

LETTER TO PASTORS OF ALL TRIBES AND STRIPES

To those who have discerned a call to be pastors among God's people in different denominations and churches. We, lay people, also called to be collaborators and co-ministers with you, greet you and pray for God's blessings upon you. It is our deep wish that you always find joy, strength, peace, and renewal in fulfilling your vocation and service, in good or challenging times. We acknowledge that your leadership role is important to our shared life and work as church. It is complex, demanding, and changing. Many times, you are not too well supported, appreciated or remunerated. We thank God for the faith, patience, compassion, good will, sacrifices, and perseverance you have shown in accompanying us through many journeys. We promise to be more caring, supportive, and responsible in fulfilling our part.

We have observed you in many roles and heard from you, or read in some books, different names to describe a pastor's vocation and work. We have heard old titles like pastor, priest, prophet, teacher or steward. We have read some new titles: servant leader, wounded healer, bridge builder, or community leader. We don't know if you prefer one or several of these images when you think about yourself. Maybe, it is more like a kaleidoscope of tentative names or identities that you claim depending on contexts, seasons or tasks in your life and ministry or the church's life and ministry, or both.

It occurred to some of us, after participating in the bible study group reviewing the books of Proverbs, Romans, and Revelation this year, that maybe you are like a Sage and Seer or better, a Sage Seer, that is, a wise *advisor* and visionary of *utopias* to confront the *dystopias* for living "between the time" in which the "old order" is still present, pressing, and passing and the "new order" is present, pressing, and emerging. We came to think this way after considering

your thoughts on how the “prophetic and apocalyptic” imaginaries are implicit in many writings in the New Testament.

Are we too far-off thinking this way? After all, we see you constantly proposing, or helping us to discern, new visions and horizons for our lives, the church, and the world by considering God’s love, mercy, and justice and what you call, God’s mission for mending the creation and rehearsing the new creation. In your preaching, counseling, teaching, prayers, conversations, and pep talks, we have “seen” you laying before us visions of what could be different, better, new, healthier, fulfilling, and more just, despite the challenges, difficulties, impediments, and habits that we confront and seem to trap us or push us down or backward.

We confess that some of us consider you too optimistic; others think, too naïve. Yet, we respect you and even crave, in our moments of disbelief, for the truth and energy in your invitation to *envision*, what you call “signs of the times” as clues to understand how “the new order” erupts and interrupts “the old order.” We still remember your exhortations to “look for” and connect with *new exoduses, new resurrections, and new Pentecosts* that God is working in our midst. We are not sure if this is literal or symbolic language. One of us heard you saying something more obscure and puzzling: “God is liberating and renewing selves, societies, and creation through the reconciling and recreating ministry of Christ and Spirit among all people and creation.” We wondered, what does this mean? Are these words of wisdom or just “seminary language” that pastors enjoy?

This we know, you have challenged us to be and live as wise people discerning “kin-dom utopias” to confront, resist, and change “worldly-dystopias” in the following of Christ and in the power of the Spirit. You have exhorted us to desire, hope, and commit after that which is of

God's heart and mission, that is, people and communities where three things are sought and cultivated: a) loving God, neighbor, self, and nature; b) pursuing shalom (eg., holistic well-being, reconciliation, safety, freedom, non-violent action); and c) doing justice (eg., righting the wrong; defending the poor and vulnerable; avoiding and repairing harm; seeking the common good; etc.). We don't know if these ideas summarize correctly what you have conveyed, but this is what has stayed with some of us who are deeply inspired by "abstract" language. Others prefer the times when you share visions of wisdom with simple words and clear examples for daily living. For example, when you share a memorable story or read a poem or give your testimony or meditate on biblical or contemporary people who model the life of faith, hope, and love.

We are curious and want to ask you about what two of the pastors you invited to speak in a panel said about multicultural ministries. They were a Latina and Latino pastors speaking about doing theology and ministry *latinamente*. We don't know clearly what they meant, but they raised for us an important question. Does this mean that all pastors do ministry from their respective cultural make-up and perspectives? Does this mean that white Anglo-European, African American, and Asian American pastors do ministry and think about the church and themselves informed by the cultural perspectives and social locations they and their churches have? This is an interesting proposition and led us to wonder, what is common and different among Sage Seers who are pastors in culturally homogeneous or in diverse congregations?

Dear and respected pastors of all tribes and stripes, here or beyond, we hold you in great esteem as wise advisors who accompany us in our journeys and struggles by displaying visions, dreams, and imaginaries for faithful, fruitful, and liberating Christian living. We thank God for your wise visions and visionary wisdom. Luis and others wish you peace.