



PASTORAL LETTER

ON THE SOLEMNITY OF SAINT PETER BAPTIST, TITULAR PATRON OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CACERES

St. Peter Baptist, Builder of Christian Communities

As we celebrate the feast of the Titular Patron of the Archdiocese of Caceres, we thank God for St. Peter Baptist who formed Christian communities here in Bikol. As a Franciscan missionary, he led the founding of the towns of Baa, Buhi and Libmanan in Camarines Sur, and Cagsawa, Oas and Ligao in Albay.

Born in Avila, Spain in 1542, and sent to the Philippines in 1584, he preached God's Word by journeying with the people. First, he sought to understand their culture and then ushered them to a communal life anchored on the Gospel. In him, we find a model and inspiration as our Church calls for synodality. Fueled by his love of God, he united himself with the people and paved the way so they would grow in faith. This is also our vision for our basic ecclesial communities (BEC), or *Saradit na Kristyanong Komunidad* (SKK) – that animated by the Holy Spirit, they become vessels of communion, participation and mission.

Synodality in the Context of SKK

Through SKK, we can bring the Gospel to every home; we can pray together, listen to each other and serve one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. In our SKK, we can discover a Church that is truly alive, where everyone fulfills the duties received at baptism. When the rich and poor, healthy and infirm, young and old are immersed in SKK, we can break barriers as a synodal Church.

St. Peter Baptist broke language barriers because he spoke the language of God's love. He understood the locals because he listened with his heart. And he led the people not only by preaching, but by living out the Gospel. Martyred on the cross in Nagasaki, Japan in 1597, his fidelity to God does not need further evidence. His life and death are guideposts for our SKK.

Our Pastoral Direction

In February 2020, in celebration of the feast of St. Peter Baptist, we unequivocally declared our commitment to “strengthen our efforts to form Basic Ecclesial Communities in our parishes.”

Since then, several parishes have heeded the call. Our accomplishments thus far are largely due to the clergy and laity who, filled with the Holy Spirit, dedicate themselves to SKK even amid the pandemic.

The pandemic may have caused unprecedented challenges, but it fortified our resolve. It has underscored the truth that society is hinged on small communities. The *bayanihan* spirit ignited in neighborhoods can spur the entire country to action. This is also how we shall pursue our vision. Our parishes must unify the faithful, from one household to another, towards a new way of being Church.

Therefore, I enjoin the clergy to spearhead the crafting of an SKK Pastoral Plan in their respective parishes. This pastoral plan shall be the roadmap so every parish will be composed of vibrant basic ecclesial communities. There are parishes where BECs are effectively engaged in pastoral programs. Thus, I ask the *Vicars Forane* to facilitate the sharing of experiences and best practices, to equip more parishes to establish SKK. Parishes may have diverse contexts, but all must fulfill the Church's mission.

I call upon the archdiocesan ministry clusters – Worship, Education, Social Services, Temporalities, Youth, Clergy and Laity – to identify points of convergence so they may fully participate in this direction. Specifically, I ask the Education Ministry Cluster to reinforce efforts already begun, in support of the BEC Office. The formation program for BECs must be collaborative, sustained, and responsive to current realities.

Closing

This year, we close the celebration of the 500th Year of Christianity in the Philippines. We are also preparing for the Synod on Synodality. These milestones behoove us to take a closer look at how our faith communities proclaim the Gospel by words and deeds. Through SKK, we can serve God and country, especially the poor, as devotedly as St. Peter Baptist did.

To mark his feast and as a way of invoking his intercession as we persevere in forming BECs, we shall welcome and enthrone his bone relic at the Metropolitan Cathedral on February 5, at 2:45 in the afternoon. May this be a testament of our commitment to journey together so every BEC, like a mustard seed, would grow in faith and virtue.

May the loving care of our *Ina* continue to guide us, as a Church building God's Kingdom here on earth.


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