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Communicating the Gospel and the Culture to America's Younger Generation Vietnamese who have Lost a Connection with their Cultural and Historical Roots

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Communicating the Gospel and the Culture to America's Younger Generation Vietnamese who
have Lost a Connection with their Cultural and Historical Roots

Pastoral Synthesis Project

by

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Presented to

the Faculty

of Loyola Marymount University

Department of Theological Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

Los Angeles, California

April 29, 2021

Director Signature:

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the director.

for

Dr. Michael Horan

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Abstract:

Communicating the Gospel and Culture to the younger Vietnamese American generations comes with many challenges. There seem to be many Vietnamese parents living in the United States who are concerned with their children losing their distinctive family cultural characteristics while living in another culture. The younger generation themselves find it hard to adapt to the American and Vietnamese cultures where they are living here. How can these young generations adapt to their new culture and not lose some of their distinctive family cultural and Christian religious roots to balance their lives? How can we help to communicate the Gospel and the culture to the young generation of Vietnamese Americans who need to discern what can support and enrich their lives in living in both cultures, Vietnamese and America?

The thesis holds that it is important to maintain the Vietnamese culture which defines their identity and expresses who they are but also make use of the divine opportunity to learn the values and the beauty of the American culture. Cultural adaptation helps balance the values of both cultures and enrich knowledge about living within a diverse world. The thesis further proposes that using Vietnamese Christianity as their asset, young Vietnamese Americans are capable of this cultural adaptation. The Church have to put a gospel presentation strategy in place, follow a seven step pastoral strategy plan, and establish less costly centers which will be devoted to training Vietnamese men and women as spiritual directors and religious educators to aid the priests in ministering to the young generation. Parents need to understand the dual cultures of these young people and accompany the young generation mindful of their duality and the centrality of the gospel values. The younger generation of Vietnamese Americans have to open themselves not only to the two cultures but above all to the Gospel message of Christ. Their openness to divine guidance and endowments, in addition to the worthy human direction and church guidance coupled with good structures and programs will produce fruitful integration.

Part 1: Proposal and Case Component

Communicating culture to young people and helping them to get back to their roots, including their own culture and their history, can have significant impact on them, on their lives, and on the future of the church. Living in a different culture—and in my experiences of ministry I see the problem—is a concern of many parents. My question is, how can we, as ministers and leaders, help young people adapt to a new culture? This question is necessary for our Church today. Culture is something unique and mysterious that expresses the lives of people who belong to it. Growing up and living in my own Vietnamese culture, I also have many memories of my childhood. Everyone has his/her native culture which he/she should learn about and treasure, even when living in a new culture, because each culture expresses its particular way of living. It also shows the unique characteristics of each country. Living in another culture helps to recognize the beauty and abundance of each culture, such as the people, their activities, the geography, and the accepted religions. Also, it requires an open heart to learn about how other cultures can enrich one's daily life. Thus, as one tries to adapt to a new culture, he/she also wants to keep what he/she has learned from his/her own culture because it is a beautiful and unique culture that one has so many fond memories of since childhood and beyond.

Many younger Vietnamese generations have lost their roots and an understanding of their own culture while living in America. This is a concern of many parents, even in seeing their children have lost of the joy and nostalgia of their Vietnamese childhood. Some of them just stay within the four walls of their home without going out with friends, which is reminiscent of our culture. Some families have two to three children in a family, so they can talk and play with each other. The situation is worse for children who are alone, i.e., in families which have only one

child. What of the loss of the Vietnamese cultural values regarding child care and the lessons embedded in folklore and the stories that children and young adults enjoy?

As a minister, leader, a sister, I am concerned about how can I not only assist those young people to adjust to the new culture where they live and are growing up, but also help them to be aware of and understand the history and roots of the culture of their homeland. Each culture has abundant and unique gifts that native people should know about, appreciate, and treasure in their daily lives. The young generations from other cultures have suffered much, especially how they feel when they cannot fit into the new culture. Sadly, in the other extreme some of them have lost their own culture and their roots in the process of cultural readjustment, and many parents are concerned with how to find a way to help their children get back to their cultural roots. As parents strive to do this, the young people also keep struggling with the need to adapt to their new culture where they are living. This is felt, for example, in terms of learning what teachers instruct in class and what is necessary to guide them and help them understand more about the people, culture, and society of their “adopted” country. For those children who end up in this struggle, realizing they are losing their own culture and not adapting easily to the new culture can have a negative effect on their childhood development. The difference between the two cultures of Vietnamese and American can make young people conflicted and this is a struggle in their daily living. In observing this problem, the goal in this research paper is to bring some methods and guidelines to help communicate the Gospel and the culture to the young generation of Vietnamese Americans who have lost a connection with their cultural and historical roots.

Case study

A story which I want to recount regards a Vietnamese family whom I have known since I first came to the United States. This is a family with three generations including grandma,

parents, and two children (one boy (Peter) and one girl (Mary), not their real names). Leaving Vietnam during the Vietnam War, this family came to the United States to escape the Communists. They had to work hard to provide for their family. They suffered much with their jobs because of the language barrier. The two children were born with lots of unconditional love, and were cared for by their parents. They went to school, and in addition, they learned some skills and hobbies, such as painting, playing the organ, and dancing. However, with the lack of communication between grandma, parents, and children, the adults did not understand what their children needed, and the children felt stressed with their mom's expectations. In observing and taking care of Peter and Mary, their mom did not understand them because she believed that parents should always try to work and provide for what the children need. She did not recognize that the children needed more care instead of being left behind in the new culture of America where they are living. Also, in the family, the language barrier was large between grandma and her grandchildren, so they did not have much opportunity to communicate with each other or learn about their roots and their own culture from such a valuable source as their grandma. Therefore, the parents realized that this would affect their childhood development with those issues, so they tried to get the children some ways of communicating with others, including through church activities.

One year on my vacation I went to help at their parish church. I realized that some young people did not engage in the activities and they felt that they would get lost among the others. I saw and understood the situation in observing and communicating with some, particularly the two young children in the story which I just described. Also, in talking with other ministers, I questioned how we could help the young people get more involved in some Vietnamese culture. During most of that time the two children never got along with the other children. They stayed

quiet while other children were playing together and chatting with friends. Their mom tried to bring them around to chat with the others, but they just smiled and were not interested in joining with the crowd.

Mary seemed to open her heart to answer others' questions while Peter kept silent the whole time. Their mom said that they acted the same at school; they do not join or interact with their friends. Truly, there are some struggles in the family in relating to a new culture which make them feel that there is no way for them to feel that they are welcomed. Regarding this situation, I feel that they may think they are left behind, and they do not feel that they can join with any church activities. Young people often feel that they are stuck in the middle of both cultures and suffer from that situation. There are many things that they have to learn about both cultures, such as language, foods, relationships, gender roles, society, education, economy, and especially religion.

In doing ministry in the future, I find this to be a challenge for ministers and church leaders. How can we as ministers help these children caught between two cultures feel that they belong and can be confident in their intercultural experience, while also maintaining their roots in their own community and their family? Some, because of these struggles, feel a disconnection with other people in society and even with their family members. For example, Peter and Mary's mom reported that, whenever she cooks, she has to cook different foods for the family, such as Vietnamese foods for grandma and her husband, and American foods for her children who do not want to eat Vietnamese foods while they do not know how to cook as well. Also, Peter and Mary are not interested in learning to speak Vietnamese, so they are not able to communicate with their grandma. In addition, in wanting to keep their Vietnamese culture, the whole family goes to a Vietnamese church with Vietnamese' activities; however, their children do not understand the

language well enough for them to understand the Mass or follow along. As a result, they feel bored when going to church because of the language barrier. Another issue is the fact that Vietnamese parents want to control their children even though they are old enough to decide what they want for their lives, such as what they want to wear for that day or what they want to do for relaxing after school. However, the mom always keeps telling them to wear what she feels is appropriate for her children. As young adults, however, they do not feel comfortable about not being able to choose their own clothing for the day. They may feel they are controlled by their mom because they see their friends who are so much confident and independent in their lives as they grow up and attend high school.

These are some of the challenges and issues which are brought up among some children and their parents. This cultural conflict between the members of the family is obvious and I can see some of its negative effects on their lives, and also on their faith. It is important to address some of their challenges with young people and also help them to continue to fit this into the Vietnamese cultural context. This leads us to the next part of my thesis which deals with the Vietnamese cultural context.

Part 2: Cultural Context

It is important to maintain the Vietnamese culture, which is unique to our own upbringing. This culture defines the identity and expresses who we are. Living in another country has provided an opportunity to learn the values and the beauty of another culture. Once one knows how to balance the values of both cultures, cultural adaptation supports and helps one in living a better life with new experiences and helps one to develop and enrich knowledge about living within a diverse world. Cultural adaptation is also capable of producing some adverse effects on one's life if people do not know how to embrace helpful and fitting practices and

values. How to adapt to a new culture within the confines of one's native culture is also a concern of many parents who see their children struggling and suffering to make meaningful choices, and these parents search for ways to help them. Being a religious and a minister, I desire to help the younger Vietnamese American generations use their families' resources, religious setting, and Vietnamese cultural values as the best sources available to understand the dynamics of their unique Vietnamese culture and to help them encounter the American culture meaningfully. I seek to analyze this dialectic in light of the pastoral challenge in my ministry and propose ways that can be of help to the younger generation of Vietnamese Americans in their intercultural living challenges. I propose that using Vietnamese Christianity as their asset, young Vietnamese Americans are capable of being grounded in their native culture, engaging in meaningful cultural adaptation, and contributing their uniqueness as a gift to even the U.S culture, as Gittins mentioned in his book *Living Mission Interculturally*.¹ This project will proceed by first analyzing some aspects of Vietnamese culture, including family challenges, social challenges, and different customs and practices, in order to situate the issues at stake.

1. Family in Vietnamese Culture

As Peter Phan points out, family is where the most challenging and greatest conflicts occur, though it is equally the place where the enduring Vietnamese cultural and religious values are deeply embodied. It is important to note that there is a significant difference between such values in Vietnam and in the U.S.² The Vietnamese culture, for example, is typically very patriarchal where the male has authority over the female and acts as the family's boss. Vietnamese families are typically connected by the extended family system, with more than one generation living together in the family home, such as grandparents, parents, and grandchildren,

¹ Anthony J. Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 25 – 26.

² Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 71.

sometimes with nieces and nephews. Hence, the expectation of respecting elders and obeying them is of prime importance. In other words, children are required to honor their duties of filial piety. According to May & Mariana, Vietnamese children have to fulfill this responsibility to their parents, and this primarily means acting in a respectful way as children should in the family.³ Culturally, children should be willing to forego their own happiness for the common good, and especially for the sake of family members or other significant groups of elders.⁴ In contrast, the American culture promotes individualism. It insists on fairness, assertiveness, and equality of all who live in this country. An instance of a contrast in cultural expectations is illustrated as follows: in Vietnamese culture young people must respect their elders when it comes to being served food in line, which translates into offering them pride of place even though the child was first in line. In the U.S culture, however, whoever comes first can fairly be in line or be served first, and there is no cultural expectation on children to yield their pride of place. Age or position does not really matter in this instance. The same cultural expectations apply to situations having to do, for instance, with limited seating spaces in public transport. With these examples in mind, it is easy to see how each aspect plays a role, but represents the uniqueness of their culture. My argument is that these cultural expectations are not in competition with each other in terms of value or moral judgment, but are capable of supplementing and enriching each other.

Furthermore, in the Vietnamese family the relationship between parents and children is one in which parents tend to both control and take good care of their children, especially the girls in the family during the high school and college years. For example, parents tend to closely watch and control girls' friendship with the opposite sex because usually dating is not allowed to

³ May K. Kanti, and Mariana K. Falconier. "Asian Americans Caring for Elderly Parents in the U.S." *Journal of Cultural Diversity* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 73–83.

⁴ Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 71.

young girls until they are deemed mature. Conversely, parents expect much in relation to the boys' success in the family, so they push the boys very hard to achieve success in their studies and career and anticipate that they become notable professionals, such as lawyers, doctors, and engineers. Parents have to work hard to support their sons in their studies and in achieving success in their lives. In the Vietnamese way of thinking, the boys are considered to be "our children" and the girls are the "others' children" because they will eventually leave the family to get married and go to another family.⁵ The boys, however, will remain with parents in the family and take care of their parents as their responsibility of filial piety. There abounds many folklore, legends and stories of children who please their parents with their loving care. Filial piety is stressed as expressing the children's gratitude for their parents' sacrifice, love, and care over their early years of childhood and adolescence. Vietnamese culture usually says: "công cha như núi Thái Sơn, nghĩa mẹ như nước trong nguồn chảy ra," which means: "the father's labor is as high as the Thai Son Mount; the mother's love is as deep as the River." If this is the sacrifice of parents, then children owe them the filial piety. Besides, they teach their children to honor their parents like, "Một lòng thờ mẹ kính cha, cho tròn chữ hiếu mới là đạo con." Which translates: "Respect and honor your mother and father, thus you will fulfill the obligations of filial piety derived from the way of being an offspring."⁶ These are beautiful ways of expressing children's love towards their parents. Vietnamese culture maintains this has to be practiced as the children's duty and responsibility to their parents. Within these cultural values and demands that endure in every Vietnamese family, we can envisage how these things play out in each individual's way of life and grounds the individual's unique Vietnamese identity, customs and practices.

⁵ It is lightly changing now that girls can study and have higher education as boys.

⁶ Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 33 – 34.

2. Different Customs and Practices:

In my personal experience I have come to realize that each culture is unique and mysterious and shapes the lives of people who share that culture. As they share their unique culture, they have their way of expressing who they are and their unique way of conveying the beauty and uniqueness of their culture and customs. Thus, by focusing on this uniqueness, other people can recognize where they come from and identify them in their distinct identity. The Vietnamese also have some customs that people in this culture should know and practice to enhance their way of living. For example, the Lunar New Year is when Vietnamese celebrate with all family members who return to their ancestral home to celebrate together.⁷ It is a time for everybody to be with their family, even though they may work or live far from their families, they still try to go home during Lunar New Year time. At that time, they stay and reconnect with their families. They help to decorate and make some traditional cakes for the New Year. During the New Year week, they gather together to wish happy New Year to extended family members, relatives, and friends, especially grandparents and parents, and give children lucky money as the first blessing of luck on New Year. Children do the similar things and wish their parents and grandparents good health. The New Year gathering can be anywhere and lasts for three days to a week. It is a family time, so it is important for Vietnamese to come back home because: “Home is not only a house, a physical dwelling, but also a place where the spiritual values attached to that life and the positive emotional ties reside and are shared.”⁸ The home is where people have old memories and good feelings with parents having children to surround them. Most Vietnamese express this longing for home in the Vietnamese word, “về”⁹ which means “come

⁷ Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 57.

⁸ Mai Van Hai. “Studies of Family Values among Vietnamese Immigrants across the World - a Literature Review.” *E-Psychologie* 13, no. 3 (July 2019), 65.

⁹ Mai, “Studies of Family Values among Vietnamese Immigrants across the World - a Literature Review,” 65.

back home.” Parents always expect their children to come back home on the New Year so the concept of “*về*” is a meaningful concept to many Vietnamese.

There are other Vietnamese cultural customs and practices that also affect the younger generation of Vietnamese when trying to adapt to the new American culture. In the Vietnamese culture, for example, people call others by using titles, especially when addressing older people. People never call others only by first name without adding title, such as Mr., Mrs., Miss, Dr., Professor, Fr., Sr., Br., etc. The culture sees it as a way of being respectful to others, especially to older people and to people in higher positions. Particularly when meeting older people, superiors, or hierarchy, young children have to bow their head to greet them to show respect. There are rarely any shaking hands or giving hugs among us.¹⁰

Another important custom in the Vietnamese culture is to avoid “conflict”, particularly with the elders and superiors. Because of that, Vietnamese very seldom say “no” to elders even though they may not agree with them. They always say “yes” but the “yes” here is not always the “yes” of agreement.¹¹ The reason is that they do not want to upset others, so they try not to object to them. It is a high expectation from children toward their parents and their grandparents. This attitude is further illustrated in the observation that if a Vietnamese is doing something wrong, he/she tends to smile as a way of expressing embarrassment, not because they do not want to own their mistakes or make fun of it. In all these, they express their respect to older people and superiors, and express appreciation for their teaching and corrections. Should those who make mistakes and are being corrected get upset or react against their elders and superiors, it is seen as not being respectful. Such corrections have to be accepted with pleasant gestures.¹²

¹⁰ Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 79.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹² *Ibid.*, 79.

Interestingly, each culture displays different customs and practices to show others their identity. These diversities enrich our cultural heritage in this world. It makes a beautiful picture of creation because each culture is a part of this picture and we all play our role in this big picture as we contribute to the perfection of the Artist's image.

3. Vietnamese Christianity:

Vietnamese Catholics are a minority in Vietnam; only 8% of the population is Catholic.¹³ However, they actively practice their faith in families and at the churches. Vietnam is not a free country for practicing religion, especially for Catholics. There is no Catholic school in this communist country, so children have to study and learn catechism only at church every Sunday. Pastors have to arrange appropriate catechism programs for young children to learn and practice. They also try to arrange some church activities for children to engage in besides learning their catechisms. Some additional activities arranged for children include Nativity play on Christmas, a New Year festival play, activities on Easter, short retreats, and Taize prayer—all open and tailored for different ages to join. On Sunday children have their own Mass before attending their catechism program. Activities like children's Mass help young children to engage and feel welcomed as Vietnamese. In some parishes, children remain at the church to hang around and play together. Also, pastors, religious brothers and sisters, and leaders at the church try to educate the young adults in order to equip and prepare them to lead the younger ones in some activities. Those children preparing for their Holy Communion and Confirmation have to attend Masses and catechism programs as they prepare to receive the Sacraments. When they finish their catechism program, many young adults continue to have higher education so that they can join in teaching the younger children. Thus, the churches and religious practices in Vietnam are

¹³ Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 98.

conducted for the younger generation to help them both develop their faith and learn some cultural values and customs.

This brief overview about Vietnam's culture and customs, has identified how Vietnamese people, especially the younger generation, are working and struggling to practice their culture and customs within and outside the family. I have pointed out how the younger generation has to deal with different customs and practices in Vietnam and in America while living in both their family and in the new culture, with its different cultural and practices. I argue that each culture has unique ways to educate their people in both religion and society. The Vietnamese have this saying: "nhập gia tùy tục," which means "when in Rome, do as the Romans do." The culture, in addition, knows that, as people try to adapt to a new culture, some of their own culture and customs can be folded into the new culture to make their lives more abundant and enriching, because each culture represents a part in the big picture of creation. I believe that it is in the best interest of the younger generation of Vietnamese to use what they have of their culture, appropriate what is valuable to the new culture, and this will enable them to honor their roots and also adjust to and assimilate the new culture values. Having analyzed the cultural context I proceed to provide some theological considerations and implications of the case and issues at stake.

Part 3: Theology Component

God's revelation continues to be revealed in the daily lives of human beings and in everything that He created. We are the hands of God to fulfill whatever purpose we are called to work for God, to promote what we are given in our lives and make it more perfect in accord with God's will. Our duty is to deal with and interpret problems in the light of God understood primarily through the Scripture. Therefore, in this part I want to address the challenges in the

lives of younger generations who try to adapt to intercultural living and integrate it into different cultures. In the New Testament Jesus brings comfort to those who feel burdened in their lives. Pope Francis and the Councils are also concerned about young peoples' lives. For this reason, I seek to discuss this problem in light of the concepts of pastoral challenges in ministry, and also to find a way forward to help younger generations of Vietnamese Americans to overcome their challenges of intercultural living and encourage them to use whatever uniqueness they have in their own culture as a source to access and integrate into the new culture where they are living.¹⁴ Although much can be discussed in the way of theological reflection about younger Vietnamese American generations and their cultural challenges, it does not mean that this problem can easily be solved for all of them, just as Jesus' messages are for all, but not all people are able to perceive those messages and live at peace with them. There are some important theological reflections from different aspects and areas of this issue that I am going to draw upon, including: the Communication of Jesus Christ, The Gospel and culture, the Worldview, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the role of His Blessed Mother, and a Gospel Presentation Strategy.

1. The Communication of Jesus Christ:

Communication is important in addressing messages to and from others, especially whenever we need to communicate with other people to receive messages or to understand messages from the messengers. Therefore, it seems to be essential for us to discuss how best to communicate the Gospel to different cultures or different groups of people of different ages or who come from different contexts. The important goal of communication here is how to effectively exchange messages with other people. In reading the Scripture, we can observe that Jesus is an example of an effective person in communicating with others. Also, we can see how the apostles brought the

¹⁴ Anthony J. Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 55 – 57.

Good News about Jesus Christ and communicated it to other people, notably to those who were from different cultures.

Jesus communicated His Gospel to others effectively through His expert skills of understanding His listeners, which is essential in communication. Listeners are like a spiritual director or a messenger who is primarily open to hear what is said; however, they should show others that they are involved and engaged with what others are telling them, as Margaret Guenther emphasizes in her book, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*.¹⁵ To communicate with others Jesus always listens to others and cares for others' needs. Jesus is not only just speaking to them, but He is also teaching them many lessons for their lives. For example, in Matthew 7:29, He teaches people with His authority, unlike others who teach by the law.¹⁶ In engaging with others and appealing to them with his teaching, Jesus taught the people with grace and compassion, and also with belief and conviction. Telling them real stories or parables they could relate to in order to make a spiritual application to help people engage and pay more attention is also a highly effective way of communicating. An example is Jesus' use of the parable of the sower in order for people to understand and apply His lesson to the reality of their life.

Likewise, in communicating the Gospel to the younger generations, it is more effective if we use their reality to connect them with the Gospel. We should do this after the example of Jesus who spoke the right words to the right people with the right tone and message. Jesus did this mindful that there were a lot of different people who needed to be able to understand what His message was for them, in order to help to apply it in their lives. We know that there are many problems and challenges that people have to face, especially the younger generation and young

¹⁵ Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Lanham: Cowley, 1992), 44.

¹⁶ Benedict T. Viviano, (1990). *The new Jerome biblical commentary: The Gospel According to Mathew*. R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, and R. Murphy, eds., New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, 647.

adults, such as “the uncertainty of relationship in a digital era, diminishing opportunity for work, the growth of political violence, discrimination, and degradation of the environment.”¹⁷ Those things present young people with serious difficulties as they try to find a way to build supportive personal and family relationships based on solid spiritual and financial foundations. Young people do not take time to acknowledge and address concerns about their faith, for they do not feel that spiritual commitment is necessary for them as they seek their more immediate needs. Immediate needs, therefore, have forced many young people to leave the church because they see no benefit for them to go to church. I am sure that this faith crisis is happening all over the world. To understand the crisis these problems cause, we have to learn from Jesus about how to communicate and how to choose the right words to speak with the young ones, in order for them to understand not only what is immediate but also what is necessary. Living in this digital age offers a very effective way of communicating and establishing relationships, but it also presents many problems and distractions, and causes much harm to young people in many ways.¹⁸ Truly, young people these days are very curious, and they want to know and develop themselves with the various tools of technology, but they do not know how to use them rightly or they allow those tools to dominate their lives, so this causes many problems that complicate their lives. In seeing this reality, younger Vietnamese Americans are challenged with these same problems, so we as ministers want to know how best to help them and apply the Gospel to guide them.

As ministers or leaders we have the ultimate goal to be good missionaries who are able to communicate the Gospel in such a way that it makes sense of cultural differences and relates to

¹⁷ Jesuits - The Society of Jesus, “Journeying with Youth - Accompany young people in the creation of a hope-filled future.” Curia Generalizia della Compagnia di Gesù, 2019.

¹⁸ Anh Hoang, op., “Try To Find A Direction Of Christian Education For Young People Today.” Giao Phan Vinh Online, March 14, 2016. <https://giaophanphucuong.org/gioi-tre/thu-tim-mot-huong-giao-duc-kito-giao-cho-nguoi-tre-hom-nay-850.html>.

the circumstances of each unique cultural context.¹⁹ Therefore, in communicating the Gospel effectively, we need to know and understand some insights that will help us better understand how culture affects our communicating the Gospel with a particular group.

To better do this, first of all, we have to learn that communication is involvement because it is necessary to know another culture in order to effectively communicate the Gospel to it. In communicating Gospel values to a group of younger Vietnamese Americans we must know and understand what their customs and practices are, as well as how they interact with their family members, friends, and within society. Jesus used reality stories in communicating to groups of people; He knew how to use those real-life stories and relate them to some kind of spiritual application. For instance, in Vietnamese culture, the filial duty of children is to take care of their parents when they get older. This is one of the long-standing customs and practices of Vietnamese people, so in communicating this message, we are able to understand this aspect of their culture.²⁰ In keeping this duty, we Vietnamese believe we are obeying and living the fifth commandment of God “Honor your Father and your Mother.”

Secondly, communication is a process. A mission is not just taken and completed within a day or a short period of time, but it takes time with commitment, discipline, and a step-by-step approach to develop the process. Sometimes the outcome can be unexpected. For instance, while Jesus was communicating the Gospel to people and especially among His twelve apostles, the impact on Judas turned out very different from expectation. However, in the will of God, He can use that unexpected occurrence for some purposes, or to make it beneficial. Similarly, we need to spend time on a process that can lead to fruitful results because we need time to listen, explain,

¹⁹ Anthony J. Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 67.

²⁰ May K. Kanti, and Mariana K. Falconier. “Asian Americans Caring for Elderly Parents in the U.S.” *Journal of Cultural Diversity* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 73–83.
<https://electra.lmu.edu:2084/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=125586773&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

dialog, and speak to others to achieve a desired goal. This point is exactly addressed in the letter of the Vietnamese Bishops, who referred to the story of Jesus when He was walking with His two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and it was the Bishops' inspiration as they chose their pastoral theme targeting young people.²¹ Their inspiration was that we need to be ministers willing to walk with young people as Jesus walked with the two disciples, listening, questioning, and explaining to them about His life and mission and the true significance of the Scriptures. He have to walk with them in their "walks of life." I believe that this is a great way and an effective method to help young people spend more time reflecting on what they are listening to in order to apply it to their lives of faith.

Finally, meaning is internal to each individual. Truly, it is important how we communicate to others and it matters what we say and how well we say it in order for an individual to truly perceive the meaning of our words and why they matter to him/her. We should remember that communication is not only what is said, but also what is heard. Pope Francis is the leader of the church and also our spiritual father; for this reason, he tries to figure out what is driving our young people. He is not only listening to their problems, but he also wants to encourage them to come up with some solutions in order to solve those problems, because he believes that young people should be responsible for their future.²² Therefore, we are not just to communicate and speak what is in the Gospel, but we also have to understand what the reality of young Vietnamese Americans is who have greatly struggled in adapting to the American culture.

²¹ Kham V. Nguyen, and Linh C. Nguyen. "The Pastoral Letter to the Community of God's People, Especially to the Youth." *Giao Phan Vinh Online*, October 4, 2019. <http://giaophanvinh.net/hoi-dong-giam-muc-viet-nam-thu-chung-2019-6987>.

²² Reese Thomas, "When Pope Francis Asks Young People What They Think," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 20, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/signs-times/when-pope-francis-asks-young-people-what-they-think>).

Indeed, I believe that in communicating the Gospel to another culture, not only what gets communicated is significant but also how that culture or people perceive the message equally is. Therefore, the important role of a missionary is to listen to and to understand the people of the particular cultures whom they are trying to reach before they try to present the Gospel to them.

2. Gospel and Culture:

The Gospel is the best resource for learning about the life of Jesus Christ. In order to communicate the Gospel clearly to others, especially to the younger generation, it is essential to understand how the Gospel is transmitted to different cultures and how various people interpret the messages in the Gospel which match with their cultures and their reality. As we know, there are four Gospels, written by Mark, Matthew Luke, and John. Each Gospel was written for different cultures which the authors wanted to address. Like each Gospel writer and St. Paul himself, it is important to note how we communicate the message appropriately in order for it to be accepted, understood, and internalized for each group. However, it is more important to see the way in which the Gospel was presented and how the Gospel message affected other people in their hearts and their lives. Each author wanted to highlight the messages in the Gospel and specifically target them for those to whom they wanted to transfer God's messages.

The Gospel of Mark is the first one in line that the author wrote for a persecuted group of Jews in Rome and to the Romans in general. In reading the Gospel of Mark, we can see how the author portrayed the life of Jesus. For Mark, he did not focus on the birth of Jesus; however, throughout his Gospel, we can see how he narrates the life of Jesus emphasizing His betrayal, feeling forsaken, and the alienation Jesus experienced, and how He overcame it by His obedience to His Father. His obedience and surrender to the Father's will saved humanity from sin so that whoever believes in Him will live with Him forever. In this Gospel the author wanted to give

believers the message and the truth that Jesus was obedient and brought salvation to others by His Passion, Death, and Resurrection.²³ So I ask the question: What about us, who are believers, the children of God, what can we do to live His message and follow Him in our lives?

The Gospel of Matthew was written for the community of Jewish-Christians, Jews who became followers of Christ. Recently, however, claims have been made that the final stage of the Gospel is directed towards Christian Gentiles. In this Gospel, the author presents two portrayals: one of Jesus as the Christ and the second as the near approach of the Kingdom of God which Jesus proclaimed. The Gospel of Matthew is like a handbook for church leaders. It is also as a book for the service of God in worship and teaching-preaching. Therefore, the author expected his Gospel of Matthew to reach a widespread audience.²⁴

When we examine the Gospel of Luke, we recognize that the Gospel of Luke was written to the Jews; however, it was not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles who were also included in the Gospel message, since the author mentioned Gentiles in Chapters 2:1; 3:1; 7:1-10, and in other places as well. Here, for example, readers can see that the Gospel of Luke was written to the Greeks because Luke came from a Greek culture and background.²⁵

The Gospel of John was thought to be written for the Greeks because Greek was John's second language and it may have been written for people who also had a second language; indeed, the end of Chapter 20 seems to support this view of an audience of non-Christian believers. Using some of the stories such as the story of the Samaritan provided a clue that John may have been writing to converts from another religious tradition, which lies in the background

²³ Catholic Bishops' Conference, ed., Patricia Grogan. *Christian Community Bible*. (Quezon City, Philippines: Bernardo Hurault, 2012), 1374.

²⁴ Benedict T. Viviano, (1990). *The new Jerome biblical commentary: The Gospel According to Mathew*. R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, and R. Murphy, eds., New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, 631.

²⁵ Catholic Bishops' Conference, ed., Patricia Grogan, 1429.

of the Gospel of John. Truly, his purpose was to provide a picture of Jesus and His teachings to others who want to know and believe in Him.²⁶

These are the four Gospels, which are addressed to different cultures and to different communities of believers. Specifically, each of them addressed and understood the cultural background of those for whom they were written. Therefore, there is no separation between the Gospel and the idea of culture because in communicating the Gospel we have to understand the particular culture of each particular group, and also acknowledge the role that culture plays in general for all groups.

It is interesting to see how each culture received the Gospel message, especially because it depended on the age, time, situation, environment, and location that the writer wanted to target for information and application. Therefore, Gospel and culture are important and often go hand in hand, and connect with each other in communicating the Gospel effectively. I propose this what pastoral ministers should aim at and do in transmitting the unchanging Gospel to the young Vietnamese Americans who have a distinct cultural context.

3. Worldview

In attempting to describe what a worldview is, I believe that there can be different definitions of views from people because each person can see it in their own perspective and it also depends on each culture as well. Worldview impacts each person, and especially influences how the gospel message must be transmitted to us. In the Encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Joy of The Gospel, Pope Francis declares, “It is imperative to evangelize cultures in order to enculturate the Gospel.” It can be a long process, but he calls on each culture and social group to

²⁶ Pheme Perkins. *The new Jerome biblical commentary: The Gospel According to John*, 943 – 945.

grow in faith.²⁷ Another determinant of worldview is how a society looks at what is the real in the world; reality is all around us, but it has to be understood at a deeper level of interpretation. Being a Vietnamese, I understand what our common worldview and thinking are. It is deeper than culture because it shapes our identity of who we are as Vietnamese. We tend to be safe in a small box more than we are when we go out to discover some new adventures that might be dangerous for our safety. It is true to say that worldview is at the center of all cultures because everything that a culture is and will be is driven by our worldview. Growing up and living in a Communist country, I know that people can be shaped and live with fear and doubt of others because the environment makes the people be this way. In order to effectively communicate the Gospel message to younger Vietnamese generations, one must understand they are a unique group of people who have their own worldview. So there are certain things that we have to hold to as ultimate reality in communicating the Gospel.

We have to look at the Bible, find the truth about Jesus Christ and his worldview, which has authority to save humanity. I am sure that God is very much a part of our Vietnamese and American worldview. We are able to communicate with God daily through prayers and we should be aware of His presence through our day; especially when we are confronted with difficult situations, we should ask for His guidance. When we are experiencing joy, we thank Him. When we are suffering, we ask Him to be gentle and help us bear the burdens we are experiencing. God is very involved in our lives because we operate with the understanding that He is part of everything we do. God is not some distant spirit; He is involved because we have knowledge of God and past experiences with Him to determine how we should act. We should

²⁷ *The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii Gaudium* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2013), 37.

consider Him a compass that points us in the direction He wants us to go; so in this sense, He is very involved in our life, as Margaret Silf affirms.²⁸

I believe different people will have different thoughts in answering this question because of how they feel and what they think about their life. Being a Vietnamese, my worldview includes my personal beliefs about the world and ultimate reality. It calls for self-knowledge, which is important for us to help us to know who we are, and to be honest with ourselves and accept the truth about our abilities and limitations. This will lead us to a greater happiness and fulfillment.²⁹ Sometimes it is difficult to be honest with ourselves about our limitations. Living in my culture, for example, to be a strong person is to not show others my limitations or negatives. However, we all do make mistakes, so we should accept ourselves as we are, always striving to be better. Also, getting out of our comfort zone to be with others, fearing to fully embrace our identities, worldviews, and our personal opinions is difficult, because we tend to stay in our comfort zone and do not want to see other people's views of the world; however, Gittins calls on us to get out of our comfort zone to see what is going on in order to know and have a better understanding of others' cultural views.³⁰

These perspectives mentioned above are very common in Vietnamese thinking; however, they ought to be explored in the light of a Christian worldview, from an evangelical perspective and following the belief that the God of the universe is one God but manifested in three forms, of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Also, human beings are flawed because of sin and the original sin of the first ancestor (Gen. 3). Is there a need therefore to hide our flaws and pretend we are perfect? In addition, Jesus Christ is both human and divine; that Jesus Christ is God who

²⁸ Margaret Silf, *Inner Compass: an Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2007), 21- 25.

²⁹ Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon Au, *The Discerning Heart: Exploring the Christian Path* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 131 – 137.

³⁰ Anthony J. Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 115

took a human nature while still being God, so it is to for us to climb to Him.³¹ The importance of developing a deeply committed, younger Vietnamese American worldview is that this is the ultimate reality of their lives and in order to understand what their true reality is, they must turn to God in order to find the answers for their ultimate reality.

4. The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the Role of His Blessed Mother:

We are able to learn about the life of Jesus, especially as Scripture presents the life of Jesus Christ and shows us the uniqueness of Jesus. All of the Old Testament prophecies were uniquely fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God.³² Throughout His life, Jesus performed many miracles for the people, such as healing the sick with incurable diseases without medicine, as in the case of the person born blind (John 9), raising several people from the dead, including Lazarus (John 11:39)³³, and casting out demons (Mark 3:10). He also did other miracles, including turning water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana (John 2:7), and walking on water (Matthew 14:25). There are various works that Jesus has done on behalf of others and He is the only One who has authority to perform these miracles.³⁴ He did authorize and also enable His Apostles and some disciples to do miracles.

Indeed, Jesus not only achieved uniqueness through His life by performing many miracles, but also uniqueness through His death. There were many miracles when He died, including the period of darkness from noon to 3:00pm (Mark 13:33),³⁵ the opening of tombs and rent of the veil in the temple (Matthew 27:51-54).³⁶ One particularly significant lesson that He gave to us while He was on the cross at His crucifixion is that He said: “Father forgive them,

³¹ Catholic Bishops’ Conference, ed., Patricia Grogan. *Christian Community Bible*. (Quezon City, Philippines: Bernardo Hurault, 2012), 43.

³² Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Lanham: Cowley, 1992), 46.

³³ Pheme Perkins, (1990). *The new Jerome biblical commentary: The Gospel According to John*, 967, 970.

³⁴ Benedict T. Viviano. *The new Jerome biblical commentary: The Gospel According to Mathew*, 658.

³⁵ Daniel J. Harrington. *The new Jerome biblical commentary: The Gospel According to Mark*, 624.

³⁶ Benedict T. Viviano. *The new Jerome biblical commentary: The Gospel According to Mathew*, 647.

for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). We can see clearly here how Jesus Christ is unique in His words and actions toward others, even though to those who treated Him badly.

Moreover, Jesus is unique in His resurrection when He demonstrated the reality of His triumph over sin and death with twelve appearances over forty days in the presence of many. Again, the uniqueness of His ascension to heaven is included in Christian creeds, which clearly emphasize the miraculous bodily ascension of Christ from this earth into heaven. The Gospels especially illustrate Jesus’ life as being sinless throughout. Recall, for example, when He was on the cross and the Roman soldier proclaimed: “Surely this was a righteous man” (Luke 23:47), or the thief on the left side of Jesus, at His crucifixion, who said, “This man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:41). These examples for the Gospel show us how Jesus was a unique Man.³⁷

The uniqueness of Jesus Christ has been understood by many different cultures. Several theologians have portrayed Jesus Christ in different images: Jesus as the poor Monk, Jesus as a marginalized, and Jesus as the immigrant and border-crosser par excellence. He came to save us, to live with us, and to bring love to us, as Peter Phan, in his book, *Christianity with an Asian Face*,³⁸ explains. In here, we do not have to look at Jesus as European, but at Jesus as an Asian Man, who addresses our culture and comes to us from the Father to give us life. The goal here is to allow us to see what Jesus means in our lives and how his presence affects us in order to give people hope. This should be the way that Jesus is presented to the young Vietnamese Americans. Truly, the world is understood as a large tapestry and each culture is a lovely part of it; therefore,

³⁷ Robert J. Karris, (1990). *The new Jerome biblical commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, and R. Murphy, eds., New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, 719 – 720.

³⁸ Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll (NY): Orbis Books, 2003), 104 - 115.

in presenting the Gospel, it was important to the writers to show how each culture is perceived as part of that and how each one belongs in that image, as part of the community of God.³⁹

Similarly, in the Vietnamese culture, the role of our Blessed Mother is an important aspect of Vietnamese Christianity. She is a mirror for us and also a Mother who brings us closer to God. Simply put, Mother Mary is a bridge to connect humanity to Jesus Christ. She plays an important role in Vietnamese family Christianity too. Our Blessed Mother is essential to Vietnamese history so that most of Christianity honors her as our Mother and prays with her in our family's daily life.⁴⁰ Like other countries, there are two locations in Vietnam where Vietnamese claim to have had Marian apparitions; these include our Lady of La Vang and our Lady of Tra Kieu. There are no historical documents about these appearances of our Blessed Mother; there is only unverifiable oral tradition.⁴¹ Our Lady did not appear to an individual, but to a group of people at the time when Catholics were being persecuted by the Vietnamese. Our Lady appeared to call people to recite the Rosary to the devotional heart of Mary and she promised to protect them. In both places and twice, the Blessed Mother called people to rely on her by saying the Rosary. Through these apparitions, the Vietnamese portrayed her as a Mother of Mercy because she represented herself as the Mother of God and Mother of us all who was extremely attractive and of great pastoral relevance.⁴²

Our Lady is a Mother of Mercy because she did not ask for favors, but she promised to Vietnamese Catholics and to all those who pray with her, that she had also suffered and would protect the Vietnamese as they suffered persecution for their faith. She is a mirror for us to follow as a Mother of love to her suffering children who cried out to her for help. It is interesting

³⁹ Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll (NY): Orbis Books, 2003), 104 – 105.

⁴⁰ Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 116 - 118.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 116.

to see her image from the apparitions because she was wearing a Vietnamese traditional dress and holding the Christ child on her hand. In the Vietnamese cultural context, this image represented a loving Mother who is always ready to embrace her children under her arm in order to listen to them and protect them from those who want to harm them. It is no wonder that the Vietnamese see her as a Mother of love and mercy who is ready to assist them.⁴³ Therefore, in most Vietnamese Catholic homes, we can see the statue of Blessed Mary of La Vang in a place of honor where they pray to her together every day. My family is a personal example, and my parents and members of my family recite the Rosary every day together twice a day, early in the morning and again at night time. I believe that many families in Vietnam do the same as my family because they believe that our Mother is always listening to her children who pray with her. Our Mother Mary is always a bridge to connect us to God and help us to have closer relationship with Him. It is easy to ask our Father any favor through our Mother because she always loves us and listens to what we want to ask her. This uniqueness and motherly love of the Blessed Mary to Vietnamese should therefore be a unique lens of communicating the Gospel message to Young Vietnamese Americans. We do this mindful that the same mother holds pride of place in the American culture, Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Blessed Mother becomes a unique unifying figure for the young Vietnamese Americans.

Through these two great examples which I just pointed out above, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ helps us to see how He comes to save us, to love us, and stay with us throughout our lives. Through all His works, we can definitely see that He has authority to save us and protect us. In the Vietnamese context, Jesus Christ is sent from the Father and brings love and salvation to us. He is the lovable head of the family. This connects to our Vietnamese tradition, a patriarchal tradition where we view men as being in charge and having authority to make

⁴³ Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 116 – 117.

decisions in the family.⁴⁴ However, the roles of the women are important in the family as well just like our Lady of La Vang who represents the women of Vietnam. She is willing to protect and love her children and to embrace her children and keep them from suffering and defend them from the dangers of enemies. As they feel these loves, Jesus love for the Mother and the Mothers love for Jesus should be a tool to heal the dangers of patriarchy for the younger generations of Vietnamese Americans. All these must lead us to develop a Gospel presentation strategy which the next section deals with

5. Gospel Presentation Strategy:

In communicating the Gospel to other people, and especially to younger generations of Vietnamese Americans, it is important to understand how to communicate to them without making them lose their identity or question their beliefs in the process. Therefore, this can be powerful in affecting them because these conversations will lead them to feel that they are welcomed and will encourage them to get involved in the church, and then help them nourish and develop their faith. There are some methods which can be used to help facilitate the spread of the Gospel to young Vietnamese Americans, such as to show them where they do things in accordance with the Scriptures and affirming that God is the only one who can give us true love and peace in our lives.

Sacrifices are one of the first steps that we have to address; they have to be performed for God. There are stories that show how people began their rituals of sacrifice. Truly, we must ask: how can we truly make sacrifices to God in our lives? This can be a question to ask people, particularly young people in search of their answer to God throughout their lives of living and practicing the Gospel.

⁴⁴ A. Terry Rambo, *Searching for Vietnam: Selected Writings on Vietnamese Culture and Society* (Kyoto, Japan: Kyoto University Press, 2005), 74 - 75.

The second method is how we connect what Jesus teaches in the Gospels to the reality of people. In demonstrating the story of a woman who was caught in adultery (John 8: 3-12), we can see clearly how Jesus acted on her behalf to reduce her sin and the price that she had to pay.⁴⁵ In considering that, there are many times when young people just follow the crowd or seek comfort and forget God in their lives. However, God always waits for them to be ready to repent. God never reduces His love for us if only we recognize His presence in our daily life. Also, in telling the story of the Samaritan, Jesus asks: who is his friend? Surely, the one helped him out and took care of him.⁴⁶ As Christians, we learn and practice what the Samaritan did for the stranger. Even though he did not know the other he did it, not because he needed to pay back, but because he saw the other as his friend/ brother. Following this example, young people are able to bring God's love to others including strangers, non-Catholics, friends, and the poor.

Another example: Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice. Throughout the life of Jesus, He had done no wrong but He was still condemned and killed. However, at the last minute, He cried out to His Father to ask forgiveness for those who did not know what they were doing. This reflects the enormous love that He showed to others, both His companions and those who hated Him and caused Him to suffer. He still forgave them. What about in our lives? It is important that we learn from Jesus Christ how to forgive others because no one is free from mistakes in life. If we learn how to forgive, we keep His commandments and practice them throughout our lives. These are just some of the examples which equip and allow people to apply Gospel values to their reality stories. This sacrificial love and forgiveness ought to be balanced with Jesus standing against oppression and standing for the poor. A wholistic message as this I believe will be a good Gospel

⁴⁵ Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Lanham: Cowley, 1992), 47.

⁴⁶ Catholic Bishops' Conference, ed., Patricia Grogan. *Christian Community Bible*. (Quezon City, Philippines: Bernardo Hurault, 2012), 1466 – 1467.

presentation strategy which is capable of satisfying the curiosity of the younger Vietnamese Americans and at the same time doing justice to the Gospel message.

From the explanation and analysis above, I conclude that good implementation of the concept of communicating the Gospel to the younger generation Vietnamese Americans will move them toward a personal relationship with God. In our lives, sometimes people cannot achieve this by themselves, but they need people who are willing to guide and lead them by the grace of God. In this same way, young people sometimes do not recognize how the love of God works in them. Once again, I believe if the younger generations use their freedom and consciousness to discern what they need for their lives and what they should detach from in order to attain integration of cultures, this will help them to grow and enrich their living. I also believe that effectively communicating the Gospel to younger generations of Vietnamese Americans will help to build their lives on a true and valid foundation of their faith with the grace of God. Furthermore, it will help them become more active and engaged in the Church, where they can learn to serve others and grow, both in their daily lives and within their spiritual souls. Therefore, each of us should follow the footsteps of Jesus in ministry in bringing the Gospel to others. As Osborne says: “The ministry of Jesus is a ministry of service.”⁴⁷ With this, I believe that the young generation of Vietnamese Americans will understand and know what their role in the church is and how they have to be responsible to their faith. For example, how they are able to become great ministers in their parishes and to help others adapt to American culture, which will give them a meaningful opportunity to help the Church and society grow better and stronger. But we do not only need a Gospel presentation strategy, but we also equally need a pastoral plan

⁴⁷ Kenan B. Osborne, *Orders and Ministry: Leadership in the World Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 97.

or project if we are to have real impacts. The next and final part of my thesis looks at the pastoral project or plan component of the issues at stake.

Part 4: Pastoral Project or Plan Component

Communicating Gospel and culture to others effectively is not only by speech but above all by practical action. My personal experiences and ministry have taught me some of the ways to communicate the Gospel. This can be a limited way, but I believe it is a starting point for me to begin with. Some of these ways are also alluded to by others in the academia. In his book, *The Spiritual Way*, Philip Sheldrake leads us into the way of practical action based on the Ignatian exercise and he calls us to "respond to the call of God in Jesus Christ in a variety of radical actions in the world."⁴⁸ The radical actions demand a pastoral plan or project which is the focus of this section. **My proposed plan is developed around these seven sections:** a call for the development of a spiritual life based on the Ignatian spirituality of accepting God's invitation; the need to connect the young generations with Jesus Christ; a thorough sacramental formation and direction; holistic religious education and formation; discernment as a pathway of detachment; the need to connect the young people with the Church and the mission of the Church; and responding to the Call to Service—Living Faith in the World.

1. Developing a Spiritual Life based on the Ignatius Spirituality—Accepting God's Invitation:

Spiritual direction is necessary for most people who want to seek a deeper relationship with God and a tool to guide people to build their faith in life. It is an effective tool to help people, especially the younger Vietnamese Americans generation, open their hearts with others they feel comfortable sharing their situations with. Indeed, helping the Vietnamese Americans

⁴⁸ Philip Sheldrake, *The Spiritual Way: Classic Traditions and Contemporary Practice* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019), 71.

younger generation develop their spiritual life, particularly using the Ignatian spirituality as their worldview, expressed in seeing God in everything,⁴⁹—helps them develop an inner life to correspond to outer life because it helps Vietnamese American young people to see the uniqueness of Vietnamese culture and American culture. They play a part in God’s creation. The Ignatian spirituality helps people to see the beauty of the earth which is given to human beings, and God gives us as our dominion so we continue to do God’s work developing our common home. Therefore, Vietnamese Americans will understand what is essential in our lives in putting God as our center and seeing God in everything of our lives, Ignatian spirituality helps young people root their lives in foundational thinking that gives them hope and conveys meaning in their lives.

What is the purpose of my life? What do I live for? How can I be American and Vietnamese? Why should I care about Vietnamese Catholic faith, practice, and community? Can Vietnamese Catholicism help me deal with my life? What about the growing anti-Asian sentiment and hate crimes directed at my community? These questions are for every one—particularly young people—to raise in their journey, because each person has a purpose to achieve in his/her life. Many young people are challenged in their journey, especially in their spiritual life. They find it easy to doubt or difficult to face what has been happening in their lives because some people lack a healthy prayer life or they do not put Jesus as the center of their lives. Therefore, the ministers and leaders of the Church have to guide and help them be confident in dealing with their issues. The Church needs to encourage, dialogue, welcome their challenges and help them grow in discipleship.⁵⁰ All these will be possible if the church and her leaders put in place effective means of spiritual direction. Spiritual direction can also help young

⁴⁹ Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 2004), 5.

⁵⁰ Hung Do M. “Synod 2018: Vietnamese young people - 6 problems and ways.” YouTube, October 2018.

Vietnamese Americans balance their faith and life regarding their history and cultural roots because we know that spiritual direction is a source to nurture life and it also cares for the soul of each individual. In seeking spiritual direction young Vietnamese Americans want a deeper relationship with God and focus on the experience of God in their daily life. If young people are conscious to let God direct and guide their paths, they find it easy to live peacefully and offer their lives to God.

“Come, follow me”⁵¹ (Lk 18:22) is the statement with which Jesus called His apostles. It is also the invitation for each of us, especially for the young people, to be transformed into holy people. It also brings that holiness to other people to help them to realize the love of God and continually saying yes to God's invitation because only Jesus Christ offers us a solid foundation and brings us hope in our lives. Who is to lead them to follow Jesus is what sometimes seems lacking. Spiritual direction is not common in Vietnamese culture, so I believe it is good to provide young people spiritual directors who can guide and accompany them in their journey and walk with them, and explain what they need in their lives as Jesus walked and explained scripture for the two disciples on the way to Emmaus.⁵² Because young people may not understand fully what God teaches them, they need wise people to explain how it can be applied to their daily living. In Vietnamese culture, we tend to hide our personality in secret, and we find it is difficult to share it with others so that spiritual direction is not common in Vietnamese culture. However, it is a good way to help many people, especially young people, to open their hearts to share their personal challenges in order to find good answers in God's help.

⁵¹ Catholic Bishops' Conference, ed., Patricia Grogan. *Christian Community Bible*. (Quezon City, Philippines: Bernardo Hurault, 2012), 1488.

⁵² Kham V. Nguyen, and Linh C. Nguyen. “The Pastoral Letter to the Community of God's People, Especially to the Youth.” *Giao Phan Vinh Online*, October 4, 2019. <http://giaophanvinh.net/hoi-dong-giam-muc-viet-nam-thu-chung-2019-6987>.

2. Connecting young generations with Jesus Christ:

Young generations need guidance from leaders, ministers, or older people to help them mature in their personal and communal growth. They will grow toward their relationship with Jesus Christ as young Vietnamese according to the words and ideas expressed in the song titled "Study With Jesus"—studying with Jesus brings them peace, joys, and happiness in life. We learn to love each other instead of focusing on negatives.⁵³ Pope Francis issued the "Christus vivit" in which he portrays the living, youthful, and intimate face of Christ, who is living among us. He is a friend of youth and wishes to have a good relationship with them to help the young people live in fulfillment, grow up in holiness, and commit themselves to serve society and Church.⁵⁴ Therefore, it is essential to connect young people with Jesus Christ, and the best way is to lead them not only into Church programs but to help them bring Christ into their studies and work. To practically engage in this, there will be the need to help form them sacramentally.

In Vietnamese culture they look at Jesus as our Father who is the head and leader of the family; therefore, young Vietnamese build relationship with Him to seek the Divine more deeply in their daily practices. It is great that young Vietnamese take Jesus as their model and mirror to follow as their guidance, because He is their center to connect faith and culture together.

3. Sacramental formation and direction

It is crucial to help young people develop their sacramental life because it will become the foundation and rootedness for building their lives. Leaders should encourage young people to participate in the sacraments, especially the sacraments of confirmation, reconciliation, and Eucharist, because they help young people build a closer and deeper relationship with God, the

⁵³ Y Vu, "Study With Jesus" Vietnamese Thieunhithanhthe song, 2008.

⁵⁴ Pope Francis, "Christus vivit": Post-Synodal Exhortation to Young People and to the entire People of God (25 March 2019) Vatican, March 25, 2019.
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html.

church and life. Building on a good sacramental formation, we should encourage young people to learn and experience different forms of personal and group prayers, have chances to connect and react with others, and to pray not only for their own needs but also for others' needs, and together to share their own stories and reflect based on God's mysteries. The great wealth of the sacramental life and devotions must be open to them including the rosary prayers, devotion to saints and guardian angels, devotional groups and confraternities such as the Sacred Heart, Legion of Mary, Young Apostles, etc. A good grounding in sacramental life of the church will make them connect with Christ at every aspect of their lives, be it at the home, school, or workplace.

Vietnam has a very small proportion of Catholics; however, they are very devoted to being Christian, participating in different forms of prayers, such as attending masses, reciting the Rosary, and saying the liturgy of the hours. They also want to teach their younger generations how to pray and to live their faith according to Vietnamese culture. The Ignatian tradition is a great way to help young people to live their faith, not only for themselves, but also to live helping others in their actions. Truly, Jesus not only speaks out what He thinks, but He acts what he has said. The Ignatian spirituality helps to see God in all things; it can lead young people to see God in the poor, the marginalized, and the people voiceless in the world. Living our faith is not only to pray, but it also has to demonstrate faith through actions toward others, as Philip Shaldrake leads us to the prophetic way. Our faith is more fruitful if we practice living for each other as shown by St. Therese of Lisieux with her "little way" and her vocation to love.⁵⁵ Therefore, Ignatius calls us to live with love and see God in others.

⁵⁵ Philip Shaldrake, *The Spiritual Way: Classic Traditions and Contemporary Practice* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019), 118, 126.

4. Religious Education and Formation

Education is a key in any formation for life, little wonder the church thought it wise to have Catholic education put in place. Parents must prioritize Catholic education for their young adults and children. The Church must make serious efforts to subsidize the cost of attending Catholic education, and the content of the education must be tailored towards formation for both life and work. Young people need to be educated and understand church teachings, so providing them information in both topical and programmatic formats effectively helps them have a more profound sense of the value of developing their faith and how to live and fulfill their faith in the world. Some programs include formation in church life, formation in virtues, theology and life of the saints, theology of the sacraments, practical Bible studies, etc., necessary for young people to learn to understand faith and reason in its fullness. Since Vietnam is a patriarchal country, topics such as the roles of women and children, human dignity, family life, personal faith, racism, etc., all need to be carefully addressed for young Vietnamese Americans and to help them have a good knowledge foundation so they can be confident to deal with challenges that occur in their lives. The two cultures which form the lives of the young Vietnamese Americans must be in dialogue with the faith. This is what brings in the element of discernment which is a necessary part of the journey of young Vietnamese Americans. Therefore, the Ignatian spirituality can be a great resource for young people to grow and mature in both soul and body with more peace and happiness to help them to see what is best for them to hold onto in both Vietnamese and American culture. Ignatian spirituality especially helps young people to live fully as a child of God, seeing God in everything in their daily life. It also helps them to live and nourish their whole person as who they are in the love of God.

5. Discernment – Pathway of detachment

Wilke Au emphasizes the importance of discernment in our lives. I believe that insight is necessary and essential for each of us.⁵⁶ There are many reasons for us to practice discernment in daily life. Here again, the role of the church and her ministers is essential. In helping the young generation of Vietnamese Americans, we should guide them on how to discern, because they need to constantly distinguish whether what they do is good or bad, negative or positive, and how to be closer to God. Maybe what appears to be good may be turning them away from the love of God. As we know, young people now live in a rush, and they try to follow the digital world, so they have no time to pause to reflect and discern what is essential for their lives to help them be valid and healthy both in their faith and in living life. Not only will spiritual direction, sacramental formation, religious education, all aimed at connecting with Christ, help in this direction, but above all, the need for formation in the virtue of detachment is key.

Margaret Silf leads us to consider detachment, which is essential for each of us, to detach from what is not necessary for our life. What takes away our peace and relationship with God?⁵⁷ One key area is formation in both the use of and the detachment from social media. Young people might use social media, but they should know how to discern and detach from what is not suitable for them, and choose to be with God and develop their relationship with God. The world of social media must be open to them, but not controlling them. They should use guidance as they explore social media.

The message of both authors, Au and Silf's, regarding discernment and pathway to detachment must be practically explained and implemented by the ministers of the church and by parents.

⁵⁶ Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon Au, *The Discerning Heart: Exploring the Christian Path* (New York, N.J: Paulist Press, 2006), 19-24.

⁵⁷ Margaret Silf, *Inner Compass: an Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2007), 155-158.

These two pathways are important for the young Vietnamese Americans to apply in their lives, especially in their own families, to help them adapt well to American culture with some uniqueness of each culture to enrich their lives. Furthermore, these young people ought to be led to detach themselves from some customs and practices of both the Vietnamese culture and the American culture to help them adjust their lives. As I have mentioned above, in Vietnamese culture and tradition we do not tend to say “no” to older people, so that living in the U.S, we should learn when we should say “no” and when we should say “yes” with others. I believe that this is an excellent way to discernment and detachment. Another example is filial duty of children toward elders. In the Vietnamese culture, the children in the family need to fulfill their duty as a child to take care of their parents when they get older. Living in the U.S, young Vietnamese Americans know how to discern what is good for both their parents and themselves. They should detach what Vietnamese culture maintains when it is not appropriate in the U.S culture in taking care of elders. It may be helpful for their parents to live in a nursing home so they can have good care. Applying Ignatian spirituality helps young Vietnamese Americans to discern what is good and what is better for their parents. Such a view will help the young generation to balance their expression of life with more detachment from the negative effects of the traditional Vietnamese culture of maintaining filial respect. In the final analysis, such discernment and detachment will allow the young people to recognize their limitations, acknowledge the good in each culture, reject the not-so-good, and to trust in God. It is God who will help us and strengthen us to deal with our weaknesses and embrace our strengths having been enlightened by his Holy Spirit. As Psalm 27:1 encourages, the Lord ought to be the light, help and stronghold of the young Vietnamese Americans.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Catholic Bishops' Conference, ed., Patricia Grogan. *Christian Community Bible*. (Quezon City, Philippines: Bernardo Hurault, 2012), 1194.

6. Connecting the young people with the Church and the mission of the Church:

In the meeting of the synod of Bishops at Rome on May 10, 2018, Pope Francis and the bishops attending all agreed on emphasizing the importance of helping to strengthen young people's faith today with the topic "Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment" as a center of attention all over the world.⁵⁹ Indeed, Christian young people are always a particular concern of the Church because they are seeds that will grow into plants in the Catholic Church. Our Church will be better and more potent if the young people are conscious of their roles in life; therefore, how shall we connect young people with the Church and the Church's mission? In the understanding of old patriarchal Vietnamese culture there was much injustice. Therefore, it is important to invite young Vietnamese American generations to get involved in the Church's mission to better understand human dignity and counter racism and rifts between men and women, rich, and poor. They must be trained to get involved not only in the mission of the Church but in the mission of ensuring the dignity of friends and families both in the U.S. and in Vietnam. Since the young people are seeds we expect to grow and bring new hope to all nations, especially to bring Good News to others and to show people the value of the Gospel in their lives regarding justice and peace in their home, workplace, and society, we must lead them to have a deep connection with the mission of the church. Here again, spiritual direction, religious education and formation, discernment and detachment, etc., must come to play.

Here the role of the Blessed Mother could be of immense help also. In Vietnamese tradition the Blessed Mother's role is important. The young generation must be led to meditate on the litany of the Blessed Mother which celebrates her virtues and what she stands for. There

⁵⁹ Pope Francis, "Letter of Pope Francis to Young People," Letter of Pope Francis to Young People (Vatican, January 13, 2017), <http://www.synod.va/content/synod2018/en/pope---young/letter-of-his-holiness-pope-francis-to-young-people.html>.

we will, for example, learn that she is not only the mother of mercy but also the mirror of justice. Mary will teach the young Vietnamese and Vietnamese Americans how important women are in God's plan and in the family. She is the bridge between human beings and Jesus Christ, the cause of our joy, the virgin most faithful, seat of wisdom, vessel of devotion, help of Christians, queen of families, queen of peace, etc. As leaders, ministers, we have to invite, train, support, mentor, and educate young generations to be leaders for the present and future because they can be hands of Jesus Christ and the Blessed Mother to bring hopes to others and make the Church more vital. Also, understanding Ignatian spirituality with seeing God in all things allows young people to have a valid foundation in spiritual direction so that they are able to help others to recognize the value of what they are given in each culture so that they can embrace the best of both cultures, Vietnamese and American.

7. Responding to the Call to Service—Living Faith in the World:

The challenge of young people's faith is to be a credible witness to the power of the Gospel in the world today, especially in the dual culture of Vietnamese Americans. The first place that this challenge and witness presents itself is at their home, and after that, it can spread out to the Church and society. Vietnamese culture maintains filial respect for people, so young Vietnamese Americans should respond and be fulfilled to this call to bring God's love to their grandparents and parents in their family, to the Church, and to society. In this way they become good and worthy disciples of Christ. Embracing such a culture in light of the gospel values helps them to maintain a life of integrity. By bearing such credible witness, they are fulfilling the call of Jesus Christ to all of us; "Love your neighbor as yourself."⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Pope Francis, "Letter of Pope Francis to Young People," Letter of Pope Francis to Young People (Vatican, January 13, 2017), <http://www.synod.va/content/synod2018/en/pope---young/letter-of-his-holiness-pope-francis-to-young-people.html>.

Jesus has power overall, but he uses that authority to protect those who are voiceless, marginalized, or poor people. He always has the preferential option for the poor. In learning from Jesus, Vietnamese Americans learn to embrace both cultures in light of the Gospel and to live with mercy, love, and justice, after the example not only of Jesus, but also of the Blessed Mother, the saints, and their current spiritual guides and parents. If young people are conscious of their roles, these enormous examples and treasures of the church, and the strengths and weaknesses of the two cultures, they will grow and mature in their faith and in responding to the call of Jesus to care for their families, job responsibilities, and practicing the duties of good citizenship. They will be fulfilling their divine purpose in life.

Young people should understand that we all fulfill our Christian vocation living in the world. The Church's mission is not directed at itself, but at nurturing and forming the people God calls to serve humanity, led by the Holy Spirit and the word of God. Young people can feel supported to be Jesus' disciples in living their faith, nourished by the Church, and growing in the Holy Spirit, as the Gospel of Luke states, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" (Lk 4:18-19).⁶¹

Conclusion

The young Vietnamese Americans have what it takes to fulfill their cultural and Christian mandates. What the church practically needs to put in place is their formation. The Church mindful of the discussions above have to develop a Gospel presentation strategy, put a good pastoral strategy outlined above in place, and establish less costly centers which will be devoted

⁶¹ Catholic Bishops' Conference, ed., Patricia Grogan. *Christian Community Bible*. (Quezon City, Philippines: Bernardo Hurault, 2012), 1443.

to training Vietnamese men and women (including parents) as spiritual directors and religious educators to aid the priests in ministering to the young generation. Parents need to understand the dual cultures of these young people and accompany the young generation mindful of this duality and the centrality of the Gospel message and values. The younger generation of Vietnamese Americans have to open themselves not only to the two cultures but above all to the Gospel message of Christ. Their openness to divine guidance and endowments, in addition to the worthy human direction and church guidance coupled with good structures and programs, will produce fruitful integration.

I hold that when these are put in place mindful of the deliberations of this thesis, we will in solidarity lead the young Vietnamese Americans to face their challenges, embrace their strengths and use all to the greater glory of God and to the enhancement of our collective humanity. It will help young Vietnamese Americans to approach their goal of knowing what tools to hold to balance their faith in living between the two cultures, Vietnamese and American. It will aid them to discern what is essential for their living in a healthy and satisfying way combining the riches of their Vietnamese heritage with the best of the new American culture they are moving into, growing them a fuller, more chosen life of their own. In these ways, we will not fail this vibrant generation but help them put their grace of having two cultures to optimum use for the benefit of the two cultures and all humanity. This is a collective responsibility as my thesis points out.

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