

**“FEED MY SHEEP”: A SHEPHERDING MISSION
Pastoral Program of the Diocese of Libmanan**

Identity of the Local Church of Libmanan

Any pastoral program must be rooted in the identity of the local Church; in other words, mission flows from identity.

From early in its history, the local Church of Libmanan—then still a Prelature—was already shaped by the vision of Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, which promoted the formation of basic ecclesial communities as a renewed way of being Church. Guided by this vision, Libmanan came to understand itself as a Church constituted by small Christian communities (*Saradit na Kristianong Komunidad – SKK*). In its relationship with the universal Church, it likewise sees itself as a small Christian community within the larger communion.

Thus, the local Church of Libmanan identifies itself as a community of disciples and a Church of the poor—echoing the description of the Church in the Philippines articulated by PCP II—expressed concretely in a network of small Christian communities. This is the enduring identity of the local Church of Libmanan.

Vision

Shortly after the local Church of Libmanan was elevated to the status of a diocese on March 25, 2009, the clergy and lay faithful gathered in an assembly on June 5, 2010, following a diocesan-wide consultation. The purpose of this gathering was to discern the path and direction the Church would take in the years ahead as it embraced its mission as a diocese.

In that assembly, the participants articulated a shared vision that further clarified and deepened the Church’s sense of identity: to become a Church (*Simbahan*) that journeys and grows toward communion (*Kaboronyogan*) and strives to be a living witness to the Kingdom (*Kahadean*). This vision came to be expressed in the renewed meaning of SKK.

Mission

Given this vision, it became necessary to discern how the local Church might bring it to fulfillment—namely, to define its mission. If the vision is the end, the mission is the means. During the diocesan synod of 2014 (between June and December), the fruit of three years of preparation, the local Church recognized as its mission the very mandate

entrusted by Jesus, the Good Shepherd, to Peter: “Feed my sheep...tend my lambs...feed my sheep” (John 21:15–17).

Thus, the mission of the local Church of Libmanan is essentially a *shepherding* mission—expressed in nurturing the flock, caring for it with pastoral solicitude, and proclaiming to it the Good News. In this way, shepherding and evangelization are inseparably one mission.

Spheres of Mission (Pastoral Praxis)

The local Church further understands its mission as unfolding within three interconnected spheres: liturgy, development, and liberation.

Liturgy, because the Church is called to nourish the faithful through the Word of God, the Eucharist, and the other sacraments. In the liturgy, the flock is gathered, formed, and sustained in communion with God.

Development, because this nurturing is not only spiritual but also human and material. The Church recognizes that shepherding includes attending to the concrete conditions of life—especially the reality of material poverty—by promoting the integral development of the persons entrusted to its care.

Liberation, because the ultimate goal of the Church’s mission is the redemption of the flock: freedom from sin and from its social manifestations, particularly in structures of injustice and oppression. This liberation is both spiritual (*salus animarum*) and societal, embracing the fullness of human life.

Taken together, these three spheres express the holistic character of the Church’s shepherding mission.

Dimensions of Mission

When concretized this shepherding mission has five dimensions. It may be understood as an integrated and holistic journey expressed through five interrelated dimensions, all directed toward the fulfillment of her identity and mission.

- a) *Renewed evangelized and evangelizing community.* A renewed, evangelized, and evangelizing community is a vital dimension of the pastoral program, expressing both the Church’s identity and its mission. As a **renewed community**, the Church is continually converted and transformed by an encounter with Christ. It remains a humble recipient of the Good News (evangelized). And it actively proclaims and

witnesses to the Gospel (evangelizing). Thus, a renewed, evangelized, and evangelizing community is both contemplative and missionary: rooted in Christ, continually transformed by His grace, and sent forth to share His Good News with others.

- b) *A renewed life of holiness and service* constitutes the second dimension of the pastoral program, expressing the Church's call to both personal transformation and active charity. As a renewed life of holiness, it emphasizes the universal call to holiness among all the faithful. Holiness is not reserved for a few but is the vocation of every baptized person. At the same time, this holiness is inseparable from service. A genuine encounter with Christ necessarily leads to love of neighbor, especially the poor, the suffering, and the marginalized. Thus, a renewed life of holiness and service forms disciples who are both contemplative and active: rooted in God, yet fully engaged in the realities of the world. In this way, personal sanctification and pastoral charity converge, giving credible witness to the Gospel.
- c) *A renewed community of agents of change* constitutes the third dimension of the pastoral program, highlighting the Church's call to form and empower disciples who actively participate in the transformation of both Church and society. As renewed agents, clergy, religious, and lay faithful alike undergo continuous formation and conversion. This renewal involves deepening their spirituality, strengthening their understanding of the faith, and cultivating pastoral skills suited to the needs of the times. As agents of change, they are sent forth to engage the realities of the world in the light of the Gospel. Thus, renewed agents of change are both formed and sent: grounded in faith, equipped for mission, and committed to renewing the face of the earth. Through their witness and action, the Church becomes a dynamic presence that brings about authentic transformation in society.
- d) A renewed social ministry constitutes the fourth dimension of the pastoral program, embodying the Church's commitment to charity, justice, and the transformation of society in the light of the Gospel. As renewed, social ministry goes beyond sporadic or purely charitable initiatives and becomes a more integrated, sustained, and mission-oriented engagement. As social ministry, it expresses the Church's preferential love for the poor through both service and advocacy. Thus, a renewed social ministry is both compassionate and prophetic: compassionate in responding to human suffering, and prophetic in challenging the conditions that give rise to it. It becomes a concrete expression of the Church's shepherding mission, making visible God's love and justice in the world.
- e) A renewed responsible stewardship constitutes the fifth dimension of the pastoral program, expressing the Church's call to care faithfully for all the gifts entrusted to her for the sake of mission. As renewed, stewardship calls for a deeper awareness that all resources – spiritual, human, material, and environmental – are

gifts from God to be used wisely and accountably. As responsible stewardship, it entails the proper management and equitable sharing of the Church's resources in support of her mission. Thus, renewed responsible stewardship is both faithful and mission-oriented: faithful in safeguarding what has been entrusted, and mission-oriented in ensuring that all resources are directed toward the building up of the Church and the realization of God's Kingdom.

Taken together, these five dimensions form a unified pastoral vision: a Church renewed in faith, active in charity, engaged in mission, committed to justice, and faithful in stewardship—journeying together as a community of disciples toward the fullness of God's Kingdom.

TaGaMa: A Way of Integration

Upon closer examination, all five dimensions embody a dynamic and ongoing process of re-centering, transformation, and revitalization within the pastoral program; this process constitutes "renewal." That this "renewal" unfolds across all five dimensions of the pastoral program demonstrates that they are essentially and dynamically integrated, forming one unified reality of pastoral mission.

Tagama, an acronym for "**T**anganing **G**abos **M**ag-ako – kan pagkaherak kan Dios" ("so that all may receive God's mercy"), is itself a Bicol term meaning "to deliberately set aside something so that it may be shared or used for a beneficial—above all, charitable and noble—purpose." It has thus become a concrete expression of this dynamic integration. In its original usage, *Tagama* served as the appellation of the diocesan stewardship program, envisioned as a means of assisting the poor, especially in times of great need, such as natural calamities and other human-made disasters.

Over time, however, the meaning of *Tagama* has broadened and deepened. It has come to embody a wider spiritual and pastoral vision, captured in expressions such as "*tanganing gabos magpamibi sa pagsarig asin paglaom sa Dios*" ("that all may pray in trust and hope in God"), "*tanganing gabos maglaen tanganing mayong masayang*" (that all may preserve that nothing goes to waste), "*tanganing gabos magsaray tanganing dai mawaran*" ("that all may save that nothing is lost," "*tanganing gabos maghiras tanganing gabos makinabang*" ("that all may share so that all may benefit"), and "*tanganing gabos magmangno para sa marhay na kapalibotan asin pamamahala*" ("that all may care for a good environment and responsible governance). In this expanded sense, *tagama* now encompasses not only the offering of treasure, but also the sharing of time, talents, responsibilities and tasks in the service of ministry.

In the context of the pastoral program *Tagama* has come to mean “*Tangananing an gabos mamahalà*” (“that all may participate in the task of leadership and governance”). It is an attempt to renew and transform the local Church into becoming a *more synodal* Church:

tangananing (in order that; so that; that): speaks of purpose and therefore echoes the aspiration in the local Church to fulfill its vision of journeying towards communion and living witness to the kingdom—*maglakbay na synodal* (synodal journey), *may kaboronyogan* (communion); *pasiring sa kahadean* (witness to the kingdom).

gabos (all; everyone): mirrors “synodality” as the journey of faith and mission involves all the Catholic faithful, namely, those especially called to a *life of holiness and service* (*dimension 2*), i.e., clergy, religious and seminarians; and all *agents of change* (*dimension 3*), i.e., SKK and lay leaders, the family, the youth, and religious organizations.

mamahalà (to govern; to lead): speaks of the tasks and responsibilities entailed by the shepherding mission, which comprehends *a) evangelization* (*dimension 1*), i.e., in catechesis, liturgy, biblical apostolate, and mission; *b) social ministry* (*dimension 4*), i.e., social action—promotion of justice and peace, responsible use of social communications, and safeguarding of children and the vulnerable; and *c) responsible stewardship* (*dimension 5*), i.e., administration, finance, management of diocesan properties, and protection and preservation of Church heritage.

Synodal Images of the Church: the Fruits of Shepherding Mission

When *Tagama* is authentically embraced and lived as a dynamic process of renewal, its fruits become tangible in the life of the Church. In the sphere of *liturgy*, this renewal manifests the Church as a *worshiping community* (worshiping SKK), characterized by full and active *participation*. In the sphere of *development*, it reveals the Church as a *caring community*, grounded in *communion*. In the sphere of *liberation*, it brings to fulfillment the Church as an *evangelizing community*, defined by its *missionary dynamism* and transformative witness.