

doi:[10.29285/actapinteriana.2024.10.75](https://doi.org/10.29285/actapinteriana.2024.10.75)

## Mission in filipino migrant workers' communities in Israel

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*Vertido, M. R. (2024): Mission in filipino migrant workers' communities in Israel. Misszió a filippínó vendégmunkások izraeli közösségeiben. Acta Pintérianana, 10: 75-92.*

**Abstract:** A cikk bemutatja a Fülöp-szigetekről érkező vendégmunkások helyzetét Izraelben, kiemelten a katolikusokét, vallásgyakorlásuk jellegét és kihívásait, ellátásuk szervezeti hátterét. A migrációról alkotott pozitív teológia alapján azonosítja a hit sajátos lehetőségeit: Misszió a vendégmunkások körében (vallásgyakorlásuk segítése), és „a vendégmunkás mint misszionárius” (a tanúságtétel alkalmai). Az anyag részlet a szerző 2024 júniusában megvédett szakdolgozatából a jeruzsálemi ferences teológián.

The Catholic Church's interest on the migration of peoples is not new. Even before the recent and present migration crises, which continue to disturb both the rich countries of the West and the developing countries of the Global South, the Universal Church is already concerned about the situation of migrants and refugees. In fact, this year marks the 110<sup>th</sup> World Day of Migrants and Refugees (WDMR) which was initiated by the Holy See in 1914 to respond to the waves of Italian migration in the early XX century. In 1952, the celebration begun to have its international character following the flow of migration after World War II.

Beyond the annual celebration to remember and pray the plight of migrants and refugees, the Catholic Church is actively engaged in the issues and problems that migrants face through the publication of papal documents like the *Exsul Familia* (1952), considered to be the *magna charta* of ecclesial thought on human mobility rooted in the first social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891). To update this, the instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* was published in 2004. However, these teachings were given a concrete application in 1970 through the establishment the *Pontifical Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People*. In 1988, it was elevated into a „Pontifical Council” and eventually, in 2016, Pope Francis integrated it to the new *Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development* as a Section for migrants and refugees.

The concern that the Catholic Church has for migrants is consistent to the teachings of Sacred Scripture and Tradition. For the 110<sup>th</sup> WDMR, the Holy Father reflects on the theme, „*God walks with his people*” (FRANCIS 2024b). Pope Francis, in reference to the synodal journey of the Church, redirects his reflection on the phenomenon of migration to its biblical foundation. Reflecting on the pilgrim nature of the Church, he reiterates that the People of God is in a constant migration towards the Kingdom of Heaven (cfr. LG 49).

The Pope makes a comparison between the biblical narrative of the Exodus and the condition of migrants today. He underlines how migrants portray the living image of the People of God who ventures towards the eternal homeland (cfr. Phil 3,20) yet they truly experience difficulties because of oppression,

abuse, discrimination and lack of opportunities due to their status. However, the Pope reminds that „*the fundamental reality of the Exodus, of every exodus, is that God precedes and accompanies his people and all his children in every time and place*”. In migration theology circles, this explains the concept proposed by P. C. Phan to attribute God as the *Deus Migrator* (cfr. PHAN 2016, pp. 858-859), that is, God the Primordial Migrant or the God migrates with his people.

Pope Francis also adds in the same Message that God not only walks with migrants but also identifies with them especially among the least, the poor and the marginalized. This gives not only a theological foundation for migration but also the Christological. And because they are among the least brothers and sisters of Christ, the strangers who long to be welcomed, every Christian is urged to respond to these men and women who are constantly on the move, to apply mercy to them as the merciful will also find mercy in the final judgment (cfr. Mt 5,7; 25,31-46). Very early in the Church, caring for migrants through hospitality was already a sacred duty as Christ was identified with the stranger. This is the same principle which applies at present in the Church’s teaching on migration. Affirming the dignity of every migrant, the Church, and Pope Francis in particular, advocates to „*welcome, protect, promote and integrate*” (FRANCIS 2020, 129) migrants in any society. The Church is responsible for migrants. The Church has a mission for them.

This article presents the dynamic relationship between mission and migration through the experience of Filipino migrant workers in Israel. Through one-on-one personal interviews, stories from a small number of Filipino migrant workers in Israel and Filipino pastoral workers were gathered and excerpts from these stories are presented to contextualize a reflection on the dynamics of mission and migration.

While a complete presentation of the Filipino migrant communities in Israel and the pastoral care exercised by the local Church of Jerusalem is not exhausted in this article, however, I intend to offer a preliminary look at the phenomenon of migration and how the Church can effectively respond to it, especially in the context of Filipino migrant workers in Israel.

## I. Filipino Migrant Workers and Their Church Communities

The stories of migrants are unique and can be enriching in many ways. The Filipino migrant workers’ plight from their homeland to Israel is not only a story of bitterness and hardships but also of acceptance and welcoming. In the following paragraphs, we shall analyze briefly the world of Filipino migrants in Israel and how the Catholic Church of Jerusalem respond to their pastoral needs.

### 1. A Story of Filipino Migrant Workers in Israel

„*We are the Jews of today*”, was the title given by German social anthropologist Claudia Liebelt to one of her articles on Filipina migrant workers in Israel (cfr. LIEBELT 2008, p. 68). This phrase was asserted by a Tel Aviv-based Filipina migrant worker who explained that she was forced by her family’s economic problems to join the growing Filipino diaspora in the world. She claims that like the Jews in diaspora, Filipino migrant workers are forced to live away from their homes and loved ones, discriminated for their foreign status, but learned to form intensive emotional bonds with members of one’s cultural or religious group living in exile (cfr. *ibid.* pp. 69-70).

This analogy emphasizes three features of the Filipino migrant workers’ experience: ‘forced’ migration due to economic reasons, discrimination from the host community, and community life in exile. This particular case of Filipino migrant workers in Israel mirrors in general that of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in the world. However, the experiences of Filipino migrant workers are unique because of the Holy Land’s setting which is an affecting factor for their cultural and religious experiences. I would like to briefly examine the Filipino-migrant-worker profile using these three categories.

### a. Forced economic migrants

In recent years, the Philippine embassy boosted its tourism publicity in Israel. Nevertheless, among Israelis the idea of Filipinos remains as the *metapelet* or caregiver, which is consistent to the the general global notion which is „Filipinas are domestic helpers”.

This is the degrading reality of the majority of an estimated 10 million Filipino migrants abroad<sup>58</sup> which is at least 10 percent of the present Philippine population. This makes the Philippines one of the world’s largest exporters of temporary contract laborers. From April to September 2022 alone, the Philippines deployed around 1.96 million migrant workers (PHILIPPINE STATISTICS AUTHORITY 2022), an increase of 7.8 percent from 1.83 million in the same period in 2021. The data also presented the increase to 57.8 percent women migrant workers which confirms the phenomenon of the feminization of migration. In particular, there are around 23,754 Filipinos in Israel<sup>59</sup> employed as caregivers, service-sector employees and hotel workers. These figures portray the symptoms of the economic failures by the Philippine government to secure decent paying jobs worthy of human dignity, the absence of which pushes many Filipinos into a forced economic exodus. And in a domino effect, this means a „brain drain” (cfr. LAROUSSE 2008, p. 157) or a human capital flight for the Philippines.

Before the 1970s, there were very few Filipinos working abroad. In the wake of the growing economic and political turmoil in the Philippines, migrant workers helped boost the economy of the nation. With the enactment of the 1974 Labor Code of then-dictator President Ferdinand Marcos, the Philippines became a market for temporary contract workers (cfr. TYNER 2004, p. 30). By the end of the 1980s, there was an increasing number of Filipino migrants, thus, creating a labor crisis for the nation. What was a temporary solution to the economic crisis became permanent after the recession in the 1980s. This also resulted in the creation of agencies which aimed to regulate the hiring and sending of migrant workers. However, it only motivated further the export of Filipino contract workers.<sup>60</sup>

Soon enough, in Filipino culture, migrant workers became known as *makabagong bayani*, modern-day heroes. For sure, the remittances from their hard-earned money can financially maintain their families, but these also support greatly the Philippine economy. There were several movies about Filipino migrant workers’ experiences successful among Filipino crowds like *Anak* (Child), about a Hong Kong-based Filipina domestic helper who enslaved herself for many years in hopes of a better future for her children. Alongside these movies, there are also documentary films and even songs. Therefore, while the Philippine government pushes these economic migrants abroad, they are sustained morally by their families and compatriots by showing that their sacrifices are well received and honored.

### b. Discriminated by their host countries

In 1998, a Greek dictionary introduced the term *Filipineza*, defined as „a domestic helper”, causing Filipinos to protest against what was seen as a racist remark. In 2014, a Hong Kong textbook also portrayed a Filipina as a domestic helper, reflecting the prevalence of Filipina domestic workers in the city (cfr. APALISOK 2014).

As early as the 1970s, the first wave of migrant workers from the Philippines entered Israel as pilgrims never returning to the Philippines and illegally staying in the country. In 1987, the first Palestinian Intifada caused the dwindling of the workforce in Israel due to the implementation of stricter security measures that required work permits for Palestinians. There was an obvious need to replace the

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<sup>58</sup> The last actual complete survey which included permanent migrants, temporary migrants, and irregular migrants was made by the Philippine government in 2013. Cfr. COMMISSION ON OVERSEAS FILIPINOS 2013.

<sup>59</sup> This report was released by the Philippines’ Department of Migrant Workers, however, the number may not reflect the undocumented Filipino workers in Israel. Cfr. DMW 2023.

<sup>60</sup> Marcos was quoted saying: „For us, overseas employment addresses two major problems: unemployment and the balance-of-payments positions.” Cfr. LIEBELT 2011, p. 13.

missing workforce. Thus, in 1993, the Israeli government formally allowed the hiring of foreign workers boosting their workforce. In 1995, the *HaToknit HaFilipinit*, or the hiring of Filipina migrant workers in large numbers, was initiated (cfr. LIEBELT 2011, pp. 27, 32). These non-Israel workers are often called *ovdim zarim*, literally, foreign workers, which „essentializes both their ethnic non-belonging to the nation and their economic definition as workers” (ibid. p. 25).

The Hebrew word *zar* means stranger, entails distrust, therefore, foreign workers are naturally segregated from the citizens and marginalized with limited rights in Israeli society. Moreover, they are offered the so-called *3-D jobs*, that is, „dirty, dangerous, and degrading”, which leaves them at the bottom of the social and economic ladder in Israel (cfr. ibid. p. 26). Then, these foreign workers enter into contracts with strict measures primarily to control the number of foreigners in Israel. Alongside the problem of work visas and the number of undocumented or illegal workers, Filipino migrant workers need to endure the restriction of rights to form a family in Israel as they could potentially lose their work permit if they change marital status or give birth to a child in Israel. Prospects of an Israeli citizenship for them remains elusive as they do not necessarily meet the set criteria.<sup>61</sup> This creates a perpetual alienation for both migrant workers and their children who readily identify themselves as Israeli but the State does not recognize them. Sadly, the law is not equal for the native and the outsider.

However, to develop working conditions and the recruitment of Filipinos in Israel, the Philippines and Israel entered into a labor agreement in 2018.<sup>62</sup> This also reflects the relationship forged by the two nations since the birth of the State of Israel in 1948, which roots even further when the Philippines welcomed some 1,200 Jews saving them from the Holocaust through the pre-World War II efforts of former Philippine Commonwealth President Manuel Quezon (cfr. TENORIO 2020).

### c. Community life in exile

The bitterness of leaving their homeland for a better future and the experience of marginalization in the host countries, nevertheless, does not discourage Filipino migrant workers from continuing life in their present reality. After all, the idea of migrating is an experience of finding a new homeland where they can fulfill their dreams of a better life. We cannot dismiss that Filipinos bring with them the values learned at home and honed by personal experiences, coupled with their religious beliefs and traditions.<sup>63</sup>

They are known to be resilient amidst hardships because they are flexible and can adapt easily to their new environment. They can enter into the local culture and integrate fast into the society. You would not miss hearing the Filipina who speaks broken Hebrew in her native accent on the light rail train or at the public market. Their resourcefulness makes them learn a language, rarely going to a formal language school.

Their survival in a foreign environment cannot be attributed only to their flexibility, adaptability, and creativity. They also have a support group through their migrant communities. Walking along the streets

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<sup>61</sup> The Citizenship Law of Israel (1952) stipulates the different ways to acquire citizenship: 1) in accordance to the Law of Return (1950), any Jew who is making *Aliyah* (*oleh*, Jewish immigrants); 2) permanent residents living within the Israeli territory immediately after its establishment which includes Palestinian Arabs; 3) persons of whom one birth parent is an Israeli; 4) by way of naturalization requiring residence, participation and cultural assimilation; and in later amendments to the law; 5) the granting of nationality by the Ministry of Interior and 6) the adoption of a child. Cfr. HARPAZ & HERZOG 2018, p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> It is reported, however, that the labor agreement was not put into practice after it was signed. Cfr. MONTSERRAT & FREIXA 2023, p. 16.

<sup>63</sup> After the People Power Revolution in the Philippines in 1986 which ousted the Marcos dictatorship, the Philippines experienced the same problems as before. This motivated a search for national identity for nation building through a recovery of Filipino values. See LICUANAN in DY 1994, pp. 35-54. It presents the major results of the 1988 Philippine Senate commission report which seek to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Filipino values as a reference for reforms and change.

around the *Tachana Merkazit* (Central Bus Station) of the *Neve Sha'ananan* neighborhood in Tel Aviv, you will easily notice a migrant ghetto of all nationalities. These migrants usually work on weekdays around Tel Aviv, in neighboring cities, or other major cities in Israel. However, on weekends they return to this southern Tel Aviv neighborhood. They rent old apartments shared with three or even seven individuals, dividing among themselves the rent to save money. They are working the whole week, but they can only taste the comfort of their bed space during the weekend for several hours. They call this their home, their immediate family, their small community.

Grace,<sup>64</sup> 45 years old, a migrant worker for 22 years, shared that when she arrived in Israel, her agency placed her in an overcrowded apartment with other Filipinas. It's true that she found an unexpected Filipino community, but, ironically, it was also composed of strangers for nobody knew each other before. Yet, it did not stop her in making new friends and acquaintances in the Filipino spirit of *pakikipagkapwa-tao* (cfr. LICUANAN 1994, p. 36), roughly translated as „regards for others”, which is openness to others and empathy. This means recognition of the dignity of others by dealing with them as human beings, evident in their helpfulness and generosity in difficult times (*pakikiramay*), in the practice of mutual assistance (*bayanihan*), and in their warm hospitality to friends or strangers. It is in the overcrowded apartments that Filipino migrant workers start to care for their fellow strangers.

This *pakikipagkapwa-tao* is manifested to their employers when they take care of them. Through their caring and their ability to empathize with the elderly Israeli retirees, they can build mutual trust and care, developing „intimate and intensive affective bonds” (LIEBELT 2011, p. 86). This is notable to Grace and his current employer who is a rags-to-riches man, owning today one of the most successful companies in Israel. He considers Grace as her daughter and has always been generous to her. Grace even expressed that his employer extends generosity to her family in the Philippines.

At the *Tachana Merkazit* in Tel Aviv, each Friday afternoon becomes as busy as it gets because migrant workers do their weekend duties: send money to their families, buy their food, talk to their friends and, of course, attend to worship services. The flow of migrant workers from the 1990s created different migrant communities based on nationality or regional ethnicity, language, or religion. These communities serve primarily for mutual support and friendship, yet, they are also an attempt to collectively overcome their exclusion in the Israeli society. The community not only helps them find refuge from work and from personal problems but also makes means to connect them to their cultural heritage. However, these groups also entail social control or the desire to make more money (cfr. idem. p. 107).

Aside from their network of friends or other social groups, Filipino migrants also give priority to their religious affiliations. Like the Jews, who were a community in exile of discriminated forced migrants, religion also plays a role in strengthening the bonds of community life among Filipino migrants. Through their religiosity, they „comprehend and genuinely accept reality in the context of God's will and plan” (LICUANAN 1994, p. 37). This implies that Filipino migrant workers seek pastoral care to which the Church responds.

## 2. A Migrant Church for a People on the Move

The Our Lady of Valor Church beside the *Tachana Merkazit* in Tel Aviv is home to the largest Filipino migrant community in Israel. The Divine Mercy Filipino Community, as they call it, has six different Sunday Masses in English or Tagalog distributed from Friday evening to Sunday morning. One Filipina religious sister who serves there says that for Filipinos the „Church is a home”, and she adds, „a home away from home”.

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<sup>64</sup> To protect the privacy of migrant workers, they are given fictitious names. Pastoral workers asked personally to conceal also their names.

In the following paragraphs, an overview of the identity of Filipino Catholic migrant workers in Israel and the Filipino background that characterizes their national identity and faith will be presented. This will also include a brief introduction to the Vicariate of Migrants and Asylum Seekers (VMAS) of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

#### *a. The Filipino Catholic migrant worker in Israel*

The Philippines is a unique country of in Southeast Asia in terms of its religious landscape. While many of its neighboring countries are composed by a Muslim or Buddhist majority, the Philippines shines as the largest Catholic nation in the Far East with 78.5 percent of the population (roughly 86 million adherents) (cfr. PHILIPPINE STATISTICS AUTHORITY 2020).<sup>65</sup> This makes the Philippines the third largest Catholic country in the world behind Brazil and Mexico. However, Christianity in the Philippines is also relatively young with a 500-year history starting in 1521 when Spanish-funded Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan arrived in its central islands.

After 45 years from the first exploratory adventure of Magellan for the Spanish Crown, the *conquistador* Miguel Lopez de Legaspi initiated the colonization of the Philippine Islands in 1565. The Spanish captured Manila in 1571 and eventually established control over the majority of the archipelago by 1576 (cfr. MANANZAN 2016, p. 38). The territorial expansion was providential for expanding the Catholic faith among the natives. The natives of what will be known as *Las Islas Filipinas* became beneficiaries of the missionary work of the many mendicant friar missionaries, many of whom wanted to reach the China or Japan. The reception of the new faith was not easy and met hostility by the natives as evangelization came alongside the sword. However, in the second phase of the missionary endeavor, the natives became welcoming and enthusiastic, as reported by missionaries (cfr. *ibid.* p. 50). The Christian message referred to many native religious beliefs and spirituality. After 333 years under Spain, both Spanish culture and the Catholic faith became deeply engrained among the natives.

As the Filipino nation was born, the Catholic Church played a major role in its history and continues to do so, especially during important transitional periods. One of the famous Catholic figures in the country was the then-Archbishop of Manila Jaime Cardinal Sin who was instrumental in calling for the 1986 People Power Revolution in Manila overthrowing President Marcos (cfr. ZAIDE & ZAIDE 2004, p. 174).<sup>66</sup> Even today, the Church remains the voice of conscience to the people and the government.

Filipino Catholic migrants go forth in the world, bringing their religious traditions and customs. These migrant workers in Israel came not only with a baggage of clothes but also with an invisible baggage of culture and faith which helps them in understanding their status and the difficulties of working away from their homeland (cfr. CRUZA in PADILLA & PHAN 2001, p. 96).

A 2023 study sponsored by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (LPJ) reports a conservative estimate of more than 30,000 Filipino Catholics in Israel, the biggest among the ethnic group of Catholics in the country (cfr. MONTSERRAT & FREIXA 2023, p. 45).<sup>67</sup> The Filipino Chaplaincy takes care of communities from *Kiryat Shmona* in the north until *Eilat* in the south with the biggest concentrations in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. However, a Filipino priest serving the LPJ estimates that only around 5,000 are reached by the Church. A factor to be considered is the difficulty of many to arrive in churches or community

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<sup>65</sup> Of course, the island nation of Timor Leste is also a Catholic majority (around 98 percent). Meanwhile, they are both neighbors of Indonesia which have the largest Muslim population in the world.

<sup>66</sup> Cardinal Sin gave also his blessing to another People Power in 2001 which ousted then President Joseph Ejercito Estrada.

<sup>67</sup> Note that this number is more than the reported 23,754 legally employed Filipino migrants by the Philippine government. This only reflects the reality of the uncertainty of the number of the undocumented Filipino migrants in Israel.

centers where Mass is celebrated during weekends. He also stated that the nature of the work of Filipino migrants who are live-in caregivers makes it difficult for them to go out from their employer's house.

The same 2023 LPJ report on migrants and asylum seekers revealed a silent violation of the religious freedom of migrant workers in Israel. Accordingly, many migrant workers denounced that they are not allowed to have Christian religious symbols or the New Testament in the homes of their employers. Some employers would also double the pay so that migrant workers would stay working even on their rest days, thus, many end up not attending Mass or going to church for the sacraments. Some migrant workers claim, however, that it „*depends on the religiousness of the employer*” (ibid. pp. 24-25). Thus, the more religious an employer is, the lesser religious freedom they have. Yet, many admit of having a good relationship with their employer letting them express their faith freely.

Among Filipinos, the regular Mass attendees are generally committed to serving the Church. In their ecclesial communities, there are also charismatic associations of the faithful like the „Couples for Christ” and the „*El Shaddai*”. These associations effectively pull other Filipino migrants who are not churched for different reasons. However, while community life seems very strong among Filipino migrants, a chaplain observed that Filipinos communities also tend to break into groups.

The presence of migrant children in Filipino communities is also notable. These children and their parents are accompanied usually by the *Saint James Vicariate for Hebrew Speaking Catholics* (SJV). In general, the VMAS and the SJV coordinate their efforts to serve these families, especially the children.

#### *b. The Vicariate of Migrants and Asylum Seekers*<sup>68</sup>

The VMAS is one of the two personal vicariates of the Patriarchate along with the SJV. With the other four territorial vicariates – Cyprus, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan – they compose the Catholic Church of Jerusalem. The specific task of the VMAS is the pastoral work for migrant worker<sup>69</sup> and asylum seeker<sup>70</sup> populations in Israel. Among them, some decided to make themselves invisible because of their lack of legal status, and the VMAS accompanies these invisible Christians.

With the arrival of the first wave of migrant workers in Israel in the 1990s, the VMAS began to have its primitive foundations. The Filipino Chaplaincy was the first to be established in those years. The steady rise of other migrant worker groups and the flow of asylum seekers finally compelled the Patriarchate in 2011 to give a structure to the ministry of these invisible men and women in Israeli society. In April 2011, the LPJ formed the *Coordination for the Pastoral among Migrants* (CPAM), the predecessor of the VMAS, tasked to organize and direct all the Church's efforts towards migrant workers and refugees, especially, those who are not served by other Church bodies or religious congregations (cfr. VICARIATE FOR MIGRANTS AND ASYLUM SEEKERS).

Through a circular letter to parish priests in April 2018,<sup>71</sup> the Apostolic Administrator, and now Latin Patriarch, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa decided to erect the „*Holy Family*” *personal parish for migrants and refugees in Israel* in accordance to canon 515§1 and 518 of the *Code of Canon Law* (CIC). With the creation of this personal parish the Patriarchate aimed „*to guarantee a complete pastoral service to the many who are far from our churches, but who – despite the difficult social circumstances in which they live – still want to have the support of the church*”. With the erection of the personal parish, Pizzaballa also decided to transform the CPAM into an Episcopal Vicariate with an Episcopal

<sup>68</sup> In this brief introduction, I am citing an unpublished VMAS Overview document updated last June 2023 handed to me by the VMAS office for this research.

<sup>69</sup> The Migrant workers are from the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, parts of Africa (French and English speaking), Latin America, Ukraine, Romania, Poland, and China.

<sup>70</sup> Asylum Seekers are predominantly from Eritrea who fled from war, hunger, conflict, and other difficulties in their home country.

<sup>71</sup> The website of the LPJ provides a scanned copy of this circular letter dated April 14, 2018 with protocol number (1) 228/2018. Cfr. PIZZABALLA 2018.

Vicar who works directly with the Latin Patriarch. Both the Holy Family personal parish and the VMAS were canonically erected that year on May 20, Pentecost Sunday.

However, the VMAS remained as the twin vicariate of the Vicariate for Hebrew Catholics by having the same Episcopal Vicar. This situation remained the same in the years before September 2021, when Pizzaballa, already the Latin Patriarch, decided to appoint a separate Episcopal Vicar for VMAS. However, VMAS is still assisted to this day by the SJV for the faith formation of migrant children who are Hebrew speakers.

To serve the estimated 100,000 Catholic migrants, VMAS pastoral workers operate in 56 communities around Israel.<sup>72</sup> The VMAS tries to answer Pope Francis' call for local churches „*to welcome, protect, promote and integrate our brothers and sisters who are migrants, asylum seekers into the life of the Church and of the society at large*” (VICARIATE FOR MIGRANTS AND ASYLUM SEEKERS). The VMAS does not limit its mission to pastoral-sacramental ministry. It also promotes and integrates migrants and asylum seekers through their social and humanitarian ministries. While the main vocation of VMAS is to provide a home away from home for Christians, its ministry is open as well to non-Christian migrants and asylum seekers.

Since migrant communities are usually divided according to national-linguistic groups or Christian rites, the VMAS prepares programs to build a united community of migrants as they seek their integration into the Church of Jerusalem. These communities are gathered during the annual World Day of Migrants and Refugees to celebrate the Holy Mass together and to make cultural exchanges among the different national and ethnic groups.

The *Filipino Chaplaincy*, being the biggest community, is fully integrated into the Vicariate's mission. The recent marking of the 500 years of the arrival of Christianity to the Filipino nation was welcomed with closeness by the Church of Jerusalem. On October 10, 2021, a Mass that marked this anniversary of the Filipino people was celebrated. Pizzaballa acknowledged the role as mission partners of the 10 million Filipino migrant workers in the world. While showing his appreciation for the presence of these Filipinos in the diocese of Jerusalem, he also raised a curiosity:

*„Five hundred years ago, a small seed arrived from Spain became with time a robust tree; a lively and solid Church grow in the Philippines. I wonder what ten million seeds scattered around the world will do today!”<sup>73</sup>*

Certainly, the Church of Jerusalem is a witness to the arrival of migrants and asylum seekers. One Filipino chaplain, however, lamented that within the Church of Jerusalem, migrants still sense that they are unwelcomed strangers. He says that migrants remain invisible in the local church, yet if seen, they are regarded with suspicion and jealousy.

This negative image of the migrant, which results in labeling, distorts the *imago Dei* in the migrants. Only with a renewed vision of God seen in the face of the migrants could, we see that migrants are the face of Christ who suffers. Their experience of migration represents the journey of every Christian and the pilgrim People of God. By acknowledging this, the People of God recognizes its responsibility for migrants.

<sup>72</sup> There are 17 Malayalam-Speaking Indian Communities (two to be added soon), one Gujarati-Speaking Indian Community, five Konkani-Speaking Indian Communities, 14 Filipino Communities, three Geez Rite (Eritreans & Ethiopians) Communities, four Sri Lankan Communities, one English-Speaking African Community, one French-Speaking African Community, two Spanish-Speaking Communities, one Romanian Community, four Ukrainian Communities, one Polish Community and two Chinese Communities.

<sup>73</sup> Since the LPJ website was updated recently to have a new interface, some of the documents uploaded earlier were removed. However, I was able to recover the homily through the Internet Archive. Cfr. PIZZABALLA 2021.



## II. Mission and Migration In Filipino Migrant Communities

The Church's engagement with the phenomenon of migration is rooted in the love of Christ. To love Christ, the *Primordial Migrant*, who entrusted to His Church the mission to preach the Good News and to gather God's people, requires loving every *imago Dei*, including migrants. Being responsible for migrants is not limited to the protection and promotion of their human and political rights in the State, instead, the approach is holistic not forgetting to take care of their cultural and spiritual needs. For this reason, the Church extends her mission of evangelization to migrants for they „*deserve the church's very special attention and accompaniment, and they can in turn be valuable gifts to the church as well*” (BEVANS in GROODY & CAMPESE 2008, p. 102).

In the context of Filipino migrant workers in Israel, I would like to reflect on the relationship between mission and migration expressed in two parts: the mission *among* migrant workers and the mission *of* migrant workers.

### 1. Mission among Migrant Workers

In general, mission among migrant workers is usually linked to the pastoral care of migrants and other itinerant people like refugees or asylum seekers. We have already introduced the VMAS as the pastoral arm of the LPJ in its mission to reach out to migrant workers in the Israeli society. While the responsibility of the Church to migrants is universal, for our discussion, I intend to focus only on Filipino Catholic migrant workers.

It is providential if migrant workers arrive in a Christian country, or a country of Christian influence, however, in other cases, they arrive in a country where Christianity is a minority like in the case of Filipino migrant workers in Israel. These women and men from a faraway land enter into an unfamiliar world. They encounter cultures, food, languages, and religions that are unfamiliar to them. While their immediate friends and communities help them adapt to their new environment, the ecclesial community becomes a center of social and religious life. The Church's mission among migrant workers can be multidimensional, however, the action of the Church is two-fold: caring hospitality and empowerment of migrants.

#### *a. Home away from Home*

The Church has a sacred obligation to welcome strangers in Her midst because the Master is among the least. Through hospitality to migrant workers, the Church fulfills her role in the growth of the Kingdom by bringing glad tidings to the outsiders of the society. As Christ's universal sacrament, the Church is the sign and instrument to gather the children of God in the heavenly banquet at the end of time.

Anita, 51 years old, left her husband and two small daughters in the Philippines and arrived in Israel in 2005 to work as a caregiver of a child with special needs. She expressed that when she arrived in Israel, she immediately looked for the nearest Catholic Church. Although from her workplace in *Hod HaSharon*, Saint Anthony Church in Jaffa is a two-hour trip, she went there on her first day off to attend Mass because she knew that the Church is a home where she can be with God to overcome her loneliness being far from her family. For Filipino migrant workers, in a setting where everything is unfamiliar, the Church is the only recognizable sign that connects them to their Philippines.

The first mission of the Church is to be a home for migrant workers. The Church becomes a place where they are welcomed and accepted. The religious community gives a sense of identity along with comfort and security (cfr. CRUZ 2014, p. 79). The Second Vatican Council recognizes the role of parishes or local ecclesial communities in welcoming

*„those among the faithful who, on account of their way of life, cannot sufficiently make use of the common and ordinary pastoral care of parish priests or are quite cut off from it. Among this group are the majority of migrants, exiles and*

*refugees, seafarers, air-travelers, gypsies, and others of this kind. Suitable pastoral methods should also be promoted to sustain the spiritual life of those who go to other lands for a time for the sake of recreation.”* (CD 18)

To fulfill this, the Church provides for canonical norms. The CIC requires parish priests to give attention to migrants and itinerant people (cfr. can. 529 §1). Ordinaries can also erect personal parishes for them (cfr. can. 518) to take care of their spiritual needs (cfr. can. 516), providing pastoral figures (cfr. can. 476) and chaplains (cfr. can. 568). This mission to welcome migrants is not a mission of some chosen pastoral workers but is a collective effort of the entire local community where priests, religious, and the lay faithful are involved. Sometimes all it requires is a modest acknowledgment of their presence in the local community. This is possible by giving them either their own time and space to celebrate their liturgies and prayers or by letting them integrate some songs into the common liturgy (cfr. BEVANS 2008, p. 95).

In welcoming migrants into the local church, there should be a strong commitment to justice by protecting the dignity and rights of migrant workers. This means the Church must be in solidarity with them in their situation (cfr. *ibid.* p. 96). For example, many Filipino migrant workers fall into illegal situations and are always in fear of being caught by the immigration police of Israel. A VMAS worker states that as of the moment, the Vicariate lacks the system to help Filipino migrants in their legal problems. However, they help migrants through social or humanitarian services like the daycare for their babies or the after-school program for school children who need assistance in studying.

The Church needs also to respect the cultural identities of migrant workers; thus, their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and ritual identity must be safeguarded and promoted, in an authentic dialogue with the local community (cfr. EMCC 38 §1; 78). Among Filipino communities, Masses are celebrated in English or Filipino. There is also Mass in Hebrew for migrant children. This means that pastoral workers could be Filipinos themselves sent as missionaries from the Philippines.<sup>74</sup> Although Filipino migrants appreciate the presence of any pastoral worker, they are more transparent to a pastoral worker who speaks the Filipino language and understands the Filipino culture. This is inculturation in migration, as the Church adapts itself to the situation of migrants.

However, pastoral workers/missionaries need to ensure that migrant communities are integrated into the local church by avoiding the creation of ghettos. This requires opposing the pure and simple assimilation into the local culture (cfr. EMCC 78). In the Saint Anthony's Parish in Jaffa, during the annual patronal feast the Filipino community actively participates not only during the Mass but also in showcasing their cultural dances and songs.

A strong interaction between cultures and religious practices happens in migration. Migrants try to fit in a new environment as they try to maintain their identity. This may result in passive assimilation or resistance to integration. Pope Francis reminds that migrants are gifts for their stories can enrich everyone. He invites a hospitable response that migrants may integrate with their identity while developing themselves in new ways (cfr. FRANCIS 2020, 133-134).

Hospitality to migrants in the local church is a rich experience of dialogue. Through welcoming migrants, the local church and its pastors engage in a dialogue of life. To a certain degree, it also opens a dialogue of religious beliefs and spiritual traditions. Christians, therefore, can fully participate in *missio inter gentes*<sup>75</sup> through the phenomenon of migration. The generous hospitality shown to migrants

<sup>74</sup> To achieve this, collaboration between the episcopal conferences of the departure and the arrival countries is essential. Religious men and women sent as missionaries prove to be very helpful also in the pastoral care for migrants. Cfr. EMCC 70, 79-80.

<sup>75</sup> In light of the experience of Church in Asia, Asian missiologist proposes to understand mission by giving attention to its approach, that is, mission should be *inter gentes*, among peoples. This implies that the Church is actively engaged in a permanent *dialogue of life* with peoples of different cultures and religions. Thus, mission takes the form of witnessing Christian life among peoples of other religions in solidarity with them. Cfr. TAN 2005, p. 35. Aside from the dialogue of life, the Church also identifies other three forms in which

becomes a witnessing of life. This also strengthens the idea of what it means to be a universal Church which has both an impact *ad intra*, in this case among the local Christians, and *ad extra*, toward migrants especially their Christian brothers and sisters of different culture and religious backgrounds (cfr. BEVANS 2001, p. 163). Therefore, migration can potentially contribute to the „new evangelization” efforts for the local Church while it means strengthening of faith for migrants.

### *b. Empowering migrants through the Gospel*

As migrant workers are integrated into the local Church by accepting and welcoming them unconditionally, they should also receive a good formation of faith and spirituality. It is not that the proclamation of the Gospel is secondary to hospitality, however, a welcoming atmosphere prepares the ground to plant the seed of the Word of God. They do not seek the Church just to rest or to be heard by pastoral workers, instead, to come to Church is to enrich their personal relationship with Christ. In most cases, Filipino migrant workers are church members but remain nominal Catholics or at least Mass-goers.

Menchie, 43 years old, works in Israel in the last 20 years. She was a frequent Mass-goer in the Philippines. However, she admits of never attending the Mass in her first two years in Israel. She was busier going to parties with friends. However, this changed as she was invited by a friend to go to church in Jaffa. She became active in singing in the choir and found a family among the choir members. Years after, Menchie gave birth to a son with a Jewish father. They are not married and have no plans also of getting married. Also, they are not in a live-in relationship. Since the Jewish man claimed his fatherhood to their son, Lior, thus, an Israeli citizen, it also secured Menchie’s future to stay in Israel. Lior is baptized and confirmed Catholic. He was fully enrolled in the catechism class in Tel Aviv. He goes with Menchie to church every weekend, but as a Jewish boy, he also attended his *Bar Mitzvah*. As Menchie tries to raise her son a Catholic she was motivated to become a member of „Handmaids of Christ” which is a subgroup of the „Couples for Christ”.

The story of Menchie presents several elements to consider. First, the faith and religious practice of Menchie was shallow from the start evident in prioritizing leisure over spirituality. Many Filipino Catholic migrants lose the way as they migrate and the Church has the mission to find the lost sheep who are just roaming around ecclesial communities. For Menchie, her friend was providential in coming back to the Church.

The story of Menchie also opens the issue of irregular affairs among migrant workers. Unlike other Filipina migrants, she does not desire to marry an Israeli to have citizenship. However, having an Israeli son secured this for her. There are many cases of Filipina migrants who enter into live-in relationships with Israelis to obtain not only financial benefits but also the possibility of a citizenship through naturalization.

Irregular relationships are also seen in homosexual relationships among Filipino migrant workers. There also cases of infidelity of some married Filipino migrants who, while having a family in the Philippines, maintain another partner, or worse, a family in Israel. Still others opt to be live-in partners to maintain their status as single, knowing that changing it may lead them to an illegal status in Israel. One of the Filipino priests commented that many of these persons are those closest to the church. He said that correcting these situations becomes very hard. However, the Church must not isolate them but should help them in their irregular situation. In the words of Pope Francis, the Church chooses „*the way of Jesus, the way of mercy and reinstatement*” (FRANCIS 2016, 296). Thus, the Church reaches out to

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interreligious dialogue may take place. In no particular order, interreligious exchange is also possible through: a dialogue of action; a dialogue of theological exchange; and a dialogue of religious experience (DP 42).

these persons without judging their situations but understanding how they can participate in the Church and lead them to an authentic conversion through the Gospel.<sup>76</sup>

Another thing to consider in the story of Menchie is the situation of Lior being a Christian of Jewish heritage. Although Lior is a Christian, he observes also Jewish feasts and traditions. He is in between two worlds with a unique identity as a Filipino-Israeli. In this pastoral situation, he is assisted by the SJV for his faith formation. All Filipino migrant children, whether half Israeli or not, have the same situation as Lior. While pastoral workers ensure their faith formation, the Filipino community reinforces their ethnic, national, and religious identities (cfr. CRUZ 2014, p. 81) because there is always the possibility of deportation to the Philippines.

A VMAS chaplain admitted that most of the time their mission to Filipino migrants is limited to their pastoral and sacramental care because of the limited contact they have with migrant workers. The majority of them go to church for the hour-long Mass and after that, they go home. So, there are no other means to have a prolonged contact with them. Only a few have the opportunity to ask for a spiritual conversation or the reception of other sacraments. Many Filipino migrants also join pilgrimages to Holy Places, taking the opportunity to know the Holy Land while working in Israel.

Filipino migrants who receive more from ecclesial activities are also more committed to the Church especially when they are members of prayer groups or associations. They give time for spiritual formation even during weekdays through online prayer meetings. These examples can help VMAS to create programs which are appropriate to the faith formation of Filipino migrant workers and reach more persons.

Aside from faith formation, Filipino migrants are also empowered to be lay leaders in their communities. For example, Angelina, 51 years old, working in Jerusalem for 14 years, was a teacher in the Philippines before coming to Israel. She proudly noted that her community in Jerusalem was founded by migrants and organized by migrants. She was once a member of their team of officers who organized their weekly Masses and their periodic cultural and religious activities, including pilgrimages. She appreciates that their community in Jerusalem conducts team-building activities and other training sessions which help their leaders improve the quality of service in the community.

Therefore, the Church's mission includes the preparation of Filipino migrant workers to become missionaries in the context of their workplaces and communities. Like all Christians, they participate in the mission mandated by Christ to His Church.

## 2. Mission of Migrant Workers

While the Church does mission among Filipino migrants, these migrants also participate in the mission of the Church for they are not passive recipients who only welcome the fruits of the Church's missionary action. They are likewise potential missionaries (cfr. BEVANS 2001, p. 168). As part of the laity, they are called „*in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth*” (LG 33).

Their immersion in their workplace allows them to be beacons of light to the people around them to see the Light of Christ primarily through their witnessing of life. Even without formal training, their simple actions make them missionaries *inter gentes*. Of course, if opportunity necessitates, they are also to proclaim directly Jesus, the Word of God. Therefore, in the same manner as the Church, migrant

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<sup>76</sup> The Pope affirms: „*In considering a pastoral approach towards people who have contracted a civil marriage, who are divorced and remarried, or simply living together, the Church has the responsibility of helping them understand the divine pedagogy of grace in their lives and offering them assistance so they can reach the fullness of God's plan for them*», something which is always possible by the power of the Holy Spirit.” FRANCIS 2016, 297.

workers also have a two-fold mission: to care for strangers (hospitality) and to smuggle the faith (evangelization).

#### a. *Caring for strangers*

In Israel, Filipino migrant workers are largely employed in jobs linked to caregiving, either they stay home with their employers or clean the hotel rooms for guests. They are supposed to care for strangers, that is, to be hospitable to unknown persons. Working in Israel, their first mission, however, is personal in nature, that is, to earn money for their families. For them, taking care of strangers is a matter of *pakikipagkapwa-tao* rooted deeply in their faith and religiosity.

During the October 7 attack of Hamas in several Israeli *kibbutzim* near the Gaza border, four Filipino caregivers were among the casualties. These caregivers died protecting their elderly employers, a sign of the close bond between the *metapelet* and the employer which they usually call as *sava* (grandfather) or *savta* (grandmother). One amazing story is that of Camille Jesalva, 31 years old, who saved herself and *savta* Nitza, 95 years old, by offering Hamas terrorists her preciously earned 1,500 shekels saved for her planned vacation in the Philippines two days later that day. The militants willingly took the money and spared their lives. In the aftermath, Camille canceled her vacation and decided to stay with Nitza to take care of her until her last breath. She said, „*I feel like I can't leave her, like she's my best friend*”. And added, „*she trusts me and I trust her*” (STAFF 2023). Camille stated in a television interview that God was their protection during that time of distress and danger.<sup>77</sup>

The devotion shown by Camille is a manifestation of her deep regard for Nitza. She could have just left *savta* and saved her life but she decided to stay with her even if it would cost her life. Because of living with their employers for a long time, many Filipino caregivers in Israel developed a deep sense of belonging to the families they are serving. Although, it is hard at times, they eagerly show their love for the persons whom they serve. Camille's actions certainly reflected her faith in God who saves.

In caring for „strangers”, Filipino migrant workers are potential missionaries of the Gospel in their silent actions of love and devotion. Their presence among their non-Christian employers is a potential witnessing of the Gospel. Their perseverance to caring for the elderly and being hospitable to them can draw attention and curiosity to the source of their character, their Filipino culture and their Catholic faith. Their presence can become a catalyst for intercultural and interreligious dialogue (cfr. KROEGER in BIAGGIO & BRAZAL 2008, p. 241). For example, Grace, whom we met earlier, shared that his Israeli employer who is not religious at all would always ask her to say a little prayer for him when she goes to church on Saturdays.

While „caring for strangers” takes a primary form in the work that Filipino migrants actively devote inside the homes of their non-Christian employers, this is also the same expression they bring when they encounter their fellow migrant workers as they form their communities of faith. In these settings, they meet strangers even if they are of the same cultural and religious backgrounds. Above all, they witness how to be hospitable to one another in their communities (cfr. 1Pt 4,9).

As their communities are part of the local church, this hospitality is also manifested in their dealings with other Christians. Indeed, it is noticeable that their communities are open to all. They are happy to share their culture and their faith with others evident in their lively, festive, and heart-warming celebrations. For this reason, Cardinal Pizzaballa also praised them, saying,

<sup>77</sup> The TV interview is in Filipino: Pinay caregiver, binigyang-pugay ng Israeli govt; iniligtas ang 95-yo na alaga sa Hamas (2023); and she repeated also the same in a Hebrew interview (2023): אלהי שקלים ופלאפון: סיפור הגבורה (2023); של קמיל המטפלת וניצה בת ה-95, Youtube, uploaded by תאגיד השידור הישראלי | חדשות - כאן (2023).

*„All of you carry out your service, which we all know is not always easy and appreciated. Yet, it is known to all, how your simple and deep faith, rooted and convinced, provokes amazement and interest, questions and curiosity.”*  
(PIZZABALLA 2021)

### *b. Smuggling faith*

„Smugglers of faith” was a rather controversial description of Pope Francis of Filipino domestic helpers in his homily during the Mass for Filipinos in Saint Peter’s Basilica. According to the Pope Filipinos can transform the joy of the Gospel they received in their lives by showing the joy of faith they expressed in their smiling faces and their songs and prayers (cfr. FRANCIS 2024a). In the apostolic visit to the Philippines in January 2015, Pope Francis had his first unforgettable contact with Filipinos for he personally experienced the enthusiasm of the Filipino people.

In 2021, amidst the pandemic, he told Filipinos that they are „smugglers of faith” because wherever they go to work, they sow the faith. The Pope observed that working silently in the homes of many people is a form of witnessing their faith. Thus, in the setting of their work to „care for strangers”, at the same time they are „smugglers of faith”. The mission to proclaim the Gospel comes naturally when we take care of strangers, and as the Pope adds, *„the Gospel message of God’s closeness cries out to be expressed in love for our brothers and sisters”*.

Debie, 58 years old, remembered recently her 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of working in Israel. Her first employer was an elderly religious Jewish man. Although, she rarely went to church during her stay in the home of *saba*, she was never denied of reading the New Testament or practicing her faith in their house. Her employers’ children, though not religious, in certain occasions asked her even to lead a Catholic prayer. Her employers regarded her highly and trusted her because of her Christian faith.

While what is admired and makes the Church curious is the ability of these migrants to „smuggle” the Gospel into non-Christian homes, some of them are also called and empowered by God and by the Church to serve and be missionaries among their communities. This resounds the story of Terry and Mary, members of the Catholic association „Couples for Christ”, a group which intends to the renewal and strengthening of Christian family life, believing that by building the domestic church, they can also build the church of the poor. Already a married couple in the Philippines, they came to Israel in separate ways: Mary was legally employed while Terry entered as a pilgrim who never left Israel, sheltered by his relatives. In the year 2000, they joined the Couples for Christ through the invitation of some of members in Israel. Eventually, they built their family in Ramat Gan having two children who are also active in the „Youth for Christ”.

The troubles they faced in Israel because of their illegal status helped them grow in faith as a family. Today, they serve as leaders of their association at the national level in Israel. This allows them to evangelize others, but first of all, their community. Therefore, as other Filipino couples are also empowered, they all become missionaries for other Filipino migrants who are far from the Church or are not inside the Church.

Finally, the Filipino migrant communities contribute to the local church as their communities are partners in the Church’s effort for new evangelization. Cardinal Pizzaballa observed that their presence is precious not only because of their lifestyle which brings Jesus into the homes of thousands of families, but, as they express their love for Jesus in the setting of the local churches, they also awake the faith of local Christians into new ways of being a Church (cfr. PIZZABALLA 2021). For migrants and the local church, migration is a theologizing experience (cfr. BEVANS 2001, p. 169) for it provokes Christians to be aware of their faith. For Filipino migrants in Israel, being in Israel gives them the opportunity to visit the Holy Places which helps them appreciate the faith they profess. Moreover, Filipino migrants also

come into contact with the oldest Christian communities in the Holy Land and learn from them, and they also have the opportunity to encounter world Christianity through the numerous pilgrim groups.

Equally, as Filipino migrant workers insert themselves into the local Christian milieu of Jerusalem, these women and men from the Far East challenge their host ecclesial communities into a renewal of faith. They do not preach to local Christians but they use their faith expressed most of the time through popular piety (cfr. CRUZ 2001, p. 100) through their national and regional devotions to Christ, the Blessed Mother, and the saints; some rites related to the liturgy; and the use of religious objects and institutions. They are subtle instruments of faith but have an impact on other Christians.

The presence of Filipinos and other migrants also helps local Christians understand the sense of belonging to the Universal Church. Migration reminds the local church that the unity of the Church born on Pentecost is not about the commonality of origin and language, but the diversity of nations and expressions which the Lord willed to bring together as a community-in-mission (cfr. EMCC 103).

Going forth from their homeland crossing borders to a better life, Filipino migrants in Israel arrive to care for strangers. As they persevere to work hard in a foreign land, they unintentionally become the unexpected and reluctant missionaries of the Christian faith seen in the silence of their day-to-day interactions with their employers, their co-migrants, and the local church community. Thus, Filipino migrant workers, as the face of *missio inter gentes*, truly smuggles the faith in three levels: as *ad gentes* among their non-Christian employers; as pastoral care to their fellow Filipinos of fervent Christian culture and religious traditions; and as a reminder to local Christians that „*the Church of Jerusalem is indeed a Mother Church for all and in her all can feel at home*”.<sup>78</sup>

### III. Conclusion

*„Like Christ, whose body is the church, the church is always on the move, not ever at home, willing to go where it is needed, wearing the simplest of clothes, carrying no more than it needs, but, because of its marginalized status, capable of entering all cultures and bridging all people as one.”*<sup>79</sup>

These words summarize on point the journey that had started to unfold in the pages we have dedicated to reflecting on the dynamic relationship between mission and the complex reality of migration.

Migration poses a great crisis if only seen as a socio-politico-economic burden to be managed. Undeniably, control of the movement of people should be greatly considered not to deny the right to migrate but to facilitate and help migrants who possess equally the dignity of being an *imago Dei*. Through a renewed vision of the dignity of migrants, migration can be a *kairos* event for the entire People of God.

By welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating migrants into the community, the Church realizes Her nature of being a People of God on the move. This demonstrates the deep relationship between mission and migration. This is alive in the context of Filipino migrant workers in Israel who by diffusing an empire of care, become unexpected missionaries of the Gospel through dialogue of life.

*Caring for strangers, smuggling faith* becomes then the expression of the mission among Filipino migrant workers in Israel and the mission of migrants. Caring for strangers is an opportunity to bring faith to others. On the part of the Church, Her mission to Filipino migrant workers starts with welcoming them into the local church. This includes an authentic dialogue of life by listening to and learning from the stories and struggles of Filipino migrants. Thus, the Church can truly organize pastoral care for them which does not only think of their welfare but, above all, their empowerment as members of the People of God.

<sup>78</sup> We borrow the words of Fr. David Neuhaus, SJ, who was then patriarchal vicar for Catholics of Jewish Expression and coordinator for migrants and asylum seekers. See NEUHAUS 2017.

<sup>79</sup> A paraphrase of the words of A. BANUELAS. Cited BEVANS in GROODY & CAMPESE 2008, p. 90.

*Caring for strangers* is what Filipino migrants are known for in Israel. It is a reflection of their great regard for other human beings. The empathy that they have for the situation of other people makes them models of effectively becoming part of the life of others. By showing love for the stranger who can be their employer, their fellow migrant workers, or local Christians, Filipino migrant workers can demonstrate their faith-based value system.

Their silent witnessing becomes the first and essential way of *smuggling faith* to others. However, because the pastoral care and mission of the Church also empowers them, they are potential missionaries. Surely, if given the chance and the proper training and tools, they can also be effective in proclaiming the Gospel. Through their unique situation of being in between worlds, their witnessing to faith reaches the home of their employers, the migrant communities, and the local Church.

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