



GOD'S NEWS

short stories of solidarity

Testimonies

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This publication has no aim other than the recounting of short stories of solidarity. Stories of men and women who have given their time, their convictions, their efforts in a simple way because they have heard the cries of the weak.

Reading their accounts has been an experience of faith, there is God's news in this world, written in other codes; maybe we have to know how to decipher them.

We must truly thank each one of you for the shared experience, the simplicity of your acting, the belief that you do very little, the gratitude thereby felt to be received in this your story, mutually shared and always accompanied.

We must also beg forgiveness because the original texts of the testimonies have been reduced. They were full of deeply moving anecdotes. These publications are also shared in solidarity and must cut down on costs, like so many of our brothers and sisters who not only reduce them but do not have even the minimum. They are the protagonists of these stories, you alone are those who have had the good fortune to find them along the path.

On finishing the publication the reader will confirm that they are not presented with 'models of saintliness' but rather with evangelical testimonies. Saintliness is a thing of God, not ours. But human life is filled with infinite testimonies of anonymous goodness. And from these it is easy to extract a number of lessons such as the following:

- a) The importance of others. In the form of partner, of movement, group for marriages or for life review, of the children themselves... At times others can bring out the worst in us, but they are the only ones capable of bringing out the best in us.
- b) The need to 'find out'. How do we change? one of the testimonies asks itself. And it responds: "We simply start to find out". These days one cannot be a Christian retiring to a placid world of blessed ignorance. The least we are asked is to know in what world it is that we live.
- c) None of those who testify here (despite the admirable nature of some accounts) feel themselves to be superior, or better, but instead paradoxically grateful. Commitment is grace, good news ('eve-angelic') before it is law.

Starting from this triple observation the reader can introduce themselves into this small 'cloud of testimonies', and from this come face to face with the Fount of all life and all liberty, in order to ask: "Lord, do you wish something more of me?"

Cristianisme i Justícia

1. A HOME OPEN TO ALL

Gloria Pérez and Jordi Riera

1. Concern for those most underprivileged

I could say that already as a youngster I began to feel a certain worry and concern for all those most underprivileged people. The theme of solidarity preoccupied me very frequently and this concern led me to the St. Roc district of Badalona where, together with others, I went on Sundays to help in a play group for gypsy children. All of this was backed by the reflection of a CVX community that drove me to believe that faith and commitment were much more than meetings and chats.

It was in this community that I met my husband, Jordi, 24 years ago. My disquiet and my restless spirit converged with the patient disposition of an essentially good man, perhaps not very daring in his conduct but yes, full of a great essential coherence.

In our path as a couple we were helped by a marriage team run by a Jesuit. It was a time of learning to live alongside the other, of learning to combine work outside the home with the housework, the arrival of three children, with the nappy changes, the waking nights. They are now 20, 19 and 17 years old, and from the outset they have represented a fount of richness, of constant reflections and questions. My restlessness, my being open and my social concern could not live like a mother's 'mania', but rather increasingly as a desire to transmit and to live a certain type of family life.

So it was that we incorporated ourselves into the group of families that arose from the colonies of the Order of the Escuelas Pias of Pineta. The group involves all of us who form a part of it, it is a way of living, together we walk in consciousness of the importance of solidarity, we encounter different testimonies that spur us on and encourage us to believe that, once again, it is not enough to talk, but it is necessary to act.

2. A decision that marks us

A number of years ago some good friends in the group contacted the Oscobe Foundation that runs a refuge for boys between the ages of 15 and 18 years who come from ward centres. These boys come from broken families or from parents who, for different reasons, cannot look after them. Many bring with them serious family problems and above all a great lack of affection. In this Centre they are taught a trade whilst working in a number of plant nurseries and in the hotel industry. Some of the boys also go to the academy in order to graduate from school because many of them have suffered from school absenteeism. They are taught to look after themselves and to be independent. They are also educated in work habits and in domestic task sharing. They live in an open centre system whilst they fulfil their obligations. Following a suggestion made by the Centre to these friends, it appeared interesting that the

boys could live and experiment with that which they had always lacked: sharing their free time with a structured family, at least once a month. These boys usually spend the weekends with their families (although this isn't always possible and at times is inconvenient) or in the Centre.

Our service consists in welcoming in one of these boys two weekends per month, and during part of the holidays. Our family has actually received two brothers aged 16 and 17 since last year. They usually come on Friday evening and leave mid-afternoon on Sunday.

When they are with us we normally do the same as any other weekend, but trying to dedicate more attention to them and to do activities that they might enjoy. Above all we try to be there more for them.

3. We and our children value life and things in a different way

This incorporation of two more members into our family has involved a constant reflection. Why do we do it? What do we expect of it? This significant commitment often means having to renounce our independence as a couple, above all now that the children are older and live their own lives, in order to be attentive to those recently arrived and to take back on board some of the functions of parents that we had already forgotten.

It has also posed questions to our own children that have led them to value positively all that to which previously they gave no importance: to have parents who love them, a family stability, education and, at the same time, they have had to make an effort to share all that we have, and sometimes this isn't easy, especially for adolescents.

Theoretically all our children believe that welcoming others in is positive, but in the practical moment when they see that it is their turn to share or to make an effort to renounce something, it costs them, especially the eldest who is already more used to making his own life. Their relationship with our daughter is one of good friends, they explain things to each other, they consult one another. It is with the youngest that they play and share most but, at the same time, he is also the most jealous; at times he dislikes the fact that we are there for them and that they are considerate with us.

After almost a year's experience, we believe that we have all taken to it well. It requires effort, but it is worth the pain when you see that they are happy, are growing, explain things about their family to you, trust you, and try to do well.

The experience enriches us all. On being able to share our family we have discovered how this could be a sacrament of love, shared and shared again with renewed impulse towards those who lack what is fundamental to any child: a father and a mother who truly love them.

Perhaps this that we do is only a drop of water in the ocean, but it is what we feel capable of doing: sharing what we have, our home, our time, our family.

2. OUR SILVER RINGS

Silvia and Xavier

1. We try to be coherent

We are a married couple from the Gracia district of Barcelona, together for 16 years and parents of a large young family of 10, 7 and 4 year old children. At home we simply try not to have an insulting disassociation between feeling and doing. What we have done is neither extraordinary nor marvellous, it is simply an act of congruence with that which we claim to believe: faith in Jesus Christ and in a model of a different society, egalitarian and one of solidarity.

Living in solidarity comes to us from a young age, thanks to the education received from parents and from the schools that we attended. The parish also influences us, the Third World group, the choir, the midday Sunday youth Mass, the prayers of Santa Maria del Mar on Sunday nights. More recently we have had new inspiring influences: Taizé, Montserrat, St. Pere de les Puel.les and the Puiggraciós, Mas Blanc.....

2. How to live in solidarity in the family

Solidarity begins at home, with oneself, with one's partner, children, elderly parents.... sometimes it is easier to live in solidarity outside the home than in it.

We choose children. This means giving them our time to be with them day to day, to the detriment of other activities: reducing our working hours to be able to take them to and pick them up from school, choosing jobs that allow us to share their time to the detriment of others with better salaries or with other professional options.

We want to underline the fact of having found ourselves one to the other as a couple. We believe that this has been the drive of our common lifestyle, and this has meant beginning with an advantage, we consider ourselves to be privileged in this aspect.

In the first place, at the time of arranging our house our intention was to furnish it simply, avoiding things that weren't strictly necessary. Our engagement rings are made of silver instead of the habitual gold, as a symbol of austerity. The doors of our home have always been open to absolutely everyone, as we try always to have time for whoever will visit us.

At certain times of our life being austere has been easy, at least for us: we had little money and not much ambition in this respect, but we lived peacefully, without suffering to reach the end of the month. Maintaining oneself simple, poor, in solidarity, becomes complicated when one enters the wheel of society. You have to choose between entering this 'train of life' or not.... and, at times, the temptations are strong.

3. How to live in solidarity with the world

We think that one must take steps:

- We have been Conscientious Objectors to military and fiscal service, choices that are a transformative instrument of society.
- When just married we spent a brief period of time working in Guatemala, as a doctor and teaching in a rural school. During this experience we got to know Benjamin, a Mayan Tzutuil youth whose university studies in teaching and psychology we helped to pay. He now continues this chain of solidarity working as a teacher in his native village.
- Alongside our small Christian community for a number of years we were supporting the 'Centro Juvenil Mártires del Despertar - Nueva Vida' (Juvenile Centre) in El Salvador, helping out with the wages of two of those released.
- Over these last few years we have begun a new commitment. One day a week one of us goes to sleep at the Barceloneta 'Sostre', a dormitory for the destitute. For us this has the feeling of returning to its users the human dignity that our dehumanising society has taken from them.

There is no doubt that it is very risky to follow the path set out by Jesus without anyone to accompany you, you need to do it in community. We have had the immense luck to be accompanied for almost twenty years by a small community of prayer, of life, of sharing, and for over five years now we have also belonged to the ACO movement (Catholic Worker Action). Our companions, with their support and with their commitments, generally braver and more daring than ours, have always carried us and encouraged us along this path of solidarity.

3. PLURALISM, DIALOGUE AND TOLERANCE

Enric Vidal and Nuria Gispert

1. A sober and austere education

We are 70 and 63 years old, have been married for 41 years, we have 3 children and 4 grandchildren. Before meeting we had both already been educated in the sense of solidarity and the fact of sharing with others.

The priest of Nuria, who was a doctor, visited all those who presented themselves in his surgery without any form of discrimination. In those days social security did not exist and in his waiting room one could meet as much with the president of the Board of Trade and Commerce as with a Perona gypsy. If he saw a bad economic situation during his home visits, as well as not charging he discretely left money under the pillow so that they could buy the medication.

Enric's father was a civil servant and an honoured person. During the Civil War the town council named him the Institution's representative for the food stores that the Quakers sent. At a time when others took advantage to enrich themselves, he set food aside for those in hiding, for those who were persecuted for their religious beliefs, nuns, priests, and for others who needed it.

2. 'Giving the good news to the poor'

We married very much in love with each other, but also with God. From there on we have been learning, little by little, to know each other, to accept ourselves as we are and to treat each child as they are. At one point in our lives the lecture Luke 4,16 was especially important to us: 'I have been sent to bring the good news to the poor / to proclaim liberty to the captives / and to the blind the return of the light / to free the oppressed / to proclaim the year of grace of the Lord'. This text of Isaiah read by Jesus and from which he makes his program was what decided us both to take a political stance. This was a difficult decision in the midst of the dictatorship, with its being a matter of a leftist choice.

We had two reasons, the first was that alone we could do nothing, and the second was that the cause of the world's injustices were the oppressive structures.

Enric was the doctor in a factory with thousands of workers, and in those times he took part in all the strikes to obtain denied rights for a collective that was not his.

Nuria dedicated herself to political agitation. We received a great quantity of signs of solidarity from nuns and priests who lent us their premises for clandestine meetings, who hid wanted persons.

All this left us isolated from our habitual social circles. We did not belong to the intellectual élite but rather we were middle class people who lived in a workers' district, who fought in order to enable democracy to arrive and so that liberty should be one of the important axis of a new society.

3. Believing in Jesus means defending the weakest

All this life had a strong effect on our children. They didn't go to select or progressive choice schools. From the outset we explained to them the motives of our battle, and that the world that surrounded us did not always think the same as us. This gave them a number of values learning to defend the weak, to search for justice in the things of everyday life, to be tolerant....

Our home has always been open to all, but even more so during the years of dictatorship: meetings, the painting of slogans, etc.

A sit-in of women of the Motor Iberica business arose in the parish of St. Andreu, amongst whom was an elderly woman whose husband was on the point of retiring, who was afraid. When the police decided to clear them out our daughter Nuria, who would have been about 12 years old, was with me in the Plaza Orfila waiting for the police intervention. Suddenly she thought of that elderly woman and, I don't know how, was able to reach the parish church and leave arm in arm with the woman saying: she is my grandmother and we were coming to see the priest.

I would like to end this part by highlighting the role played and the help given by Christians to Socialism. It was a breath of fresh air. People like Joan García Nieto and Alfons Comín helped us to make it seen that faith is not at odds with what in those times we called revolution. The parish priest of St. Pacià, Mon. Xavier Casas, always encouraged us to be coherent.

4. Although it loses votes I want to be at the side of the weakest

1982. In the Perona gypsy district the non-gypsies who lived nearby wanted that zone to disappear. The Administration didn't yet have clear the way of doing it. The social workers recommended making a number of stables for the animals that had always lived with them in order to begin the process of the gypsies' education. The neighbours thought that this would be Perona township and they began to demonstrate violently against it. For many nights we guarded the gypsies, the nuns who had a nursery in the district and myself, who was district town councillor. The situation was tense and one night hundreds of neighbours wanted to burn the huts. Some of them, leftist militants, were in favour of the burning.

I had the certainty that although this would lose me votes, I had to be at the side of the weakest. Today I still meet gypsy friends from this epoch who feel proud of that solidarity.

5. New commitments

Enric dedicated himself to professional life and gradually left active politics. During these years his solidarity has been directed towards the elderly who live alone. He also helps the terminally ill withdrawn from hospital to die with dignity and he lends his support to their families who do not know how to approach the situation.

Nuria became a professional in politics and was elected. For fifteen years she has been town councillor of Barcelona Town Council. Over this time she has tried to promote to the maximum greater knowledge amongst those who have worked with her, not for competitiveness but rather to secure more culture, to be able to do things better, prizing the values of solidarity, justice, tenderness. She is currently director of the Barcelona diocesan Càritas, a job that during the final years of her working life allows her to continue working in the defence of the weakest.

We would like to say that, despite the inconveniences that we have encountered in our solidarity, we are content and we believe that the experience of God that we wish to convey to others is not any old experience, that it is expressed in the life of Jesus, that chooses for the weakest and that searches for justice.

4. LIVING FROM UTOPIAS

Maria Lluïsa Oliveras, wife of Alfonso Comín (1933-1980)

1. Social injustice

When we married, we decided to go and live in Malaga. It was a choice indicated by a whole previous history, a history of each one of us and of the two. On meeting, Alfonso and I shared a clear concern for social injustice, for the situation in which the majority of human beings were living, and still do.

Each of us in their own way tried to give an answer. Alfonso participated in the SUT (University Work Service), with Father Llanos at its head. It was precisely there that they met and from this meeting arose a friendship that would unite them until death. I helped out in a social centre in Paralelo, a workers' district in Barcelona.

We wanted the world to be different, one of justice and solidarity. Although at that time the word solidarity was barely used, this did not stop it from being practised. Nearly all our time was taken up in work or meetings that had to do with this concern and with this attempt to transform the world. On one side, the concrete work in the foundation and, on the other, the works of reflection or action, like the participation in the Rutas de pax Christi (international routes for peace). We also had the luck to spend a month with Abbot Pierre in the 'banlieu' of Paris, in 'Los Traperos de Emaús'. All of this was shaping a way of understanding commitment, solidarity.

Through René Voillaume's book 'In the Heart of the Masses' we came into contact with the spirituality of Charles de Foucauld. This encounter marked our lives definitively. It was not concerned with 'doing' but with 'sharing' without waiting for visible results. Sometime later I entered into the Sisterhood of the Little Sisters of Jesus in the Bomba district of Madrid, a shanty district inhabited mainly by emigrant Andalucians. The separation was hard but I had thought about it a great deal, and Alfonso knew how to help me, despite the pain of the separation, to embark on this new road.

For eight months I shared life with the Sisters and with the district's neighbours. It was a stage of my life with which I still now feel linked. At the end of eight months I left the Fraternity of the Sisters in Madrid for health reasons, but from this stage would always remain the choice for the poor, marked out by the testimony of the Brothers and Sisters of the Brotherhood of Charles de Foucauld.

2. Learning to live

And I return to the beginning. After a while, and almost recovered from everything, Alfonso and I decide to marry and to go and live in the south. Why Malaga? We had spoken various times of going to the Third World. After the Madrid experience, the Third World was very close. In Malaga there was a Fraternity of Sisters and Brothers. This was the main motive for the election.

We tried to live in a form coherent with what we thought, without stridency or heroism. In this the Brotherhood's testimony was fundamental. We learnt to live with others, open and sharing, knowing that we would receive more than we were giving.

It was the sixties, at the height of Francoist repression. We heard from the protagonists themselves how they had lived the Civil War. It was another world. 'Red Malaga' they said in our previous surroundings. On arrival there we heard what perhaps we already knew: but it is different when it is a mother who tells you how they made her 17 year old son climb up into a lorry overflowing with youths like himself, in order to shoot them in the middle of the street for the sole crime of being trade unionists. Nothing returned to what it was before. There was an urgent demand to fight together with those who were committed to securing justice and liberty. Life in Malaga wasn't easy. The house was watched by the police. To be an engineer and not to practise, to be a friend of the poor, to live in a workers' district, was suspicious.

3. A family marked out by solidarity

We had to return to Barcelona. The situation in Malaga reached a blind alley, to the extreme that some of the friends who frequented our house had labour and police problems. But what was decisive was my mother's health. She was very ill and we wanted to be near her.

We return with a different way of living. We were returning with two children. Maria aged three and a half and Pedro, two years old. Six months later Elisabet was born. We thought that to educate and care for the children what was suitable was an environment where they understood in a natural way that having the essential and the necessary has got nothing to do with the having 'of everything'.

Our children were used to an open house. In Malaga it was simple: the district and the Southerners' way of being facilitated it. In Barcelona it was more difficult, neither the district nor the manner of being helped. Once more we return to the 'doing'. The choice was the same, but according to the situation and the circumstances the answer can take diverse forms. It was the time of concrete political commitment as a demand of the faith itself, as a way of living solidarity. The two of us entered to serve in the Bandera Roja (Red Flag) of Catalunya, an organisation outside parliament to the left of PSUC.

The children were growing. I believe that they had a happy infancy, despite the difficult situations, like the imprisonment of their father. After the imprisonment, in 1971, our fourth child, Toni, was born.

4. Christians for socialism

Those were the years when we demanded of the Church freedom of conscience for the political choice of Christians. We members of CPS, Christians for Socialism, together with others serving in the Bandera Roja, enter the PSUC. Alfonso held positions as much in the direction of the PSUC as in the PCE. He used to say that at times one has to descend to the arena even if one has scant vocation for 'making politics'. In the Party he pleaded for liberty of conscience for those members who were Christians, so that they wouldn't be discriminated against for reasons of their faith. As always, his teacher and inspirer was the French philosopher Emmanuel Mounier.

We thought from the outset that the choices one makes from the standpoint of drawing close to the reality of how the majority of human beings live and suffer, should shape your life in such a way that turning back is not possible, that you cannot live it as if nothing will happen. Let the knowledge commit, let the word you speak obligate.

The children have grown up in this environment. Each of them has undergone their own development and they give answers according to the specific choice of each. But certainly they all share the values of solidarity.

5. A NEW LOOK

Maite and Jorge Rosell

1. Situations that mark us

A few personal details: fifty-five years old, married, with three children, the eldest already married. Chemist by profession, with a small business of six workers, and currently president of the federation of chemical industries in Aragon. Maite, my wife, is also a chemist and BUP professor.

We married young and the first years were dedicated to our professional life and to caring for our daughters. We were ‘practising’ Christians and little more. One day in school a nun asked me my opinion about the school’s socialisation. Over the following years we entered the APA assembly, we began courses for the parents’ school, assisted in the survival of marriages, theology courses, small Bible courses and conferences on faith and culture. We began to participate in Confirmation Sunday school at our daughters’ school. All of these were gratifying experiences for Maite and for myself.

2. The hour of truth

As a member of the Centre in which we were being moulded, human and Christian, I assisted at the diocesan Synod, and I was one of the five moderating secretaries. At the close of a number of years they put me forward as director of the diocesan Cáritas. They had already proposed me a few years back and for various reasons I didn’t accept. Now the circumstances had changed and it was not so easy to say no. On a personal level I felt fundamentally obliged for two reasons:

- in Sunday school, with the boys and girls for Confirmation, we had reflected ‘theoretically’ on the choice for the poor made by Jesus of Nazareth, the Christians and the church.
- also in Sunday school with the children and in the marriage group we had been discovering that the church, although not answering our expectations and needs, was something that we were all building.

At the same time I had plenty of fears. In Cáritas the ultimate responsibility lay with the director who had to answer in conduct to the Bishop, the structure was tremendously vertical, according to old church custom. It assumed a lot of dedication in terms of time that, logically, was taken from family and from work.

3. A greater business

So I found myself running a business greater than my own. And there it was that I found the truth with the poor and with poverty.

I learnt to pay attention to what I didn’t see before. I observed that there were many people with subsistence and marginalisation problems, with personal and familial situations that

bordered on inhumanity. I saw that our society, and very often our church, was tremendously lacking in comprehension with these people.

On seeing many women and men living solidarity to the full with the real outcasts, the unemployed, the drug addict, the abandoned child, the divorced woman with three children in her charge, the elderly woman in need of company and tenderness, I also understood that the inhuman situation of society's excluded has a number of structural causes. I understood what liberation theology was saying and that the power of salvation is in the poor and in the oppressed.

4. Contradictions and difficulties

All of this was lived with contradictions, but at the same time with trust. For me taking it on within the partnership with Maite has been of great importance.

Difficulties and contradictions also in the hard business world in which I live. I soon realised the importance of human relations in the business and the great difficulties in impregnating them with understanding, tolerance and co-responsibility. I learnt not to be naïve with the system, when I felt that if I was to openly display my business concept to the bank manager I would remain without the credit that the business needed. I understood the impossibility of being angelic in competition with others in the market, but that one must reconcile competitiveness with the truth and with honour.

My big doubts in this sense today take the path of whether or not it is possible to survive in the midst of the large and medium-sized economic and business groups.

5. Negotiating with the politicians

The five years lived in Cáritas also gave me the opportunity to have to work and negotiate with the independent and municipal politicians. I also met people there who were sensitive to the problems of exclusion. The sensitivity and understanding of the actual politicians was also diluted by the power of the structures. The power of the decisions taken by the party, the search for profitability in votes, the difficulty of expanding a local community project in one million pesetas when dozens were thrown into a project with a business image, etc., showed me the wickedness of depersonalised structures and the power of the politico-economic blocks' interests. The same could be said of the financial systems like the savings banks and their social works.

When I left Cáritas I wanted to remain linked to the hard reality of social exclusion with a small personal presence in a program of accompaniment to the prostitute woman. A year ago I had to leave it in order to dedicate a little more time to my father, terminally ill. Although he has now died, I have not returned. My commitment to the poor today is actualised, or limited, by my membership of the Intermón foundation and by my position as secretary general of the diocesan pastoral Council in my diocese from which I also try to make a church more sensitive and committed to the poor and to poverty.

6. QUITE SIMPLY, LET US FIND OUT

Pilar H. Gefaell, wife of José M. Valverde (1926-1996)

1. Traditionalist roots

This 'putting clearly' of my life in Christian solidarity and commitment to the 'world's pariahs' will be somewhat difficult for me, when I myself still wish to reunite our life together, trying to remember it 'in peace' as the poet said.

José Maria and I come from bourgeois, religious families, of a rather conventional religiosity and later in the 'national Catholicism' line. We were families that had won the war. Valverde's parents had received the Republic of the 31st with joy, but they were soon shocked at what this could represent in terms of change in their lives and they aligned themselves with the conservative right.

My family is less typical: my father, a Viennese Jewish engineer who arrives in Spain in 1913 to design some works for 'The Canadian'. The Viennese youth 'accidentally' falls in love with my mother from Madrid, in Lerida, and he stays in Spain. My mother, a monarchist; later, at the lack of king, Francoist and with a very clear idea of who are 'the good' and who are 'the bad'. A woman of firm religious and political ideas, of who were 'we gentlefolk' and who were 'the others'. As the Christian that she was (Catholic, she always said), she was charitable and had to help the poor.

A few years ago, for international mothers' day, someone asked me to speak about 'what did a woman like me do in confused situations like these'. I set to thinking about when I had begun to have awareness, political, social and of justice.

Because my first political memory is of the 14th of April 1931. My mother was crying "poor Spain, poor Spain!" and warned the nanny not to take us down to play at La Castellana because there was great uproar (I remember from our windows the lorries with people and banners). I must also have been marked somewhat, because I remember it (I must have been about 13 or 14 years old), a confrontation with my mother in defence of one of our maids who she was admonishing. "You are unjust" I told her. I don't recall more confrontations. Only that, as we were growing up we argued with my mother about politics, the civil war and we put ourselves with Franco or with the bishops.

2. The beginning of a change

José Maria and I met in the intellectual milieu of Madrid of the forties and thereabouts: Dámaso Alonso, his teacher and poetic promoter, Gerado Diego and Vicente Aleixandre, Pedro Laín and Aranguren.

How did we change little by little? I believe, quite simply, by finding out. One had to search for books that someone brought from France or those published in South America. José Maria made machine copies of J. Maragall, Lorca and Neruda, taken from books of the cultural association.

3. Our exodus

We marry in 1952 and live firstly in Rome; later professor of Aesthetics in Barcelona University. And here begin the university upheavals. Ernesto Cardenal enters the 'Gethsemany Rag' (USA) with Thomas Merton who sends us mountains of 'subversive' papers against the atomic bomb; later E. Cardenal's book on 'Cuba'.

When they throw Aranguren, Tierno etc. out of the university, José Maria sends José Luis a card, a home-made 'collage' with his photo as a robed professor together with a drawn blackboard at his side where is written: "Nulla aethetica sine ethica, ergo: Finish and let's go. For José Luis, this magisterial lesson". José Maria August 1965.

And already involved in all senses, we go there with our five children, still young, more excited by the journey 'to America' than conscious of what all this could mean for their parents.

In the United States in the lovely university of Virginia, good Faculty colleagues take us in with all the elegance of the 'South'. And turn to sign documents for the equal rights of blacks, Luther King's assassination (marching to the black district church and in contra to the Vietnam war arm in arm with Javier Solana!). And José Maria starts to get nervous, uncomfortable despite such a comfortable life and an economical turn -around, and he says that "I was on the point of jumping into the fire to leave the frying pan: I mean to say that I was in with the Yanks for a while". (Letter to N. Comadira). And following the letter-poem to Comadira we went "to the last house on the last street of the final city, facing the North Pole". The truth is that this new emigration cost me. I had been in agreement with the resignation from the professorship and, apart from physical work and the trouble that going to the other side of the ocean with five children involved - one, Willy, a baby in a baby-grow - the journey to America wasn't hard for me. Now, when the books and a few clothes are already more or less in their place, there are good friends around you, Virginia, so sweet and kind, the march to the Canadian tundra was hard for me. Nevertheless, a little comment from José Maria soon convinced me. Our eldest son, Juan de la Cruz, had become a young lad in long trousers. José Maria said to me: "Do you believe it would be good if our son were to go and kill Vietnamese under the banner of the stars and stripes?". The sense of laziness I felt towards once more hoisting the home up on the shoulders and going north left me rapidly.

Our 'final city facing the North Pole' turned out to be a good city, although from my kitchen window to this North Pole there would have been I don't know how many thousands of miles with nothing in between. And here arrived the first Canadian friends who were working in Latin America (under the protection or with the help of the Toronto Jesuits), an old Brigade member from our civil war, the letters of E. Cardenal, Allende in Chile. It was tempting to organise a section for literature in...

This time I said no straight away. And it must have been with the help of the Holy Spirit because we were soon crying for Allende's death and the other dictator's coup.

4. Our political commitment

And during these years, already very involved in what has been our political commitment, it is the children who also push us and don't allow respite. Before going to the tremendous 'shopping centres' I would ask Clara: What do I have to 'boycott' today? The Californian grapes of course, and the Del Monte products. They take part in the campaigns with César

Chavez (the Mexican-American casual workers in California), Willy, a tiny boy, held up the placard when we were demonstrating in front of the 'super'; South Africa, they help the Northern indigenous peoples in small projects, always Chile and the work with Amnesty International in favour of the political prisoners.

And the dictator who we all believed immortal dies and we return with only the two small children: Teresa and Willy. The older ones, Gianni, Mariana and Clara are already Canadian. Here once more as professor. And so many people around us showing us every day what is and what was the fight for justice.

We have learnt from our companions of the house of Nicaragua, of the solidarity, to always have courage and hope. In these years we have had our saints and martyrs, Christians and without this label, but who are 'blessed who will go to the right hand'.

I, now, am in waiting ('The Wait' José Maria's second book). And after writing these pages nothing more remains than for me to give thanks to God for everything and everyone.

7. MY MEMBER'S COMMITMENT

Xavier Becerra and Mercè Cabrera

At twenty or so years old, I experiment with a strong and profound desire to leave myself and my world. Desire and necessity, because my world, my approaches and schemes, are empty, closed, timid and without meaning.

In the context of this predisposition to change and of opening, of breaks and new relations, of new environments and activities, I have the good fortune to meet the JOC. The JOC becomes not only an opportune and appropriate answer to that essential situation, but also beyond this it becomes the driving force of a profound personal transformation that has radically imprinted my life ever since.

1. The membership

Twenty years ago I took the first step towards membership of the Catholic Action Youth Workers. Throughout these years the commitments have been varying. First, initiating other young people into the movement in one of the poorest districts of Badalona. Later, also in Badalona, assuming responsibility for extending the movement. At the age of 30 I left the JOC membership, still keeping myself involved with the movement for a few more years, as a councillor in Nou Barris.

On leaving the JOC, and following a time of interruption, I pursued a process of initiation into the GOAC. For six years now I have been a GOAC team member of Santa Coloma.

2. A concrete option: the union choice

In 1982 they chose me to form part of the business committee. After a few years I saw the need to organise myself in the syndicate. During these years we have had to tackle a couple of re-conversions, at the same time as we have been consolidating the business syndicate.

In 1990 the syndicate's management suggests that I be freed to negotiate for the Regional Treaty. I didn't feel capable and I was afraid of the business management's reaction.

The negotiation finalised, I set myself to continue working in the structure. It was not my initial choice but I saw its necessity and I accepted it.

3. The consequences of choices

The union commitment puts itself in permanent conflict with business power.

The union commitment demands putting yourself into the game, risking the very capital that, for a worker, is the work, your career and professional and economic promotion.

Choosing syndicalism in the current socio-political context is, obviously, very difficult and complicated. But it is important that we realise that, precisely in this context, the class union movement is a reference of the left in Europe. This fact has to show us the need that we have, as a team of workers, to strengthen the unionist movement.

4. References that help me

In the syndicate structure commitment has neither limit nor face, at times is thankless and bitter. There is the danger that the heart hardens or falters. I need spaces of freedom, of goodness, of peace, of harmony, of silence, of tenderness, of friendship,..... to rebuild myself, to recuperate the hope and the dream of a world more just and of solidarity, to recapture the faith in the transformative capacity of men and of women.

The partnership is a privileged space for communication and deep communion, of affection, of dreams and of plans that allows me to find myself, once more, with myself.

The GOAC movement, the reference and the friendship of many believing members, the team where I share and revise life, the Gospel and the prayer, feed me and make me sensitive to the breath of life.

8. DIRTYING THE HANDS OR WORKING IN THE MUD

Manuel Marcet Ballber

1. Can there be solidarity in a business?

This morning in an unexpected phone call a friend has asked that I try to explain the solidarity lived in the business where I have worked for over 20 years. Is there solidarity in a business? Can this exist? Can it be created in some form? I work in an American capital multinational and in a very competitive environment of neo-liberal capitalism.

2. I am going to say with simplicity what I think:

- The capitalist business is not based on solidarity but rather on competition. And to compete, in a market that regulates prices and products, consumers and fads, means achieving success whilst bringing about in turn the other's loss.
- It is clear that the free market affords us some advantages: progress, growth, self-improvement, attention to the consumer, product improvement, a politics of price adapted to the environment, etc. But it is also clear that neo-liberalism within the business inculcates in us a spirit of confrontation and of fight that has nothing to do with solidarity.
- In the business you think and you are made to think more about results than about the people. The value of the person is not negated, but is subordinated to the value of the results.
- It is very difficult to design a neo-liberal project that enthuses the 'personnel' and is integrated into the business. Because the feeling of continuity, trust, the feeling of finding oneself close to those in charge, is missing. Integration is only possible in the project that is common, known, shared and loved for all its values.

3. Denunciation of the business structure

Although one may wish to show solidarity within the liberal-capitalist business, there exist and will continue to exist contradictions, these days impossible to make disappear. If one works within a structure of non-solidarity one must know where it is coming from and at what consequences it arrives:

- The competition of the markets that wins ground by 'killing' the others.
- The competition of expenses that leads to the exploitation of large and small in the rewards and salaries that would be fitting.
- The competition of products that leads to the production of items that kill instead of maintaining life.
- The competition of exploitation between rich and poor that leads to the exploitation of the countries that produce the raw materials.
- The competition of authoritarianism and absence of liberty that leads workers to be obedient executors of orders proceeding from way above.

- The competition of the distribution of the wealth created in a business, because paths are not sought to participation in the work, in the decisions and in the results.

4. How to create a culture of solidarity

Solidarity is closeness and helping one's neighbour, it would be necessary to create a 'culture' that puts the person in the centre of the organisation. This means that whatever worker in the business, irrespective of their role or responsibility, will be respected in their work and will never be treated as interchangeable material.

If there is this culture, solidarity is built on mutual aid and the team spirit, but it is not possible to base it on the competition that kills. It is possible to create a work team that looks for the growth of all those who comprise it: to learn from everyone in order to be a small fruit of all. If we still believe that a single person can do it all, we will never engender solidarity.

From here we could pass on to the solidarity of the workers' Collective within the business. There are many forms of solidarity, but we must be clear that without 'intention' there will never be results. I speak of solidarity in the payments, that should be internally fair (making sure that the market competitiveness is not lost). I speak of solidarity in work time and in the labour contracts. If there isn't work for everyone, it should be shared out.

At times there is no solution other than dirtying one's hands and from there on in improve the world of the business; one has to enter into the contradictions in order that they disappear.

9. TWO YEARS ON, LOOKING AND LEARNING

Oriol Soler

1. One of the experiences that have marked me most

In the summer of 1996 I went to Honduras for a couple of months. I never would have thought that writing four lines about the things of that journey that have marked me - internalising, over and above the socio-political sensations - would be so difficult for me..... How difficult it is to speak of oneself when one is accustomed to talking of others!

As a matter of fact I come from a background of political activism. In Ripollet (Western Valleys) years ago we were working from a project with a local base to change this world at the level of society's essential structure.

My ranch in Central America was a good end-point to a year of interruption and internalisation. Because of this I wanted to go to a country like Honduras. A discrete and bare state of Central America. Without big political convulsions or absolute revolutionary projects.

The first days resulted difficult for me to look. The reality dazed me. Just as with satellite television that obligates you to permanent zapping.

There were days of remaining struck by a mass, the first nightfall in a small cabin on the mountain, where the simple people made me understand what it was to feel oneself the Church, saturated by the situation of those who were explaining to me that "they ate mixed: one day yes, another day no"; impressed by those who have given everything (parents, brothers, health...) for the most elemental justice, or, overcome by the extreme parish activity that continued - there would be even less! - despite my presence...

I was immensely grateful for the sincere support of Pilar, my companion, towards a journey that she did not share; her company was sorely missed in the sorting out of the feelings and surprises of each moment. My people, Ripollet - as I always like to explain that I feel like my people - I thanked for all the years of accompaniment.

2. Sharing the life of a family

After the week of 'landing' we divide the time between the ranches of various families, in mountain communities, alternating with days in the parish of Tocoa where I tried to follow the extreme rhythm of the Jesuit community.

Sharing the work in the cornfield with a family, grinding the cake maize, going to look for water, playing with the children or sharing the social circle of nightfall, was creating a space of comfort and well-being that, as well as instantly overcoming all the domestic problems that a 'gringo' can have living in the Honduras mountain, facilitated in the integration.

To feel that everything that surrounds you, simple though it may be, exceeds you; to see the way in which the people who have nothing give everything with an enlightening smile; that the last on the earth educate their children with a love that is given no room in all our supermarkets..... makes you feel lowly, minute, grateful.

As a matter of fact, the lad who explained to me that “the Tocoa parish house is not a house but rather a passage” had all the reason in the world. In this passage, about 80 square metres, not only did the whole world have a bed, or a place to eat when it was necessary but also it was the vital centre of the whole Tocoa parish. It was about thoroughly surrendering oneself with coherence: including in intimacy. Like the simple people.

I believe, finally, that it isn't that it cost me to understand what is so elemental. As a matter of fact, now I understand it and I share it. It cost me to accept it and to carry it out.

And, moreover, I spent that time extremely well: making good friends, seeing marvellous landscapes, saturating myself with the Caribbean ‘busitos’ with music at full volume, impressive walks.... The best journey that I have ever made.

10. LEARNING SOLIDARITY: THE FIRMNESS OF THE WEAK

Fernando Huarte

In the month of November 1990 a good friend brought up a request that he himself had received: - in the capacity of his position and prestige - to search for a psychologist for Bietxeak. The profile that that my friend proposed was quite clear: it corresponded with mine. Nevertheless I lingered, twenty four hours of ruminations and searches to inform myself well. It was this: I was asked to work in a refuge for AIDS patients.

I ought to acknowledge that the proposal caused me a lot of anxiety. I had a good dozen years working as a teacher trainer. So I had to reflect seriously on the most important difficulty to accepting the challenge: the fear of losing something very important. Despite the medicine seeming sufficiently explicit, in this epoch it was easy to believe that treating this type of patient supposed a 'sure' risk to one's health, contagion was easy. And who is asking me to put my health and that of my family at risk? Why go to the limit of my professional work and my projects in accepting a dangerous adventure?

1. Discovering the human person

The situation of the patients sheltered in the Bietxeak Centre is especially strong being that, as well as meeting an advanced stage of the illness, they are people who do not have enough family and social support to be able to live in an independent way. Their request for help shows their having always touched the bottom, having gone down to the hell of solitude, and, also, having seen in this new human mediation a handle on salvation. Because of this, I want to highlight some truths that this process has taught me.

- The nakedness of those who have lost everything: family, friends, social consideration, self-esteem.
- The nakedness underlined by the ever-present pain and the relative proximity of death. In the face of this nakedness one has to live the experience of 'treading sacred ground'. One must keep silence and walk attentive to the truth that opens up.
- In this nakedness or the loss of empty verbiage, the word of these people is almost always the word of depth and of truth, their worries are essential. And, although at times they lose themselves in trivialities, they soon return - perhaps obliged by the truth of the situation - to their truth, to the sense of their existence, to the essential.

2. Making oneself capable of accompanying and being accepted as a companion

For a psychologist and educator by profession this learning is probably amongst the most gratifying. The long listening, the listening free of prejudices, has made me acquire capacities that I recognise as formed by the trembling hands of my friends, many of them already absent:

- That of becoming a reference for many of them. Your words and attitudes have value because, increasingly, they have had to find firmness in sharing nudity, from having passed through the process of the recognition of my own nudity.

- That of feeling that you give security to the ill and to the team of we who work with them. I have felt particularly good in their company.
- That of moving with total trust in the social world of these ill people. Whilst some time back these groups of excluded, like others, provoked apprehension and insecurity in me, now quite the contrary occurs.
- I should unite my previous reflection to the recognition that I have learnt to work in a team, to share feelings, doubts and searches, to recognise and to correct mistakes, to overcome individualism and sterile defences, to value the work of other professionals and volunteers.

3. Learning to be of lesser importance

One learns to put oneself in their space instead of wanting to be an 'efficient agent' of what happens there. What happens there are too many things to attribute to the real help that each educator lends. For this reason it is tremendously healthy to see how the re-established familiar relations, the newly resumed friendships, the 'educative dependencies' towards other members of the team, put you in your place and free you from the deceptions which an excessive anxiety could carry under the mask of help.

But perhaps the most definitive for me has been in this sense the experience of death. The first times I could feel no less than a sense of failure: all of them went when their process appeared to be most promising. The difficulty that the rest of the residents had in working on the pain and the inevitable warning that "tomorrow it could be me", did nothing other than to put the meaning of our intervention to the test. The new residents were going to repeat the process: when it seemed that they were winning space for affective and social life, they died. I remember that I was always helped by the believer's lecture Luke 24, 23-25. It has helped me to open the eyes for the next time: in this process, life opens up the road until the final trusted surrender.

Neither do I want to forget the I have seen enough young people die and all of them with a 'knowing how' that has amazed me. The person who has touched the depth of their truth knows how to carry it to the end with a simplicity, but with a security, that makes you think....

4. Defending the rights of those one loves

It is no secret to anyone that these ill people have suffered a strong social rejection, although over the last years it has improved quite a lot. My contact with them has made me evolve from the distance, the ignorance and the fears, towards the active defence of their rights. In my case, this has taught me to:

- Enjoy the company of these ill people in the streets, in the bars and in the city's cinemas.
- Help others to overcome prejudices and fears. Perhaps nothing is more eloquent in this sense than the praxis itself, but there is never enough well-given information.
- Work with a strong will for the recovery of the capacities of social and labour insertion of these patients. Rights would be no great thing if they couldn't be exercised in real life. To see that they are capable of taking important decisions with respect to their health, to their family, to the occupation of their time, to the improvement of their own professional training.

It only remains for me to underline the second part of the title of this document: my experience began with doubts about the risk of losing something important, but the reality has shown me that I did not know what is truly important. Nothing is lost in solidarity, nothing is

lost in giving and giving oneself. Rather, one finds oneself overwhelmed for so much that one receives and because one receives what one did not even suspect. In my case the sense of the most important: the firmness held and communicated by those whom we call weak. To be in solidarity with them has made me benefit from their firmness. And this indeed is what has cured me of those fears of losing something important: what one feared losing was not important, what is more one loses nothing.

11. THE EXPERIENCE OF SOLIDARITY WITH OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF THE FOURTH WORLD

Teresa Peña

1. A striking experience

'I begin' by presenting myself: I am Teresa, from Bilbao, I am thirty one years old and for a number of years I have been walking alongside people deprived of liberty. I do this in a Program called Bestalde, in Basque meaning 'for the other side', in a desire to reach these people from this other side, from the street, from being citizens and being responsible.

It seems really daring to speak about all this, about solidarity in the Fourth World, I believe my experience is small and simple, it is also true that it marks my life profoundly. This path towards actual solidarity, towards allowing oneself to do for God's chosen, began by chance, and the fact is I never imagined that people and worlds so different from mine could eventually become an important part of my life: people who are in prison.

I suppose that I, like the majority, have passed and continue passing through stages of solidarity and the choice for the poor.:

- A first one of being moved on seeing and hearing so much suffering, so much pain, a stage of meeting the beloved of God, of allowing oneself to be surprised, to feel, why not, fear, of thousands of actions, of coming and going, running all over the place.

- A second period of discovering that poverty, injustice, is a structural problem, not one of bad luck, something inevitable, something of injustice and oppression, this made me feel very small and also made me feel indignation and anger, rage and non too attractive feelings.

- A third stage of discovering and encouraging the power in people, in that it is they who must and can 'save themselves', that really 'they don't need me', I give them the nail and the hammer, they hammer it in to hang the picture that others give us.

- And a fourth period of more real solidarity, because these people deprived of liberty are the possessed of the times of Jesus of Nazareth, dumb for the truth, deaf to Good News, and it is that they are poor, not in not having, but rather in not being, where badness feeds itself, and this makes the need to defend oneself great... This assumes learning to love, to live in solidarity out of firmness and the need, and to begin with oneself, far from efficiencies and short-term results.

2. Wounded healer

Accompanying these people who are touching the bottom is a privilege, is being able to practice for the Kingdom, wanting to retrieve the heart of people, and knowing myself to be a wounded healer.

To walk near human misery makes one value life like a miracle, and it is that poverty and death always walk very close together.

- Each meeting, with failures and successes, has been educating me in the solidarity that is the unconditional acceptance, that allows the other to show themselves as they are.

- Each meeting is also risk, because trusting involves it, is dialogue, pacts and compromises, is physical and respectful contact, is silence and limit.

- Each meeting is being able to put into practice the solidarity of Jesus , that of the loving father of the prodigal son, the solidarity that does not judge, but instead respects the freedom of the other.

It seems that this sort of solidarity annoys, at least the elder son, it seems like unreal naïveté and not very practical..... for the powerful and also at times for me.....

3. Others teach me

I believe that the exercise of solidarity, the proximity to the fourth world, has educated and moulded me. I want to end with recounting the experience of someone who was deprived of liberty and who lived a deep experience of solidarity from out of their conviction.

Hello, my name is Antonio and I am from Santander, I have been serving a sentence in Nanclares for eleven years now, or that is to say supposedly trying to redeem the sins of youth, well, so once more I was offered the possibility of doing a Work Camp in the San Prudencio Residence of Vitoria, to accompany and work with the elderly people who live there, which I agreed to straight away because on a personal level the relationship one strikes up with the elderly is enriching and it makes me realise about things like illness, solitude, abandonment, starvation or death, and also it strengthens me to see how grateful they are for our visits and our work, so at the beginning, when we arrive it is like they are absent and sad because of the monotony and the lack of warmth in their lives, and as the days pass they, we, gradually awaken, laughing, talking, and giving thanks that you are dedicating your time to them...., you learn to give without waiting and with this you enjoy it. I have learnt an important thing, the greatness of a smile, it is a language that all human beings understand and it is capable of breaking all the walls and prisons that grow around us. Setting myself to work has also lead me to feel anxiety and insecurity, but the feelings that move the heart can do everything. I feel myself also to be a person, something impossible within the prison walls.

12. OUR SMALL ATTEMPT AT SOLIDARITY

Teresa Raventós and Ramón Guardia

1. Our beginnings

It is 28 years since Teresa and I met and 25 years since starting a family. That experience that we have been building over the years has brought us to a conclusion: it is relatively easy 'to give' but much more difficult to 'give oneself'.

I remember how Teresa and I saw each other for the first time in July 1969, at the foot of a bus in Cathedral square in Barcelona that was waiting for us to leave on camp with 80 children. I was acting as group leader of the play group we had set up that year and Teresa had presented herself as a volunteer of the 'Servei de Colònies d'estiu'.

Two rounds of 15 day camps were more than enough to begin a relationship, which continues to today. The fact of meeting in these circumstances helped us to continue with this task.

2. Life in a partnership

The first two years of being married, still without children, we were able to continue these activities. With the arrival of three children and, above all, with the growing professional occupation we felt the need to find a reflective space and a setting to share concerns, so we decided to form a marriage team with other couples, of which we still form a part.

3. Our commitment

In this way Teresa has been able to dedicate herself for 10 years to the Telephone of Hope, as much in the task of listening as helping in the shaping of others who were listening. Still very taken up by professional work, I began to collaborate, in the measure that my work allowed me, with Intermón.

The possibility of proposing a professional change in 1994 gave me the opportunity to reflect on my professional dedication. This reflection led me to discover the need for many businesses to find new models for connecting with society and the need for many non-profit orientated businesses to professionalise their management.

I discovered a new world where I could apply my professional knowledge of almost 25 years to promote collaboration between non-profit making businesses and institutions (NLO - NGO).

So in 1995 I took the decision to begin a new professional stage creating a professional resource whose object is the promotion of collaboration between these two worlds.

Solidarity is in reality mutual aid. A well-understood relationship of solidarity with others is giving, not what we have (and frequently we have an excess) but rather what we are and how we are.

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