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Ruben C. Mendoza

**BUILDING A COMMUNION OF COMMUNITIES
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN THE APOSTOLIC VICARIATE
OF JOLO, PHILIPPINES**

In a context that is characterized by violence, poverty, and strained Muslim-Christian relations, the Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo (AVJ) understands its mission as enabling the birth of a community of peace and justice. To this end, the AVJ considers dialogue with the Moros as an integral element of its mission and ministries. For the AVJ, the church's identity as a sacrament of God's love is intimately related to the church's relationship with the predominantly Muslim populace. It is in responding to the various needs of the Moros of Jolo that the church realizes its task of building the kingdom of God in the concrete circumstances of life. With the Moros, the AVJ seeks to build basic human communities where both Christians and Muslims try to foster harmonious relationships and which respond to the pressing issues of their society.

Among the different local churches in Asia, the church in the Philippines stands in a unique position. With the exception of East Timor, the Philippines is the only predominantly Catholic country in Asia and it is where the majority of Christians in Asia reside. To a great extent, the Catholic Church has been influential in both the social and political life of the Filipino nation. However, it is less known that there are provinces and regions in southern Philippines that are predominantly Muslim. The estimates of the number of Filipino Muslims in 2000 vary from 3.85 million to 8.35 million (5.1% to 10.9% of the total population of the country) (*Philippine Human Development Report* [PHDR] 2005: 14-15). The vast majority of them live in Mindanao, the biggest island in Southern Philippines. The church necessarily undertakes its mission in these predominantly Muslim areas in ways which are different from those in predominantly Christian areas (cf. LaRousse 2004: 114-71; LaRousse 2001). To a great extent, the situation in these places is more reflective of the general context in which the vast majority of Asians find themselves.

In this article, I will look at the way the Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo

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(AVJ), which has been under the pastoral care of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate since 1939, understands its identity and mission in a predominantly Muslim setting. I will explore the question of what it means to be church in this setting. In order to do this, I will first highlight important elements of the context of AVJ. Second, I will expound on AVJ's goals, vision-mission, and its various ministries and programs. And third, I will discuss the interreligious dimension of the vicariate's understanding of its mission.

***The Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo:
A Church Sailing on Rough Seas***

Located in the south-western part of the Philippines, in the Celebes Sea, north-east of Sabah, Malaysia, the Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo covers a total area of 2,687.78 km², consisting of 457 islands. The APJ comprises both the provinces of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, collectively known as the Sulu archipelago, which are part of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The total population of Sulu is 849,670, 95% of whom are Muslims, 3% are Christians and 2% belong to other religions. In Tawi-Tawi, there are 450,317 people, 95% of whom are Muslims. The majority of the populace of the Sulu archipelago belong to three ethno-linguistic groups: the Tausugs, the Samas, and the Badjaos. Among them, the Tausugs are the most numerous while the Badjaos are in danger of vanishing.

Before proceeding to discuss the AVJ's mission in Jolo, I will first discuss the context in which this mission is performed. This is not meant to be an exhaustive presentation of the vicariate's context but is intended to highlight four crucial aspects of the Sulu archipelago's context that have had a significant impact on this local church's understanding of its mission: i) the religious situation; ii) the Bangsa-moro issue; iii) the poverty of its peoples; and iv) the violence inflicted on the clergy, religious, and the laity.

First, *the religious situation*: Islam predated the coming of Christianity into the Philippines. Islam first arrived in Sulu around the late 13th or early 14th century (cf. Majul 1999: 56-84). From there, it spread to the island of Mindanao and then, to the islands of the Visayas and Luzon. When the Spaniards arrived in the 16th century, the locals of Sulu and Mindanao, called *Moros* by the Spaniards, already had their own system of government, the sultanate. There was even a thriving Muslim community in what later came to be known as Manila. The Spanish colonizers had an easier time in colonizing and Christianizing the indigenous people of the two biggest groups of islands in the Philippines, Luzon and the Visayas, but were not really

able to gain a foothold on the predominantly Muslim areas in Southern Philippines, particularly in the then empire province of Cotabato and the Sultanate of Jolo. The fact that both of these areas were predominantly Muslim prior to the coming of the Spanish and American colonizers and that they have remained so until the present is a crucial factor in the next element of Jolo's context that we will consider.

Second, the *Bangsamoro issue* and its consequences. This is perhaps the most intractable problem facing the church of Jolo. The term "Bangsamoro" (literally, Moro people) refers to the thirteen Muslim ethno-linguistic groups who, among other things, share a common history of struggle for self-determination. Sulu has been at the heart of this struggle since it is the political center of pre-colonial Muslim Philippines, and is also the birthplace of the standard bearer of the contemporary Moro armed struggle from 1972 to 1996, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). This struggle reached its most violent expression in the 1970's when the MNLF battled it out with the military in southern Philippines (Noble 1976: 405-24). As a sovereignty-based armed conflict, it has had the most devastating effect in Mindanao and Sulu in terms of loss of human life and displacement of peoples. It has been estimated that, from 1969 to 1976, as many as 60,000 people were killed during the war, 54,000 wounded and 350,000 displaced (PHDR 2005: 72). The recent confrontations between Muslim separatists and the Philippine military from 2000 to 2004 have displaced around 30,000 to 150,000 people (Ibid., 10). The *Philippine Human Development Report* sums up the causes of the Moro problem as follows:

Historical roots include (1) the forcible/illegal annexation of Moroland to the Philippines under the Treaty of Paris in 1898; (2) military pacifications; (3) imposition of confiscatory land laws; (4) indionization (or Filipinization) of public administration in Moroland and the destruction of traditional political institutions; (5) government-financed/induced land settlement and migration to Moroland; (6) land-grabbing/conflicts; and (7) cultural inroads against the Moros. Contemporary causes are (8) the Jabitah massacre in 1968; (9) Ilaga (Christian vigilante) and military atrocities in 1970-72; and (10) government neglect and inaction on Moro protests and grievances. The triggering event of the contemporary Moro armed struggle was President Ferdinand E. Marcos's declaration of martial law on September 21, 1972 (ibid., 66; cf. Tuminez 2008: 2-11).

An offshoot of the Bangsamoro issue is the rise of Islamic extremist groups. The most infamous and highly publicized among these groups is the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), which has its base in Patikul,

Sulu (Banlaoi 2006: 247-49; Turner 1995: 1-19). The ASG has been linked to the global Al Qaeda network, has been designated by the US Department of State as a foreign terrorist organization, and has been an object of the US “war against terrorism.” The ASG is responsible for a series of bombings, kidnappings and killings in the Sulu archipelago and Western Mindanao and its members are suspects in the killings of priests in the Vicariate of Jolo and the Prelature of Basilan, the island east of Sulu. From 1991 to 2000, the ASG has been deemed responsible for 378 “terrorist activities,” 288 civilian deaths and 640 kidnappings with a total of 2,076 victims (Banlaoi 2006: 249).

An undeniable critical element of the Bangsamoro issue is the role of Islam. Islam has served as unifying factor among the Bangsamoro ethno-linguistic groups and as a source of identity for them. For many, it is Islam which distinguishes them from the colonized peoples of Luzon and the Visayas. The very name of one of the armed Muslim secessionist groups, Moro *Islamic* Liberation Front (MILF), underscores not only the religious orientation of this movement but also the religious undertones of its struggle for self-determination. In the official website of the MILF, one finds in one of the boxes of its home page the following quotation from its late founder, Hashim Salamat: “The ultimate aim of our jihad is to make supreme the word of Allah.”

Third, the local church of Jolo is also faced with the *widespread poverty of its peoples*. The poverty that people in this area experience is both a cause and a consequence of the Bangsamoro conflict. As a cause, poverty breeds feelings of neglect and insecurity so that many see armed rebellion as a means of addressing their situation. It is a consequence because the armed conflict inevitably impacts on the local economy in general and the livelihood of people in particular. Loss of property because of the conflict is estimated to be between 300 and 500 million pesos (PHDR 2005: 72). Out of the 77 provinces in the Philippines, Tawi-Tawi and Sulu rank 75th and 77th, respectively, in the 2003 HDI. While the 2003 national life expectancy is 69.8 years, life expectancy in Tawi-Tawi and Sulu is only 51.2 and 52.8, respectively. The percentage of people who are 18 years old and older and who graduated from high school is 40.9% in Tawi-Tawi and 21.1% in Sulu, the lowest in the country. 39.1% of adults in Sulu have less than 6 years of education. The 2003 per capita incomes in both provinces are among the bottom three in the country. More than 82% of the households in both provinces have no access to electricity. Based on the 2003 Human Poverty Index, Tawi-Tawi and Sulu are the poorest provinces in the country. The 2003 median income of both

provinces is also the lowest in the nation (PHDR 2005: 59-60, 122-25, 140-41, 144-45).

Fourth, a serious problem that confronts Jolo's priests, religious and laity is the *reality and threat of violence* to their persons, perpetrated mainly by the extremist and lawless elements among the populace. In 1993, two Spanish religious sisters belonging to the Carmelites of Charity Vedruna were kidnapped. A year later, Fr. Clarence Bertelsman, OMI was kidnapped but, fortunately, he was quickly rescued by the military. In February 1997, the bishop of Jolo, Benjamin de Jesus, OMI was shot and killed in front of his cathedral. Three years later, in December 2000, Fr. Benjamin Inocencio, OMI was also assassinated near the cathedral. Then, just this year, Fr. Rey Roda, OMI was dragged from his convento's chapel and killed by his would-be kidnappers. Sadly, in all of these cases, justice has yet to be served. At present, the bishop, priests and religious are under the protection of the Philippine military and have to be accompanied by military bodyguards in performing their mission. In addition, there has been a perceived problem on the part of many Christians that they could not freely practice and express their faith. Some Christians even fear being identified as Christians because of possible repercussions – imagined or real.

It is arguable then that, given these interrelated and complex issues, human security at its most basic level – freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom from humiliation – is a major issue in Jolo (PHDR 2005:1-2). To characterize this context as challenging for the church would be an understatement. It is in the face of these seemingly insurmountable issues that the church in Jolo must perform its mission. If it is to be relevant in this context, then, the church needs to address the very issues that affect its people and, in its own way, make a contribution to the realization of peace, justice and development. The question that the following section explores is how the church of Jolo conceives of its mission in a situation where the population is predominantly Muslim, many of them restive, where the vast majority of the people are poor and where mission involves personal danger.

The Goals, the Vision-Mission and the Pastoral Priorities of the Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo

In response to the context in which it finds itself, the AVJ understands its mission in terms of the Kingdom of God. According to the 1st Congress of the Vicariate, the ideal to which the church is moving is the Kingdom of God. This congress describes the Kingdom as a

situation in which men and women live “in peace and harmony in an atmosphere of justice and charity, loving and respecting one another, free to worship God as he invites them.” It is significant to note that this congress was held 22-29 September 1975, a year after most of the town of Jolo was razed to the ground due to the battle between the Philippine military and the separatist MNLF. An unintended consequence of the armed conflict was the deterioration of Christian-Muslim relationships. The war was perceived by many Moros not only in terms of the Bangsamoro struggle for self-determination but also as a religious one, particularly because almost all of the Philippine military were Christians. Thus, it became an urgent pastoral imperative on the part of the vicariate to reflect on its mission in a situation of conflict that resulted in the deaths of many and the untold suffering of so many other people, the vast majority of whom are non-combatants. It is quite understandable that the church would emphasize in this context precisely those values that appear absent from Sulu and Tawi-Tawi – peace, harmony, justice, charity, love, respect and freedom of worship. For the AVJ, the church must be an instrument of social transformation. This is why its goals, vision-mission and pastoral priorities are oriented toward and are aimed at accomplishing the ideal toward which the church is moving, God’s Kingdom. In what follows, I will discuss each of these items: i) the goals of the vicariate; ii) its vision-mission; and iii) its pastoral priorities. These aspects are reflective of the AVJ’s understanding of its identity and its mission.

The Goals of the Vicariate: Building a Community of Disciples and a Communion of Communities. In light of the ideal of the Kingdom of God, the AVJ articulated two interrelated long-range goals at the 1st Congress of the Vicariate: i) that the church in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi be a community of disciples of Christ who by prayer, witness and service become a sacrament proclaiming God’s love for all men and women; and ii) that there be established a communion of communities working together to create a society wherein people can submit themselves to God’s/Allah’s call with increasing freedom.

The first goal focuses on the building up of Christian community and highlights elements which are relevant to the local setting. The reflection of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) is instructive in understanding what becoming “a community of disciples of Christ” means. For PCP II, the model of the early Christian communities is programmatic for the renewed church that it envisions (PCP II, 87-142). PCP II first of all sees the church as *a communion*. Christ calls on Christians to form a community and it is in this community that they grow in faith. The unity that one finds in

the church is a unity in diversity. This diversity in the church “does not destroy the unity. But it brings out the complementarity and necessary contribution of the different charisms and ministries” (PCP II, 92).

Second, this church is a *participatory church*, a community in which the gifts of its members are recognized and used for the building up of the one body and in which the members share in the responsibilities of realizing the church.

Third, the church is a *community-in-mission*. By its very nature, the church is missionary. As PCP II states,

The community of disciples does not exist only for itself and its members. It exists for the world. It is sent on mission to proclaim the good news of Christ and to be instrument of his grace. It exists in order to evangelize, i.e., to proclaim the Good News, to build up the Church, and to serve the Kingdom by permeating the world with Gospel values so that finally all creation may be united in Christ as head (PCP II, 104).

With regard to church as being in a state of mission, PCP II discerned two significant considerations. First, as a predominantly Catholic country, the church in the Philippines has a special mission to the nations, particularly to the other peoples of Asia. Second, the church needs to engage in interreligious dialogue since it is an integral part of the church’s evangelizing mission.

Fourth, in order to allow it to fulfill its mission, Christ constituted the church as a *priestly, prophetic and kingly people*. These are the major dimensions of the renewed church for PCP II and they appear to underlie the AVJ’s understanding of the church as “a community of disciples.”

Moreover, the AVJ regards the church as a sacrament of God’s love. Significantly, perhaps, in contrast to the emphasis of recent Vatican documents, like *Dominus Iesus* and *Ecclesia in Asia*, there is no insistence on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Rather, as a sacrament, the church points to and makes real God’s love for all women and men, regardless of their religious affiliation. It is thus with the hope and conviction of sharing God’s love with others that the AVJ performs its mission.

How does the Christian community become a sacrament? For the AVJ, this is achieved through the three-fold task of prayer, witness and service. In this way, the community becomes a sacrament of God’s love for all. It is remarkable that, for PCP II, the three elements of living the faith are: praying and worshipping, witnessing and loving service (PCP II, 74-80) – the very activities that are men-

tioned in the first goal of the AVJ. The 1st Congress of the Vicariate of Jolo stated that the church “through service will become a sacrament proclaiming God’s love for all men [and women]” (AVJ 1975). The church’s service is concretized in the various ministries and programs of the vicariate. At the 2nd Congress of the Vicariate, held in 1981, this goal or objective was modified to state that it is “through *prayer and service*” that the church would become “a sacrament,” “an external sign,” of God’s love (AVJ 1981). Prayer sustains and nourishes the faith life. Indispensable in this regard is personal prayer which finds its source and summit in the various liturgical and sacramental celebrations of the church. Then, the 3rd Congress of the Vicariate, held 29 July – 2 August 1986, added *witness* to service and prayer as a means of being a sacrament (AVJ 1986). To believe is to bear witness to Jesus Christ through one’s life. In all of these, one notices that the 2nd and 3rd Congresses seem to have “fine-tuned” the statement of the 1st Congress as regards the Vicariate’s first long-term goal. Hence, the AVJ’s three-fold task is parallel to PCP II’s understanding of what it means to live the faith.

The second goal of the AVJ involves both Christians and Muslims. The church desires to establish a “communion of communities” between both religious groups. Community is thus understood in an inclusive sense, involving not only those who belong to one’s religious tradition but also those who adhere to another tradition, which, in the case of the Vicariate, are Muslims. This communion has as its goal the creation of a society in which “people can submit themselves to God’s/Allah’s call with increasing freedom.” It is significant to note that the Vicariate uses the words “submit” and “Allah.” The very meaning of *Islam* is the submission of oneself to Allah and obedience to Allah’s law. Also, by using the word “Allah,” the Vicariate expresses not only solicitude for the sensitivities of Muslims but also a tacit acknowledgement of Allah as “the one God, living and subsisting in Himself, merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men [and women]” (NA 3). For the church of Jolo, one’s submission to God’s will means realizing the Kingdom in the concrete circumstances of one’s life and society. At the same time, it seems that the church is also concerned that Muslims grow in their own religious tradition and faith when it regards the society it envisions as enabling them to submit themselves to Allah. In other words, the society that the AVJ envisions is a society in which both Muslims and Christians can truly practice and live their respective faiths “with increasing freedom.” “With increasing freedom” here has both personal/individual and communal/societal dimensions: personal/individual in the sense that the person is freed from sin – that which prevents her or him from truly loving – and is freed to live a life of

love and service; and communal/societal since there are structures in society that inhibit or prevent one from practicing one's faith.

The Vision-Mission of the Vicariate. An important element in understanding the AVJ's understanding of its mission is its vision-mission statement. The 4th Congress of the Vicariate, held 4-9 August 1993, formulated the vision-mission of the vicariate. The vision-mission is closely related to its goals and it is expressed as follows:

1. The provinces of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, which are predominantly Muslim, but also include peoples of diverse tribes and faiths, are presently marked by poverty in the midst of plenty, an atmosphere of fear and violence and an abuse of natural resources, yet the people journey to create a new reality in harmony with God, with one another and with creation.
2. We, the Church of the poor of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, envision ourselves as a community of disciples of Christ in union with Mary, who by prayer and service strive to live in harmony with each other and with people of other faiths and who by our lives foster charity, justice and respect for one another.
3. Appreciative of the different tribes and faiths, we join and cooperate with all people of goodwill in the birthing of a communion of communities where: human dignity is honored and promoted; every tribe and faith is respected; diverse tongues and traditions work in solidarity for the good of all; justice prevails in socio-economic structure; respect for all created life is an imperative for integral development; and everyone can worship God with ever increasing freedom (AVJ 1993).

The first part of the vision-mission deals with the context of the AVJ. The church acknowledges the reality that the Christian community lives in a predominantly Muslim area which includes "peoples of diverse tribes and faiths." The indigenous tribes or ethnic groups, who constitute the majority of the peoples in the archipelago, are the Tausugs, Bajaos, Samas and Jama Mapuns while the other ethnic groups are the Tagalogs, Cebuanos, Ilonggos, Warays, Bicolanos, Pampangueños, Ilocanos and Malays. As noted earlier, Muslims compose the vast majority of the people while a small minority are Christians and even a small group practice their traditional religion. The vision-mission then goes on to note a paradoxical dimension of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. The majority of the people in these provinces are poor even though they live in a land that is rich in natural resources. Moreover, they live "in an atmosphere of fear and violence and the abuse of natural resources." Yet, their deepest aspiration is for a society that is in harmony with God, with others and with creation.

The second part focuses on the AVJ's self-understanding as church. The church of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi regards itself as the Church of the Poor. This is a reception of a major theme of PCP II, which was held two years prior to the formulation of the Vicariate's vision-mission. Teodoro Bacani argues that PCP II

developed an aspect of Vatican II which the ecumenical council itself was not able to develop sufficiently. I refer here to the theme of the Church and the Poor, a very important theme for the universal Church in this third millennium, and of paramount importance to the Church in the Philippines. In developing this theme beyond what Vatican II was able to do, PCP-II incarnated for the Church in the Philippines a vital aspect of the Gospel already given impetus by Vatican II itself: the spirit of poverty in the Church and the Church's concern for the poor and needy. At the same time PCP-II unfolded a potential not sufficiently expressed by Vatican II itself (Bacani 2005).

According to PCP II, "God calls us [the Philippine church] more urgently to serve the poor and the needy. The poverty of at least half of the population is a clear sign that sin has penetrated our social structures. Poverty in the sense of destitution is not God's will for anyone" (PCP II, 122). Since the poor "are blessed because their poverty has been historically the privileged place of the gracious intervention of God's saving grace," (ibid., 122) PCP II declares that the church in the Philippines needs to become the "Church of the Poor" (PCP II, 124-136). For PCP II,

When the Church in the Philippines becomes truly this Church of the Poor, the poor will feel at home in her, and will participate actively, as equal to others, in her life and mission. The Church will then become truly a communion, a sign and instrument for the unity of the whole Filipino nation (PCP II, 52).

It is this vision of PCP II on the church as the Church of the Poor that the AVJ has embraced as its own and has endeavored to make a reality.

The AVJ envisions this church as "a community of disciples of Christ," once again emphasizing, like the vicariate's first goal above, the communitarian dimension of the faith as well as the following of Christ. This community lives its faith "in union with Mary." This phrase expresses not only the devotion which many Filipinos have to Mary but also the important place Mary holds for Muslims. As Vatican II states: "They [Muslims] also honor Mary, his Virgin Mother; at times, they even call on her with devotion" (NA 3). In including this phrase, the vicariate in effect accentuates an element of faith that is

common to both Islam and Christianity.

Understandably, harmony appears to be an important concern and a yearning of the church of Jolo. Hence, it tries to live in harmony through prayer and service, not only with fellow church members but also, equally important, with people of other faiths. Moreover, through the witness of their lives, Christians aim to “foster charity, justice and respect for one another” – again, values that are needed in the situation.

While affirming its appreciation for the plurality of “tribes and faiths” in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, the third part of the vision-mission focuses on the church’s collaboration “with all people of good will in the birthing of a communion of communities.” With others, the church seeks to build a new society characterized by respect for human dignity, respect for every tribe and faith, solidarity for the common good, the institutionalization of justice in socio-economic life and structure, respect for the integrity of creation and respect for religious liberty. It is a society where plurality is accepted as a fact of life and is seen as a gift, and where the basic rights and freedoms of the human person are respected and promoted. The vision of this “communion of communities” manifests a view of the human person whose dignity is paramount and whose rights are inalienable. The dreamed-of society is one where this dignity and these rights are respected, are promoted and blossom.

It is noteworthy that the AVJ’s vision-mission echoes in many and various ways PCP II’s vision of the Filipino nation (PCP II, 253-55). Indeed, the AVJ’s vision-mission may be seen as an articulation on a local level of what it means for the people of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi to have life.

The Pastoral Priorities: Responding to the Signs of the Times. The pastoral priorities of the AVJ have basically remained unchanged since the 1996 Vicariate General Pastoral Assembly. Based on the concerns of and issues faced by the parishes and mission stations, the said assembly formulated the following as the mission priorities of the AVJ: i) the strengthening of basic ecclesial communities (BECs); ii) education/formation; iii) lay empowerment – lay leadership participation; iv) poverty alleviation; and v) dialogue of life. Succeeding vicariate assemblies have reflected on this thrust and highlighted particular elements given the pastoral needs in the different mission areas in the vicariate. For instance, the 2003 Vicariate Pastoral Assembly decided to further the vicariate’s involvement in the following areas, most of which re-emphasized the priorities of the 1996 Assembly:

1. the building and strengthening of BECs and basic human communities (BHCs) with the following concerns: integral evangelization/formation, youth formation, the development of a culture of dialogue and peace, and the development of ecological-friendliness;
2. the alleviation of poverty through cooperatives and income-generating projects;
3. community health;
4. involvement with the Badjaos; and
5. peace and dialogue initiatives.

The reaffirmation in the 2003 Pastoral Assembly of the 1996 Assembly priorities suggests that these are still the perceived needs of the people and that much work needs to be done to address such issues.

The 2003 Pastoral Assembly further reaffirmed the goal of the vicariate in building a communion of communities, particularly through the strengthening of BECs and BHCs. It characterized these communities as empowered, united in diversity, in solidarity with others, self-reliant, sustainable, dynamic, self-nourishing, and self-governing. Moreover, these communities have a deep sense of God and they witness to God's goodness. The work of building BECs in the vicariate started in the late 1970s. The different parishes were divided into various areas and clusters. Weekly bible sharings were introduced and became the means through which the heads of families were gathered together and organized into small Christian communities. Nevertheless, since the BEC program at this point was so dependent on the theological and missionary orientation of the missionaries assigned to the vicariate, there were times when the BECs were very active and when they were not operative at all (*Linkage* 2003: 34). It was through the efforts of Bp. de Jesus that the vicariate's BEC Program was revitalized in 1995 during which a team of BEC pastoral workers were tasked to organize BECs in the entire vicariate. What the 1996 Assembly did was to highlight and give a new impetus to what was started in the 1970s and revived by Bp. de Jesus.

Since the vicariate's BEC program is a concrete instantiation of PCP II's vision of a renewed church, the present thrust of the program is concerned not only with the spiritual growth of the Christian communities but also with their total growth and development. As PCP II sees it, the task of proclaiming salvation and announcing a message of liberation are inseparable from each other. While evangelization and salvation are not identifiable with temporal liberation,

“evangelization is not complete without temporal liberation” (PCP II, 242). The Philippine bishops in a 1977 pastoral letter describe evangelization in the following manner: “This is Evangelization: the proclamation, above all, of salvation from sin; the liberation from everything oppressive to man; the development of man in all his dimensions, personal and communitarian; and, ultimately, the renewal of society in all its strata through the interplay of the Gospel truths and man’s concrete total life” (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines 1977). In this light, as an implication of its emphasis on the church as a community of faith, the AVJ realizes itself as church “from below” in the BECs (cf. Arévalo 1982: 13-14).

The organization of BHCs is similar to that of BECs except that the liturgical component is not an integral part of BHCs. It has happened though that, in these communities, there were occasions that Muslims and Christians prayed together although they used the prayers of their own tradition. Nevertheless, the common foci of these BHCs are the day-to-day issues that both Muslims and Christians have to contend with. It has to be pointed out that the inclusion of the BHCs in the vicariate’s thrust is particularly significant. It institutionalized what has already been happening on the ground. In organizing Christian communities and in providing services to the different Muslim communities in the larger communities, the church has for all intents and purposes been already engaged in the task of building BHCs. It is also a concretization of the vicariate’s goal and mission of building a communion of communities. In this regard, BHCs are necessary in fostering good will and building harmonious relationships between Muslims and Christians, and, in effect, being instruments in bringing about a more just and peaceful society for all of them. In affirming the task of building BHCs, the church recognizes the immensity of the problems confronting the people of the vicariate, the necessity of involving all the stakeholders and in working hand-in-hand with other people of other religions in responding to the common problems they confront. The AVJ cannot but integrate into its understanding and performance of mission the reality that the community is predominantly a Muslim community. Muslims are an integral dimension of what it means to be the church of Jolo.

The 2007 Vicariate Pastoral Assembly had similar concerns as well as new emphases: the empowerment of the laity; the strengthening of the organization and programs of the vicariate’s different ministries; the creation of a comprehensive program for marginalized groups, like the Badjaos and the “halaw”;¹ the continuation of the dialogue and discussion regarding the tensions brought about by majority-minority relations; a deepened understanding of the Mindanao

Peace Process and preparedness for its consequences; the integration of a “spirituality of stewardship” in the vicariate’s programs, including a study and a response to the ecological issues faced by the people of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi; and the strengthening and deepening of the faith and participation of Christians in the vicariate (AVJ 2007). It is in concentration on these pastoral concerns and issues that the AVJ strives to be faithful to its mission of being the sacrament of God’s love for all.

The Ministries of the Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo. The mission of building the Kingdom of God, understood in terms of the AVJ’s goals and vision-mission, takes its concrete form in the various ministries and programs of the vicariate. At present, there are seven ministries in the AVJ. These are: i) social action ministry; ii) health ministry; iii) youth ministry; iv) catechetical ministry; v) parochial ministry; vi) education ministry; and vii) media ministry. In what follows, I will discuss each of these ministries and their service to the church and the bigger community.

Social Action Ministry. Under the umbrella of the AVJ’s social action ministry are the Vicariate’s social development ministry (SDM), the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) ministry, housing and livelihood projects and cooperatives. The SDM of the AVJ started with the establishment of the Social Action Center (SAC) in 1967. The activities of the SAC led to the development of local leaders, the establishment of cooperatives, and the construction of low-cost housing for the people of Jolo. The majority of the beneficiaries of the cooperatives are Badjaos and in the almost 2000 housing units of the vicariate, 90% of the beneficiaries are Muslims while only 10% are Christians. The SAC was eventually reconstituted and was established as the AVJ’s SDM. The SDM became the social action arm of the vicariate and began to undertake several projects, e.g. housing, micro-enterprise, literacy, disaster and emergency response programs, integrated peace and development programs, and health programs.

The SDM is now working on community empowerment by organizing mothers and establishing community-based health programs in several pilot project areas in order to ensure the sustainability of the SDM’s programs. It hopes that the community which the SDM currently serves will assume the responsibility of the programs and become self-sufficient. Since 2003 the SDM has strived to strengthen 17 Area Parents’ Associations in 17 BHCs and the Krislam Magtalianak Parents’ Association, Inc., the federation of area associations, through a Capability Building Program. The SDM has also expanded its programs and services, and association memberships to non-KFLC

members. It has also integrated the Culture of Peace seminars in all its programs and projects. Moreover, it has also conducted four Children and Youth Peace Assemblies which provided a venue for the children and the youth to raise their issues and concerns to invited stakeholders, as well as a means of monitoring and evaluating the programs of the stakeholders for them. In addition, the SDM through the KFLC conducted 2 peace camps in Zamboanga City which were intended to widen and enrich the experiences and vision of their young participants (AVJ SDM 2007).

Another part of the AVJ's SDM is the JPIC ministry. The JPIC ministry was formally organized in July 2001 in response to the issues of poverty, and peace and order in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. The JPIC ministry serves as the instrument of integral human liberation in the mission of the Vicariate. Most of the work of the JPIC ministry is carried out giving the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Basic Orientation Workshops (JPIC-BOS). The JPIC-BOS lasts for 2 days, and among other things, includes an explanation of the *Balag* technology which is a new way of gardening for food production, coastal management and waste management.

It is significant to note that the SDM is at the service not only of the church but of the larger society, the people of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. The majority of the beneficiaries of the SDM's programs are Muslims. Moreover, special attention is paid to the Badjaos since, among the Muslim ethnic groups in the AVJ, they are at the lowest rung of the social strata.

Health Ministry. The Vicariate Health Ministry (VHM) was institutionalized in 1975 as a result of the 1st Congress of the Vicariate. However, nine years earlier, the Medical Mission Sisters (MMS) initiated the healing mission in the Vicariate. Their mission was to provide medical services to the people, especially the poor. At that time, there were no existing medical services in Tawi-Tawi. In 1968, the Holy Family Hospital (HFH) in Bongao was opened and offered much-needed medical services to the people. The AVJ entrusted the development of VHM and the management of the HFH to the MMS. The MMS gradually developed community health programs, which later on became the base program of the VHM.

The people's participation in the HFH eventually led to the formation of the Federation of Community Health Organizations (Parhimpunan Paghambuukan ha Pamaranan sin Kawman or PPPK). The PPPK continues to pursue the establishment of an alternative health care system, the elements of which are community health programs, referral system, medical services, financing, organizational structure and linkages/networks. This is particularly important in a place

where medical services remain problematic and the price of medicines is beyond the reach of most people. In December 2003, the MMS officially turned over the management of the HFH and its medical services to the PPPK. The PPPK also has assumed the responsibility for the further development of the VHM.

The VHM continues to develop its community health programs by organizing them in various areas and training people who would be responsible for their running and sustainability. Moreover, the VHM continues to provide health education and preventive health care services with home visitations, follow-up and monitoring. It also conducts basic health skills training in the different communities of Sibutu, Jolo and Mapun. In addition, the VHM manufactures alternative medicinal products (AVJ VHM 2007). In all of these programs, the vast majority of the beneficiaries are Muslims. For example, in 2007, the PPPK had 5,150 patients while the HFH had 5,758 patients. Of these, 95% are Muslims.

Vicariate Youth Ministry. In the 2003 Vicariate Assembly, one of the pastoral priorities discerned was the formation of the youth. The Vicariate Youth Ministry (VYM) aims to serve their needs with a view to forming them to “become active and responsible agents of change in building a transformed society” (*Linkage* 2003: 21). The VYM intends to journey with the youth in enabling them to develop and mature, to grow in their relationships, to inspire them to become who they are and to become the persons God calls them to be. Among the different activities of the VYM 2003-2007 are: a media and broadcasting workshop, catechetical congress, youth-participated catechism, basic bible seminar, youth encounter, youth leadership training, Culture of Peace and Dialogue seminars, inter-island youth assemblies, JPIC-BOS, evangelization of culture seminar, voter’s education seminar, and the Clean and Green Campaign (AVJ YM 2007). As one can see from these various activities, the concern of the VYM is to form the youth to become women and men who, deeply committed to their faith, are socially involved in transforming their society. Nevertheless, much remains to be done in VYM, particularly in terms of getting more involvement from the youth sector and in forming them to become agents of change.

Vicariate Catechetical Ministry. An important part in building up the Christian community in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi is the Vicariate’s Catechetical Ministry (VCM). The VCM is “an effort to build a culture of life, love and peace” among Christians in a predominantly Muslim setting (*Linkage* 2003: 33). The catechesis in Jolo is BEC-based. In addition, in its summer program, which lasts the whole month of May, two hours of daily catechesis are given, including Marian devo-

tion. Adult catechesis is also conducted to the CCF Christian Parents in coordination with the Kalimayahan Family Life Center. The catechetical lessons are divided into three modules: Course 1 – Basic Christian Doctrine, Course 2 – Scripture, and Course 3 – Family Enrichment and Methodologies. Similarly, in Bongao and other mission stations, catechists teach the children basic Christian doctrine, prayers and the sacraments on Sundays. In both Jolo and Bongao, radio programs are a means of catechizing, such as the DXMM program entitled, “*Ulangig Hi Isa Ha Pamilya*,” and the DXGD program, “*Ikaw at ang Simbahan*” (“You and the Church”). In addition to the regular catechetical classes, catechists are also involved in pre-sacrament catechism for 1st communion and 1st confession (held in May), confirmation (June) and in parents’ recollection and the celebration of confirmation (July). There are 3 full-time and 4 part-time catechists in the vicariate. In addition to them, there are 120 volunteers in the catechetical ministry.

Through the above activities, the VCM hopes to build up the faith of the Christian community. At the same time though, integral to the building up of this faith is the building of the church’s relationship with its Muslim neighbors. This is in response to the AVJ’s priority on organizing BHCs. In a report prepared for the 2007 Vicariate Assembly regarding the vicariate’s catechetical program, it is striking that several of its activities dealt with Muslim-Christian relations. For instance, the report noted that some Muslims joined in the celebration of a Christmas party, in a Bible-sharing session, in caroling, and in liturgical celebrations. Moreover, the catechetical program also granted scholarships to Muslim students who were expected to serve their communities in return. In the program’s culture of peace seminars, the report noted the efforts of both Christians and Muslims to reach out to and dialogue with each other. The participants of these seminars also conducted a “Walk for Peace.” In all of these activities, the VCM is mindful of the resistance on the part of militant Muslims as well as the less than favorable conditions for its ministry (*Linkage* 2003: 33-34).

Parochial Ministry. At present, there are four parishes in the AVJ: Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Cathedral Parish (Jolo), Holy Rosary Parish (Bongao), Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage (Mapun) and Immaculate Conception Parish (Siasi). In addition, there are eight mission stations: Santo Niño (Batu-Bato), St. Francis of Assisi (Sibutu), Sto. Niño (Tongheat), St. Lorenzo Ruiz (Sitangkai), St. Eugene de Mazenod (Halusugbu), Immaculate Conception (Tabawan), Immaculate Conception (Kualabaru) and St. Joseph the Worker (Taganak, Mapun) (*Linkage* 2003: 13-19). These parishes and mission stations have

all endeavored to respond to the vicariate's pastoral priorities that were noted above. In this section, I will give an overview of the programs of these parishes and mission stations which have direct impact on the Christian community's relationship with the Muslims.

Quite understandably most of the programs of these parishes and mission stations are focused on the building up of the Christian community and responding to its concerns. For instance, since a pastoral priority of the AVJ is the formation of BECs, much effort has been spent towards this end. Family clusters have been formed in the different areas of a parish, regular BEC masses are held, BEC coordinators regularly meet, monthly prayer meetings or Bible sharing are conducted and the areas are visited by the pastoral staff and coordinators. In terms of the formation of the BEC leaders and members, the following activities have been carried out: leadership training, staff development, liturgical seminars, basic bible seminars, pro-life seminars, lay Eucharistic minister seminars, secretary/treasurer's training, family counseling seminar, marriage encounter and enrichment seminars and the parish renewal experience. In addition to the building up of BECs, the parishes and mission stations are also concerned with the issue of the poverty of its parishioners. In response to the people's situation, the parishes and mission stations have been involved in providing: i) micro-financing through the BEC mutual assistance cooperative, ii) scholarships through the generosity of different aid agencies, and iii) income-generating projects like the BEC mini-store, dress-making, and fish and fruit preservation. Moreover, the parishes and mission stations are also concerned with JPIC issues, particularly in promoting a culture of peace among the people. Thus, JPIC-BOS and Culture of Peace seminars were held in the different parishes and mission stations among other activities.

Nevertheless, the mission work of these parishes and mission stations also has its interreligious dimension. Aside from the fact that the Christian community has to engage in a dialogue of life on a daily basis with a mainly Muslim community, the parishes and mission stations have initiated and implemented specific programs and activities that are meant to promote and deepen Muslim-Christian relations. For instance, pastoral workers were sent to attend the Silsilah interreligious dialogue seminar in Zamboanga City. Scholarships are also given to poor Muslim students. JPIC Basic Orientation Seminars are conducted all over the vicariate and they include Muslim participants. Interreligious Dialogue Orientation Seminars are also given in the different islands. In Siasi, the parish organized a sports tournament for peace in 2006. Also in Siasi, the parish's feeding program caters to the tri-people – the malnourished children of Christians,

Tausugs and Badjaos. In the BEC-BHC-Interreligious Dialogue Report that was presented to the 2007 Vicariate Assembly, a particular focus of strengthening BHCs in Bongao is the Badjao Village Learning Center. Two value-formation sessions were given to the Badjao tribal leaders and community members in 2006. A talk on Badjao cultural history was given to the 3rd-year high school students of Notre Dame of Bongao and Badjao students served as co-facilitators in the school's student officers' leadership training. In terms of their political education, the Badjaos were familiarized with the laws and ordinances on fishing as well as on indigenous people's rights and laws. Moreover, a voters' education seminar was given to both Muslims and Christians in Jolo and Bongao. With funding from Tabang Mindanaw, 60 houses were built for "halaw" families from Sabah. A kiddie school was also set up for the poor and "halaw" pupils. On an informal basis, Catholics often had meals with their Protestant and Muslim friends on special occasions, particularly during fiesta celebrations, Christmas and New Year (AVJ BEC-BHC-IRD 2007).

Education Ministry. A lasting legacy of the Oblates in Southern Philippines is the establishment of Notre Dame schools as a response to the needs of the people. This is particularly true in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. Since 1947, the Oblates have established different schools in the various parishes and mission stations all over the vicariate. In all of these schools, the vast majority of students are Muslims. Based on current figures for the present schoolyear, 2008-2009, there are 9,467 students in all the schools of the AVJ. Out of this total figure, only 947 or 10% are Christians. For the AVJ, these Notre Dame schools are expressions of the ongoing dialogue between Muslims and Christians. The schools "aim at an integral and harmonious development of the whole person so that he/she may live as a: true believer of God, lover of man [and woman], catalyst in the community" (*Linkage* 2003: 25). Since many of the students in the vicariate come from poor families, most of these schools have scholarship programs for them.

In addition to the primary and secondary schools which the Oblates erected, they also established their only tertiary level educational center in the vicariate, Notre Dame of Jolo College (NDJC), in 1954. The founders of the NDJC were particularly interested in training teachers who would teach in the far-flung islands in the vicariate but its courses have gradually come to include subjects which are equally relevant in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. Noteworthy in the formation of NDJC's present students is the integration of peace education in the curriculum, which includes interreligious dialogue. Moreover, the NDJC is also involved in community development and the socio-economic upliftment of the people with its many social programs. The

Notre Dame Cottage Industry of NDJC's Community Extension Services (NDJC-CES) has provided training and employment to out-of-school youth and unschooled adults in abaca weaving, sewing and pandan mat weaving. The NDJC also has its health projects, nutrition programs and fishing associations. Moreover, the NDJC has its own Peace Center which conducts Culture of Peace seminars for both students and faculty members. These seminars aim to form "peace animators" in the university and in the NDJC-CES communities. As part of its efforts to alleviate the poverty of the people, the NDJC-CES has the following programs and projects: the Grameen Banking, the Badjao Revolving Fund, Tahay projects, the Space for Peace, and the Buansa Peace and Development Program. In its effort to become green, the NDJC has declared its campus as a non-smoking area, grows *balag* and medicinal herbs and assists in the barangay waste management project.²

Mass Media Ministry. The Mass Media Ministry (MMM) in the AVJ started in 1959 with the publication of *Sulu Star* under the editorship of Fr. Cuthbert Billman, OMI. This weekly local paper reported on the progress of the province as well as the crimes and the political feuds among the different clans that dominated Sulu politics. However, this paper folded with the declaration of martial law in the Philippines in 1972. It was not until 1986 that the MMM was revived when Fr. George Dion, OMI started the first Catholic radio station in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi in Jolo, DXMM-AM, named after the source of its funding, *Missio* and *Misereor*. Dion recognized the potential of the radio for evangelization. So, in 1988, the second radio station was opened in Bongao, DXMI-AM, named after "Mary Immaculate." DXMI was renamed DXGD-AM, after its founder, George Dion, since another station had the same call sign. In 1991, the first TV station in Sulu, TV Channel 10, was established and started to broadcast. Channel 10 is affiliated with the Philippine media giant ABS-CBN in Manila.

Together, these two radio stations and the TV channel form the Sulu and Tawi-Tawi Broadcasting Foundation (STBF). The goal and network identity of the STBF is "peace, brotherhood and unity." The signal of DXMM reaches the whole of Sulu, parts of Basilan, Tawi-Tawi, Palawan, the Zamboanga Peninsula, Sabah in Malaysia and north of Celebes Sea in Indonesia, while the area of coverage of DXGD includes Tawi-Tawi and Sandakan in Malaysia. Channel 10 reaches the whole province of Sulu and broadcasts from 5:30 PM to 10:30 PM. Since the STBF is owned by the Vicariate of Jolo, it contributes to the realization of the Vicariate's goal of building "a communion of communities." It sees itself as a bridge of peace and reconcili-

ation among the various ethnic groups in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. Among the objectives of the STBF is to promote a culture of peace, interreligious dialogue, and intercultural understanding and communication.

Through these various ministries and their projects and programs, the church of Jolo strives to respond to its various pastoral priorities. Its mission of service is not confined solely to the Christian community but extends to those outside the church, the Muslim community in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. "In the birthing of a communion of communities," the church has sought and continues to seek to build a society of peace, justice and development in collaboration with the Muslim community, a foretaste of the Kingdom of God which is the church's goal. In its mission, the church has encountered and continues to experience seemingly insurmountable problems. Still, it "forges ahead with deeper faith,"³ praying and hoping that its efforts will not be in vain and that the seeds of peace, unity and harmony that it has sown will eventually bear fruit.

Elements of a Theology of Religions

As is to be expected of a local church, the primary concern of the church of Jolo is pastoral in nature – to be able to respond to the needs of the people as the church discerns them and as the people themselves are able to articulate them. Nevertheless, one can discern from the AVJ's vision-mission, goals, pastoral priorities, and ministries an implicit theology of religions albeit incomplete and not fully developed. What I intend to do in this section is to highlight five elements of such a theology as far as they are expressed in the AVJ's life and mission and which can serve as a foundation or framework in understanding the Muslim other.

First, there appears to be a positive appreciation of the role of Islam in the lives of the peoples of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. This is evident in the goals of the vicariate and its vision of a society that "can submit itself to God's/Allah's call" as well as in the vicariate's vision-mission in which an element of its dream of "a communion of communities" is that "every tribe and faith" be "respected." There seems, too, to be an affirmation both of the liberative dimension of Islam and the willingness and ability of the Moros to effect positive change in the vicariate's emphasis on cooperating with all people of goodwill "in the birthing of a communion of communities," including the members of the Muslim community.

Second, in the AVJ's vision-mission, goals and pastoral priorities,

the only mention of Christ is with regard to the church as a community of *his* disciples. This seeming lack of reference to Christ appears to be necessary in the vicariate's context. The AVJ recognizes that it is not by reiterating time and again the uniqueness of Christ in its life and mission that the church's mission in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi will bear fruit. The explicit proclamation of Christ in this predominantly Muslim area may even prove to be counterproductive and only cause undue suffering to the church. By keeping its faith in Christ implicit in its relationship with Muslims, the AVJ in effect respects the sensibilities of its Muslim neighbors and proclaims Christ in ways which are different from that of mission in a Christian milieu. The AVJ would rather let its actions, expressed in its different ministries, speak for themselves.

Third, the AVJ considers the church as a sacrament of God's love for all men and women. In regarding itself as a sacrament, the AVJ recognizes that it is an instrument and a sign of making concrete the universal love of God for all, including those who belong to the Islamic faith. For the AVJ, the Christian community in Jolo points not to itself but to the God who has called it, loves it and sends it on a mission of love and service. It necessarily follows then, that, in its ministries, programs, and projects, the church would reach out not only to Christians but also to those who are outside the fold of the church, most of whom are Muslims. It seems to be an insuperable challenge to be the sign of the God who loves unconditionally to a community which does not share its faith in Christ and in a context that is characterized by violence, hostility, and disbelief on the part of many Moros.

Fourth, in order that the church may be the sacrament of God's love, it is necessary that the church engage in interreligious dialogue, one of the pastoral priorities of the vicariate. Dialogue here would be a two-pronged task. First, it would mean the building of basic human communities, an integral dimension of the "birthing of a communion of communities." These BHCs serve as a means to develop harmonious relationships which are fundamental prerequisites for any collaboration between Muslims and Christians. Second, it would mean that the dialogue through the BHCs would take the form of addressing issues which are of common concern. In practice, this would mean responding to the concrete problems of their communities, like poverty, and crime (cf. Wadi 2004). Michael Amaladoss' remark is relevant in this regard: "At this level of common action, religious differences, though they need not be ignored, are not primary... at the level of a multi-religious community, there are no Christian values, but human values, just as there are no Christian economics or politics" (Amala-

doss 1995: 11). Importantly, Amaladoss further points out that in the building of BHCs, BECs too play an important role since “[p]eople who are collaborating with the human community have to find their inspiration and motivation in their own religious faith, and this they can only have in the Christian community” (ibid.). He sees the relationship of BHCs and BECs as a kind of dialectic: “People who are engaged in action in a basic human community fall back on the religious resources of the basic Christian community, but then bring some of these resources to the human community in a spirit of dialogue, and thus enrich it, without any imposition, however” (ibid.). As the AVJ sees it, dialogue of action is the kind of dialogue that is needed if the church of Jolo, in collaboration with the Muslim community, wants to build a society that is characterized by justice, peace and freedom.

Fifth, in all these efforts of building the local church through BECs and BHCs, the AVJ has as its goal the building of the Kingdom of God in the here and now. The Kingdom seems to be the overriding ideal of the church of Jolo, the lens through which it interprets and performs its mission. In its talk about the Kingdom, it appears that the AVJ underscores its historical dimension – its personal as well as its socio-economic and political manifestations. In particular, the AVJ highlights these manifestations in the third part of its vision-mission. The vicariate sees the church’s mission as the birthing of a “new society” – “a communion of communities” where human dignity is honored and promoted, where there is justice, where there is respect for all created life, where every faith and tribe is respected, where there is solidarity for the good of all, and where everyone can freely worship God. In other words, what the AVJ aims at is to make real the Kingdom in the concrete circumstances of the people of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. Amidst the darkness that many people experience in their lives, the AVJ hopes to be a beacon for all the peoples of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. It is these five elements which can serve as a basis for the AVJ’s theology of religions.

To be church then in the AVJ is to be at the service of and respond to the needs of the people of the vicariate. It is a task that demands that the church collaborate with the Moros in building a society based on justice, peace, and development. It requires the awareness and the foregrounding of the interreligious dimension of the church’s mission. It necessitates a positive appreciation of and respect for the beliefs and practices of the Moros as well as the effort to respond to their aspiration for justice and peace. The AVJ can only be truly church to the extent that it is able to respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as it inspires and empowers the people of the vicariate, both

Muslims and Christians, to actualize the Kingdom and make it truly a Kingdom for the peoples of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi.

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ABSTRACTS

In einem von Gewalt, Armut und gespannten muslimisch-christlichen Beziehungen geprägten Umfeld sieht das Apostolische Vikariat Jolo seine Hauptaufgabe darin, das Entstehen einer friedvollen und gerechten Gemeinschaft zu ermöglichen. Darum ist für Jolo der Dialog mit den Moros integraler Bestandteil seiner Aufgabe. Für das Apostolische Vikariat Jolo ist die kirchliche Identität als Sakrament der Liebe Gottes aufs Engste verbunden mit der Beziehung der Kirche zur überwiegend muslimischen Bevölkerung. Indem sie auf die Bedürfnisse der Moros auf Jolo antwortet, verwirklicht die Kirche ihre Aufgabe, das Reich Gottes unter konkreten Lebensbedingungen aufzubauen. Gemeinsam mit den Moros bemüht sich das Apostolische Vikariat Jolo, Basisgemeinschaften aufzubauen, in denen Christen und Muslime versuchen können, harmonische Beziehungen zu pflegen, und die für die drängenden Probleme ihrer Gesellschaft eine Lösung suchen.

En un ambiente que se distingue por la violencia, la pobreza y por las re-

laciones tensas entre musulmanes y cristianos, el Vicariato Apostólico de Jolo, ve su tarea principal en facilitar y dejar nacer una comunidad justa y pacífica. Por eso el diálogo con los “Moros” es un elemento integral en su misión. Para el Vicariato Apostólico de Jolo la identidad eclesial como sacramento del amor de Dios está estrechamente conectado con la relación de la iglesia con la mayoría de los habitantes que son por la mayor parte musulmanes. Respondiendo en favor de las necesidades de los Moros en Jolo, la iglesia realiza su responsabilidad, de construir el Reino de Dios bajo las condiciones concretas de su ambiente. El Vicariato Apostólico de Jolo se esfuerza en construir comunidades humanas de base con cristianos y musulmanes donde puedan intentar de vivir en relaciones armoniosas buscando una solución para los problemas urgentes de su sociedad.

Dans un contexte caractérisé par la violence, la pauvreté et des relations islamo-chrétiennes tendues, le vicariat apostolique de Jolo (AVJ) se conçoit envoyé en mission pour faciliter la naissance d’une communauté de paix et de justice. Pour ce faire, l’AVJ considère que le dialogue avec les Moros est partie intégrante de sa mission et de son ministère. Pour l’AVJ, l’identité de l’Église comme sacrement de l’amour de Dieu est intimement liée à sa relation avec la population musulmane prédominante. C’est en répondant aux divers besoins des Moros de Jolo que l’Église accomplit sa tâche d’édification du royaume de Dieu dans les circonstances concrètes de la vie. Avec les Moros, l’AVJ cherche à édifier des communautés de base humaines où les chrétiens et les musulmans essaient d’entretenir des relations harmonieuses et qui répondent aux besoins pressants de leur société.

¹ “Halaw” refers to Filipinos who were deported home by the Malaysian government because they were illegally staying in Sabah.

² Grameen Banking is an adaptation to the Philippine context of what Muhammad Yunus, 2006 Nobel Peace Prize awardee, did in Bangladesh (see www.grameen-info.org). The Badjao revolving fund is basically a livelihood program to help alleviate the poverty of the Badjaos. “Tahay” literally means “dried fish.” The Tahay project is an income-generating program which involves the drying of fish. Space for Peace refers to areas and communities which have been declared “peace zones” with the mutual consent of all the stakeholders – the local community, the Philippine military and the MILF/MNLF. In these areas, there shall be no armed confrontation or military operations by the parties concerned. Necessarily, there must be ongoing dialogue among and between all parties to the conflict. These Spaces for Peace include socio-economic projects, particularly for those communities that have been severely ravaged by the armed conflict. The Buansa Peace and Development Program is geared toward the development of the Moro people and fostering peace in the community. Among other things, this includes the Culture of Peace Program and livelihood projects for the Moros. “Balag” means “trellis.” The balag project refers to the utilization of any available area/space in one’s property for planting different kinds of vegetables without using commercial fertilizer. This project was introduced to reduce the food expenses of the family, and its products are for family consumption only (Fr. Marcelo Andamon, OMI, 23 July 2008, email to author).

³ “Forging Ahead with Deeper Faith” was the theme of the 2007 Pastoral Assembly of the Vicariate.