It is the fundamental *trust that it is the Spirit who acts through the Church*, and therefore that the Church’s efforts, accomplished with the utmost desire for authenticity, are never her own, and only for that reason will inevitably bear fruit in God’s time.

As Pope Francis teaches us:

“Keeping our missionary fervour alive calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit, for it is he who “helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26). But this generous trust has to be nourished, and so we need to invoke the Spirit constantly. He can heal whatever causes us to flag in the missionary endeavour. It is true that this trust in the unseen can cause us to feel disoriented: it is like being plunged into the deep and not knowing what we will find. I myself have frequently experienced this. Yet there is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting



him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills. The Holy Spirit knows well what is needed in every time and place. This is what it means to be mysteriously fruitful!" (Evangelii gaudium, 280)

Christian discernment is not merely a matter of reading a situation holistically, of grasping its salient moral features, or of judging and deciding what would be the best course of action and acting responsibly. All that is what every reasonable person—Christian or not—can and must do.

The discernment of the Christian implies reading reality through God's eyes and thus allowing the Holy Spirit to conform us to the mind of Christ.

Becoming "like Christ" and therefore "his body" is about being attuned to the Holy Spirit's action of Life and always in contrast to the signs of Death unleashed by dark spirits. *The "discernment of spirits" is thus pivotal to all Christian discernment.*

Like the discernment of reasonable men and women, Christian discernment also has multiple dimensions that the ecclesia must seek to fulfill with the utmost desire for authenticity:

- as Christians we discern and act as individuals in our personal matters. For this reason, the Christian must be an ascetic developing the necessary discipline in his or her appetites of body and soul to conform to Christ;
- as Christians we discern on behalf of the well-being of those who are entrusted to our care.

Parents discerning on behalf of their children is the paradigmatic example; but in any position of authority, prudence demands considering the well-being of others. Caring for the other through the eyes of Christ implies the "love of mercy" for the other and not just a spirit of justice;

- as Christians we also discern in our public roles, where we are responsible not only for persons under our care, but for the righteous functioning of institutions that must serve the common good. Being cognisant of the good that God desires from our institutions of governance, economy and public well-being—including of the Church itself as institution—implies acting in a way that respects the dignity of persons first and foremost;
- as Christians we are also called to discern in service of the good of our common home. Being stewards of the earth implies revealing the Beauty of the New Creation that the Holy Spirit seeks to accomplish.

But, as Christians, we also discern **together as Church**. Communal discernment is necessary as we together, **in the different communities where the Church gathers**, seek to read the signs of the times in light of the Gospel and thus to act in conformity with what the Holy Spirit demands of us.

- In the "domestic" Church, or wherever small communities gather. These communities could be the family; the particular religious community bound to a convent or specific mission; the

small lay community of friends who share the same charism;

- In the “parish”, or where the *ecclesia* can gather in its totality of clergy, lay and religious where together they discern how the Spirit is calling them to serve and go forth in their particular territory. Analogous is the work in Church schools or other institutions of the Archdiocese;
- In the “religious province or congregation” or the “lay movement” where, as communities bound by charism to the Universal Church but present locally, the particular spirit of service that characterises the community, needs to be made incarnate in the particular local circumstances, under the promptings of the Spirit;

- In the Archdiocese as a whole, starting from its Curial structures, but also **through a process that guarantees true synodality**; a true gathering of the Maltese Church that together listens, together prays, together seeks to be truly open to becoming a medium for the Spirit’s work—no matter what the cost might be.

The local Church is being invited to this conversion in our *modus operandi*, in our way of being “salt” in our land and “light” for its future, by truly becoming a **“discerning people of God”** who acts in His name, because **the sheep recognise the voice of their True Shepherd** (see Jn 10:14).







# Conclusion

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We turn our gaze upon Our Mother

**L**astly, we turn our gaze upon Our Mother, who has always protected the community of the faithful in Malta, we pray for the intercession of the Apostle, our father in faith, as we keep the words of Pope Francis in our hearts:

“Faith also means believing in God, believing that he truly loves us, that he is alive, that he is mysteriously capable of intervening, that he does not abandon us and that he brings good out of evil by his power and his infinite creativity. It means believing that he marches triumphantly in history with those who “are called and chosen and faithful” (Rev 17:14). Let us believe the Gospel when it tells us that the Kingdom of God is already present in this world and is growing, here and there, and in different ways: like the small seed which



grows into a great tree (see Mt 13:31-32), like the measure of leaven that makes the dough rise (see Mt 13:33) and like the good seed that grows amid the weeds (see Mt 13, 24-30) and can always pleasantly surprise us. The Kingdom is here, it returns, it struggles to flourish anew. Christ's resurrection everywhere calls forth seeds of that new world; even if they are cut back, they grow again, for the resurrection is already secretly woven into the fabric of this history, for Jesus did not rise in vain. May we never remain on the sidelines of this march of living hope!

Because we do not always see these seeds growing, we need an interior certainty, a conviction that God is able to act in every situation, even amid apparent setbacks: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4:7). This certainty is often called "a sense of mystery". It involves knowing with certitude that all those who entrust themselves to God in love will bear good fruit (see Jn 15:5). This fruitfulness is often invisible, elusive and unquantifiable. We can know quite well that our lives will be fruitful, without claiming to know how, or where, or when. We

may be sure that none of our acts of love will be lost, nor any of our acts of sincere concern for others. No single act of love for God will be lost, no generous effort is meaningless, no painful endurance is wasted. All of these encircle our world like a vital force. Sometimes it seems that our work is fruitless, but mission is not like a business transaction or investment, or even a humanitarian activity. It is not a show where we count how many people come as a result of our publicity; it is something much deeper, which escapes all measurement. It may be that the Lord uses our sacrifices to shower blessings in another part of the world which we will never visit. The Holy Spirit works as he wills, when he wills and where he wills; we entrust ourselves without pretending to see striking results. We know only that our commitment is necessary. Let us learn to rest in the tenderness of the arms of the Father amid our creative and generous commitment. Let us keep marching forward; let us give him everything, allowing him to make our efforts bear fruit in his good time." (Evangeli gaudium, 278-279)





# The Commitment of the Archdiocese 2020-2024



Following a process of consultation with the faithful, including the participants at the 2019 Diocesan Assembly, and inspired by the vision explained in Part I of *One Church, One Journey*, the Archdiocese of Malta is committing itself to initiate processes that will help sustain the efforts of every ecclesial community in Malta.

The focus is on the fourfold mission entrusted to the local church: a church that listens, that welcomes, that accompanies, that goes forth.

Each of the key dynamics is necessary for the People of God in Malta to enculturate the Gospel more deeply. However, for each year, personally and communally, we will focus on one “verb” to grow in our missionary discipleship.

**We are all invited to ponder every step of the eightfold process from the encounter with Christ, to learning how to discern by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

- These two **foundations** for being Church in Malta, will be the special focus of the first months of the process, throughout 2020. Each ecclesial entity will live the process according to its particular charism and within its specific context.
- **A Church that listens...** to the Word, to one another, and to our

social reality; will be the focus of 2021.

- **A Church that welcomes...** and in welcoming every “other” reconciles; will be the focus of 2022.
- **A Church that accompanies...** and therefore engages in ongoing Christian formation from cradle to tomb; will be the focus of 2023.
- **A Church that goes forth...** and becomes a more authentic prophetic light, but also hidden salt and lifegiving leaven in our land; will be the focus of 2024.
- Finally, at the **2024 Diocesan Assembly** we will seek to remember God’s gestures of mercy, to savour all ecclesial graces received, and to pray for signs to recognise where God will be calling his Church in Malta to continue her witness of the Good News. The 2024 Diocesan Assembly will launch a new process of “going forth” to respond to the times.

From 2020-2023, the Diocesan Assembly will be an opportunity to strengthen the sense of “One Church” on “one journey” and thus to renew our commitment towards missionary discipleship by listening, welcoming, accompanying and going forth.





# Foundations

The loving gaze of Jesus that constantly renews us and invites us to discern the presence of his Spirit

**W**e propose to dedicate time, resources and training so, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we deepen our life of prayer and nurture a contemplative attitude. We open our hearts to Christ's presence, to be renewed by him and to be one with the love of the Father. Our encounter with Christ transforms us into a discerning people: whose thoughts and actions conform to those of Christ Jesus (Phil 2: 5) so our personal, professional and ecclesial lives can witness the joy of the Gospel.

Throughout the four years of this process, all our pastoral approaches must be oriented to this fundamental grace of the encounter with Christ:

## **We are the People of God because we are a people of prayer**

To become one Church through our encounter with Christ, we prioritise praying with **God's word** as we contemplate the face of Jesus of Nazareth and his loving gaze upon us. This enables us to recognise Him whenever He encounters us and we become persons who look upon others with his same loving gaze. Thus, like "every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven" who "brings from his storeroom both the new and the old" (Mt 13: 52), we reinforce positive practices, like Lenten talks and retreats, while being open to new initiatives developed by lay groups and movements, whether in the parish or diocese.

1. The availability of the Bible in Maltese, online, app, and printed versions.

**PERSONS:** Archdiocese of Malta; Vicariate for Evangelisation; Malta Bible Society

2. The formation of the People of God through various **methods of prayer with Scripture** with the aim that each person responds to God's call for
  - conversion
  - conforming to Christ ("Think as the Christ Jesus" [Phil 2:5]),
  - missionary zeal: we see the

world through the eyes of Christ

**PERSONS:** Department of Sacred Scriptures (Faculty of Theology); Contribution by Groups and Movements; Religious Congregations; Centre for Ignatian Spirituality (CIS).

3. **Adoration:** we pray in adoration so as to allow Christ to leading us into an intimate relationship with the Father, in whom everything begins and ends (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 155). Formation, to this end, of those who animate adoration sessions (Liturgy animators/Commission of Liturgy; priests).

**PERSONS:** Groups and Movements; the Religious with their respective charisms.

4. **Liturgy:** the highest form of the encounter between the Risen Christ and His People occurs in Liturgy. The Bishops, together with experts in this regard, are to initiate a process which reinforces the efforts to date with regard to the translation and the publication of liturgical texts.

**PERSONS:** The Bishops; the Interdiocesan Commission for the Liturgy, the College of Parish Priests.

5. **Popular Religiosity:** the founding of an ad hoc group with the aim of restoring the profound sense of popular religiosity in Malta so that it can be purified to channel the encounter with Christ and our people's piety becomes more rooted in the Word.

**PERSONS:** Biblical and Liturgical Ministry; Vicariate for the Clergy and Parishes

## **We are the People of God inasmuch as we discern**

1. Training for priests, members of Religious Orders and the laity (including pastoral workers) with an emphasis on three areas: personal and professional choices; the accompaniment of persons according to their particular life situations; communal discernment within Church structures.
2. Renewal of the Church's structures to reveal synodality and discernment as central to our operations: How is the role of the "consultative council" to be understood in its fullest sense? What is required from leaders in the parish? How do ecclesial structures reflect who the Church is called to be? How do they facilitate the whole community's functioning according to its calling and its mission?

**PERSONS:** The Bishops with the collaboration of all those involved in this field: e.g. the Jesuits and the Centre for Ignatian Spirituality (CIS); Vicariate for the Clergy and Parishes.

## **We are the People of God in Malta united to the universal Church**

1. We implement on a local scale the Church's vision as proposed by the Magisterium with particular attention to *Evangelii gaudium* and the documents of the Maltese Diocesan Synod 1999–2003.
2. The Pastoral visit of Pope Francis renews the determination of the Church in Malta to be a People of God that listens, welcomes, accompanies and goes forth especially to those who are most vulnerable or marginalised.

**PERSONS:** The Bishops with the collaboration of all those involved.





# A Church that listens: contemplation

A gaze that brings out the beauty in others

## **We listen to the Word**

1. We commit ourselves to place the Word of God at the centre of our daily living and our pastoral approach.
2. The founding of a commission responsible for Biblical Ministry in order to assist each ecclesial entity to integrate the Word in all their pastoral work.
3. Making more Biblical digital resources available.

4. The exegesis of the Emmaus pericope to be made available in different formats.

**PERSONS:** Malta Bible Society; Malta Patristic Society; Doctrinal Commission

## **We listen to one another**

1. To nurture a sense of trust that we grow as missionary disciples.
2. An active listening, especially by Bishops, that facilitates communication and communion in particular with children and youths.

**PERSONS:** The Bishops; the Diocesan Commission for Children; MCYN.

3. Mutual listening to grow in our common mission as Church in Malta. A platform of reciprocal listening in which representatives of God's People (see Chapter 5) identify together:
  - the opportunities and the challenges in the various fields of the Maltese Church's mission;
  - the qualities and the charisms that we are called to share with each other;
  - new ways to approach the challenges and the opportunities.

**PERSONS:** The Vicar General with all the relevant Commissions

4. Priests are to be trained in discernment and spiritual direction.

**PERSONS:** Vicariate for the Clergy and the Parishes; College of Parish Priests.

## **We listen to reality**

1. A contemplative attitude that leads to reading of the signs of the times in daily life and in society.
2. An incessant listening attitude towards reality so that we identify how and where we are being called to be light, salt and leaven in Maltese society.

**PERSONS:** The Bishops; Discern; Justice and Peace Commission; Commission for the Environment.

3. The founding of a Poverty Observatory in collaboration with other entities that work in the social field within the civil society.

**PERSONS:** Vicariate for Diakonia and Caritas in collaboration with Discern.



# A Church that welcomes: reconciliation

A gaze that seeks....to bestow mercy

## Welcoming one another

1. The Art of Dialogue:
  - Seek to engage in sincere dialogue with one another in an effort to improve the service we offer as part of the mission entrusted to us by the Lord.

**PERSONS:** Presbyteral Council, Diocesan Pastoral Council, College of Parish Priests, Vicariate for the Clergy and Parishes.

2. Reconciliation:



- Emboldened by the power of the Risen Christ, we do not fear the wounds and pray for forgiveness and healing.
- We learn about our history so that we can confront the scandals of division and abuse. Through dialogue, on different levels, we seek out truth and justice which lead to reconciliation.

**PERSONS:** A commission is to be created for this objective: may include collaboration between the Safeguarding Commission, the Commission for Justice and Peace and the Vicariate for Evangelisation.

3. Identification of chapels of reconciliation where competent persons render service to those in need.

**PERSONS:** Vicariate for the Clergy and Parishes; Secretariat for the Laity.

4. Safeguarding:
  - The publication and implementation of the new safeguarding policy so that the Church can become a safer place for children and vulnerable adults.

**PERSONS:** Safeguarding Commission.

5. Integrating all persons in one community:
  - The re-establishment of the Commission for Disabled Persons so that we can identify the attitudes and initiatives required to empower each person to grow in faith and to contribute to the Church.

6. New Forms of Poverty:
  - When faced with the new realities which will emerge from the Poverty Observatory, we, as a Church, will reflect on how to respond through the service that we provide.

**PERSONS:** Vicariate for Diakonia

## Welcoming persons from other countries

1. A group consisting of persons of diverse nationalities and comprising the parish priests of the various languages and the Commission for Migrants to study the new reality and to present the following at the next Assembly (a) an appreciation of gifts, (b) suggestions on how to integrate better, and (c) suggestions about how to improve training for living in a pluralistic environment.
2. Shared projects to encourage fellowship and dialogue; proposals on improving the integration of persons of different religions.
3. As we reinforce the pastoral work which is already being done with asylum seekers and immigrants, we address the causes of xenophobia, human trafficking and exploitation.

**PERSONS:** Commission for Migrants; Commission for Ecumenism; Commission for Interreligious Dialogue; Secretariat for Catholic Education; Spiritual

Development in Schools; Justice and Peace Commission.

belonging to Church entities and to determine which properties can be used for projects in favour of the needy.

## **We strive towards an integral ecology**

1. The Commission for the Environment to initiate dialogue with parishes, groups and movements to encourage concrete decisions in favour of an integral ecology and the participation of initiatives in favour of the environment.
2. A process of reflection regarding the better utilisation of property

**PERSONS:** Commission for the Environment; College of Parish Priests' Council; Vicariate for Diakonia; Forum for Lay Groups.

3. A project in connection with the initiative "The Economy of Francesco" so that the economy can truly be at the service of humanity and the safeguarding of the environment.

**PERSONS:** Justice and Peace Commission.



# A Church that accompanies: formation

Embodying “a gaze that encounters”

**We pay attention to reality, we assess limitations, we  
broaden our missionary availability**

1. The Vicariate for the Clergy and Parishes in conjunction with the College of Parish Priests start an evaluation process to identify the obstacles that prevent parish priests/priests from prioritising Evangelisation and Diakonia.
2. The relation between numbers of masses, priests and pastoral



workers needs to be studied with the aim of improving the distribution of human resources to achieve prioritised targets.

3. Helping priests to develop a healthier rhythm of prayer and contemplation to strengthen pastoral zeal.
4. *Dar tal-Kleru* to offer more support to priests throughout their ministerial life and not only at the very end of it. The professional services rendered to priests who are in the last stage of their ministry and life to be enhanced.

**PERSONS:** Vicariate for the Clergy and Parishes.

5. A study to determine the training requirements of pastoral workers, including for new areas of pastoral work: e.g. with persons of foreign nationalities.

**PERSONS:** Pastoral Formation Institute

6. A course of formation in the spirit of diakonia for pastoral workers.

**PERSONS:** Vicariate for Diakonia; Vicariate for the Clergy and Parishes; Pastoral Formation Institute.

7. The implications of the Pastoral Plan on a formative level: the vision of the Church and the formative process; the formation necessary for different ministers to concretise proposals.

**PERSONS:** Faculty of Theology; Archbishop's Seminary; Pastoral Formation Institute.

8. Accompaniment for professionals working in the education sector, in particular in their call to work as ministers in a plural environment that includes many religions.

**PERSONS:** Spiritual Development in Schools; Secretariat for Catholic Education

## The formation of disciples

1. A joint initiative between all sectors involved in formation and catechesis in order to evaluate how changes in culture invites us to new initiatives and proposals for the initiation of Christians and the integration of faith with life, from cradle to tomb.

**PERSONS:** Vicariate for Evangelisation; Secretariat for Catechesis; Communications Office.

2. Strengthening the accompaniment of families.

**PERSONS:** Cana Movement; Belong; Catholic Action.

## On becoming missionary disciples

1. Reflection on the different contexts and cultures of the people we serve, and on the challenges for inculturating the Gospel in today's Malta.
2. The creation/strengthening of chaplaincies (schools, hospitals,

retirement homes, correctional facilities) in the light of our role as a Church in a society which encompasses persons from different cultures and religions. The necessary training to be provided to persons who work in this field.

**PERSONS:** Faculty of Theology; Missio Malta; ĊAM; Secretariat for Catholic Education; Spiritual Development in Schools; Franciscan Capuchin Monks; Pastoral Formation Institute; Commission for the Environment; Discern.



# A Church that goes forth: mission as service

We bring His gaze upon the world

## **A strong commitment to the promotion of human life and dignity**

1. We raise awareness, in parishes and other communities, about the calling we have all received towards missionary discipleship as concrete works of service or diakonia. Our communities are to become more open to the peripheries and to vulnerable persons so that there is a common effort in promoting human life and human dignity in light of the Gospel.



**PERSONS:** Vicariate for Diakonia; Presbyteral Council; Pastoral Diocesan Council; College of Parish Priests; Vicariate for Evangelisation.

## Preferential option for the marginalised

1. Advocacy (from diakonia to justice):
  - In conjunction with Civil Society, the Church identifies the ways in which human dignity is being weakened and creates new initiatives that address the root causes of poverty (attitudes, training and decisions).

**PERSONS:** Vicariate for Diakonia; Caritas; Justice and Peace Commission.

2. New initiatives at the service of those who are most needy, and in collaboration with professional entities and Civil Society, are to be duly considered (St Michael's Hospice, which offers palliative care, and Dar Papa Frangisku, which takes care of the homeless, are examples of such initiatives). The Church can thus focus on initiatives for the neediest instead of other operations which are already being well catered for by the State and the private sector.
3. We reflect on how the Church shares the same hopes and the same concerns as the rest of the Maltese population. We interpret local current happenings in the light of the Gospel and propose paths that reinforce Christians and those of good will in ethical decision making and political

formation which upholds honesty, integrity, justice and good governance.

**PERSONS:** Commission for Justice and Peace; Commission for the Environment.

## A commitment to transition as church “from maintenance to mission”

1. We identify what is not bearing fruit in our ministry so that we dispense with it and renew.

**PERSONS:** Every Church entity

2. Training in creativity for mission so that we cease to be afraid of taking risks and we overcome pessimism and false prudence. Parishes to be evangelised by those who work with the poor and those who are already going forth to evangelise.

**PERSONS:** Every Church entity. Diocesan Commission for Sports; Catholic Action Youths; MCYN.

## Digital Presence

1. A small team that analyses the current reality and consequently delivers proposals toward a relevant Christian digital presence. To include a vision for every Christian which guides him/her into becoming an authentic witness and which also comprises a guide for Church structures.

**PERSONS:** Communications Office; Beacon Media; Vicariate for Evangelisation.

## **Schools**

1. The Church in Malta has had and still maintains an important presence in the educational sector through its own schools and also within State and Independent schools. However, the new realities in the cultural context (students from different cultures, different religions, changes in the reality of families, the new challenges pertaining to the life lived in faith) are demanding a renewed perspective as to how the Church is to approach these realities and how best to serve the mission.

**PERSONS:** Secretariat for Catholic Education; Spiritual Development in Schools (Pastoral work in State and Independent schools); Vicariate for Evangelisation.

## **A widespread thirst for Spirituality**

1. Retreats to be proposed in Advent and Lent for employees who work in Church institutions.
2. New proposals of dialogue with the Art and Music worlds for those who are in the process of spiritual seeking.

**PERSONS:** KSMR; FORUM

