

290 Frances Ribeiro Avenue
Waterkloof, Pretoria

Attn: Charles Pritchard
19 Freezia Street,
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Re: Alpha and Omega Mission

At the heart of the pastoral orientation of the Holy Father is his call to 'go to the peripheries'. This emerges strongly in the Aparecida Document of which he as Cardinal Bergoglio was the president of the drafting committee 2007 and later in his encyclical *Gaudium Evangelii* of 2013. Following the example of Jesus, he wants the Church to reach out to the 'oppressed, the excluded, the ignored, the poor'. He calls for a messy Church not a pristine cold clinical comfortable Church. All this is well known. This is the challenge for the Church and the challenge for the Shepherds as the Holy Father himself tries to live up to the Pact of the Catacombs.

For the past two years I have been involved in a ministry called Alpha and Omega Mission, a non-profit organization directed by founding members Charles Pritchard, Fernanda de Sequeira and Alice Grota. This is the space in which I meet the people on the margins, the people who fall between the cracks, the people who feel they have no one to turn to. These are the people with addictions, broken relationships, financial difficulties, immigrants, refugees and with family problems of all kinds. In my experience 95% or more are Catholics, practicing, lapsed, lost, suffering, but all seeking help and a listening ear. There is no other Church organization available for them. Yes, there are NGOs, Government organizations, Church resources such as Vincent de Paul and soup kitchens but no one who takes time to listen. They have to make appointments, come back later, only available on Tuesday evenings etc. Alpha and Omega fill that gap in the Church's outreach. They offer prayer, counselling and practical assistance (rehabilitation and opportunities for respite for stranded families). I have had the privilege of participating in some of their mission outreach initiatives in Portugal, Cape Town and Soshangovue and witnessed miracles of grace and repentance.

My involvement is simply on the level of Confession. Facing the present predicaments in life is often the result of a life gone awry. A time of introspection, retrospection, examination of conscience, is the step towards recovery, spiritual and emotional stability. These are the people who need upliftment and consolation, not further rejection and condemnation. These are the people Jesus reached out to. These are our brother and sisters in need. They meet the living Jesus in the Alpha and Omega ministry through the love, concern, interest and support of the resident team and their back-up staff.

For me, my Sacramental involvement is a prized priestly ministry for which I am grateful. The wonderful aspect of all this is that Alpha and Omega is an initiative of lay people. This is a response to the call in the Church for the laity to be more involved in the work of evangelization, spreading the message of love and forgiveness, living out the call to love the neighbour. It's a case of getting so close to the sheep that the smell rubs off.

I consider my involvement and the contribution I can offer through the Confessional in the Alpha and Omega ministry as a most rewarding aspect of my priestly ministry.

Fr. B. McAleer
26/05/2021

Fr Barney McAleer