The Bachajón Jesuit Mission in the Dioceses of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico.

1. The community or organisation location and context:

1.1 History: Managers, beginnings, stages, etc.

The Bachajón Jesuit Mission has been present now for nearly 50 years in the midst of the indigenous Tzeltal population. In error of clarity, we have split this presentation up into Stages. The truth of the matter is that the Stages in fact overlap, some make others possible, and in some circumstances some processes do not follow a strictly chronological line.

Stage 1 (1958-1968)

In December 1958, the priests and brothers of the Society of Jesus arrived in Chiapas and founded the Bachajón Mission. At that time, the Bishop of the dioceses was Monseigneur Lucio Torre Blanca. In 1960, Monseigneur Samuel Ruiz García took up office as Bishop of the then Dioceses of Chiapas. The first missionaries faced a truly difficult and cruel situation. There was oppression, ignorance, illiteracy, alcoholism, exploitation and slavery. The Mission, in an endeavour to improve the standard of living of the Tzeltal population, undertook works such as the introduction of drinking water, street lighting, schools, a medical dispensary, religious instruction, agricultural projects, commencement of a translation of the Bible into Tzeltal and pastoral care.

During those years the training of catechists began through courses delivered at the head of the Mission.

Stage 2 (1964-1974)

This period was one of advance in structuring of the work undertaken by the Mission. An assessment was made between 1967 and 1968, research was undertaken into social and education action, and in 1968 the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, who settled in the village of Chilón, were incorporated into its pastoral work. They began work in promoting women’s health care and collaborating in addressing the most pressing needs in the region.

The work was organised into areas. The evangelisation area was characterised by the formation of hermitages that fostered a strengthening of the communities and this represented the foundation of the ecclesiastical structuring process. The catechist training courses were decentralised and Bible learning and the study of the Tzeltal language were enhanced. Translation work on the Bible continued. The missionary team laid great emphasis on the enculturation of the Tzeltal population.

Projects of a social and economic nature were also begun including co-operatives, carpentry and leather goods workshops, vegetable cultivation and rural schools. Training of community development agents was undertaken, all with the intention of achieving comprehensive development of the indigenous community.
The indigenous communities had, by that time, already achieved a better organisation of their hermitages and of the weekly doctrine. As a result the seasonal/temporary ministries (catechists, choirs, principals, presidents, etc.) diversified.

It was an important period, one of much study and reflection: Anthropology, history, sociology, linguistics, theology, health care, the participative method and the implementation of the Tijwanej\(^1\) method.

**Stage 3 (1974-1980)**

One of the most urgent questions for the communities during this period was the stripping and monopolising of lands that gave rise to emigration to the so-called “National Lands” (lands with no owner) in the Lacandona Jungle. The missionaries, men and women, accompanied the Tzeltals on their exodus.

In response to this situation the Mission undertook the translation of the Agricultural Law into Tzeltal. Furthermore, it encouraged it to be studied, advised the communities on their application for lands, and denounced its monopolisation and the human rights violations that the landowners committed against the indigenous peoples.

These years saw San Cristóbal de las Casas host the Indigenous Congress, which began the process of increasing public awareness of the Indian population and their right to exist as such. This marks the start of the long journey we must undertake to realise that the Indian culture in our country is an enormous wealth, and not an obstacle as we have been made to believe by our superiority complexes. This Congress brought together the demands of the area itself with those of the entire State of Chiapas and of the country as a whole, opening our eyes to the complex situation in which the Indian peoples are obliged to live.

The Diocese Church, for its part, asked the indigenous communities to express themselves on how the Church was carrying out its evangelisation work. Around this time, the indigenous communities began to feel a greater need for sacramental care. At the end of this process of reflection, through the mouths of their principals (the elderly in the community or its leaders) the communities made this request: “Give us the Holy Spirit”; those were the origins of the current permanent body of indigenous deacons in the Diocese.

**Stage 4 (1980-1988)**

The Mission lived a period of organisation and restructuring within the team. In social issues, there was support from the government through healthcare, trade and education programmes. Commercialisation of coffee was controlled by the Mexican Coffee Institute (IMECAFE) and it was a strong period in which the government

\(^1\) The local indigenous communication method in training of communities as well as employment of reality analysis.
fostered the use of chemical fertilizers. We would very soon become aware of how harmful this practice was.

In parallel with the government programmes, the Mission worked on projects with vegetables and organic fertilizers. Further, a participative method was started to apply alternative medicine.

The first indigenous deacons were ordained (6th and 8th March 1981).

**Stage 5 (1988-1994)**

Very important events took place in the pastoral work for strengthening the ecclesiastical structure: The first deacons were ordained in Jet’ha; the Local Church area was restructured to include women in the process and catechist training began to be delivered on interregional courses. These events should be highlighted, as they are very important in underpinning advances in strengthening the ecclesiastical structure. They truly represent a symbol in the post council period in which we live.

In this period there was a great lack of staff on the team. Between 1988 and 1989 work was restructured to attend the priority areas, despite the fact that the teams were made up of very few members.

Adaptation of teaching methods to the culture took on special relevance during this stage, which strengthened training in all the Mission areas. The structure of the permanent body of indigenous deacons was especially reinforced by courses to the deacons and their wives and the pairs of Principals, who accompany them. This is the reason for which the deacons’ training curriculum began to take on greater specificity and specialisation.

During this stage, the Human Rights, Community Development and Social Pastoral Care areas were born, which gained strength and structure. This thus favoured an increased awareness in the line of the Defence of Human Rights and participation in the spheres of greater democratic and ethnical insight.

**Stage 6 (1994-2000)**

This stage begins with the uprising for indigenous dignity by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN). A low intensity war situation was declared by the government against the indigenous communities that sympathised with the Zapatista cause. This led to great destruction of the social fabric and complicated the already serious situation in the region and in the state, which significantly modified living conditions in the communities. The Mission addressed this situation accompanying the communities by retrieving the natives’ own conflict resolution methods and fostering the formation of reconciliation figures, with which the local civil authorities were strengthened.

This stage was very important for the consolidation of the Native Church. The edicts and the Indigenous Pastoral directory were drawn up, and this strengthened the training of traditional figures and posts in the church. The consolidated advance of the diocese and the Mission were legislated.
As part of the continued attack by paramilitary groups on the communities, in the diocese and the social organisations, the region lived several years under the political and economic control of the Chinchulines (a violent paramilitary group). Due to the denouncements the Mission made concerning the violations this paramilitary group committed against the population, the village of Bachajón and the Mission came under attack on 5th May 1996, leaving houses burnt and a series of murders.

During this period the mass taking of lands increased. The Mission monitored the regularisation process of the invaded lands. It also took part, through the Centre for Indigenous Rights, in the purchase of lands by a Trust Fund to give them to groups in need. The Mission fostered peace talks between the EZLN and the Federal Government. It joined its work to the efforts of many others to structure the National Indigenous Congress (CNI).

The Mission has wanted to address the harshness of its reality through dialogue and not violence, accompanying the Tzeltal people in their self-determination process.

Stage 7 (2000 – to date)

We find it difficult to describe this period or stage. We refer the reader to the description made of the current commitments the community holds to the faith and to justice.

1.2 Relevant information from recent history that has left an important mark for interpreting the current situation.

Concerning the ecclesiastical process of the diocese.

- 1992: Legal recognition of the churches.


- 1995: The Vatican appoints Msgr. Raúl Vera López as coadjutor bishop, with the right to succession to attempt to put a brake on the pastoral work driven by Msgr. Ruiz. As the coadjutor becomes aware of the situation in the region he ends up decidedly supporting the work undertaken by Msgr. Ruiz.

- 1995-1999: The Diocesan Synod that clearly defines the lines of action of the Native Church.

- 1999: Msgr. Samuel Ruiz resigns as bishop on reaching his 75th birthday. The coadjutor bishop is surprisingly transferred to another diocese, without having been consulted, to prevent his succession.

- 2000: Msgr. Felipe Arizmendi Esquivel is appointed Bishop of the Diocese. He ratifies the Diocesan Synod undertaken by Msgr. Ruiz, continues with the ordainment of indigenous deacons and takes steps towards official recognition of the Native Church’s own liturgy.
- 2002: The Vatican orders the bishop to suspend the ordainments of permanent deacons in the diocese.

- 2005: Publication of the Bible in the Tzeltal language.

Concerning the region and the country:

- 1996: Endorsement of the San Andrés Agreements in which the Mexican Federal Government promises to pass laws acknowledging the rights and culture of the indigenous peoples.

From the year 2000 there is a change of governing party (the PRI’s 70 years of continuous government come to an end) and the neo-liberal project takes deeper root.

- 2001: Modifications to the constitution are passed which only fulfil a minor part of what was agreed under the San Andrés Agreements, and in some parts these even contradict the said agreements.

The indigenous communities find themselves submitted to a War of Overall Weardown.

The EZLN takes steps to move towards the political stage through “The Other Campaign” and seeks to build a wide front with various sectors of the population to take the indigenous struggles forward.

The indigenous demands are still unresolved; the lack of goods and services, of housing and infrastructures, plus the economic, social, cultural and political exclusion to which the indigenous peoples are submitted puts them at a clear disadvantage in comparison with the rest of the national population and is gradually building an increasingly more favourable backdrop for migration.

1.3 Geographical, political, cultural, economic and social environment.

Area of intervention in Mexico, in the north-easterly region of the State of Chiapas.

The Bachajón Mission attends the indigenous communities from the municipalities of Chilón, Sitalá and some of the municipalities of Yajalón, Ocosingo, Simojovel, Pantelho’ and Salto de Agua.
Basing ourselves on the census of the population carried out in the year 2000, we estimate that the territory covered by the Bachajón Mission attends some 150,000 people whose mother tongue is Tzeltal and a further 5,000 whose mother tongue is Castilian Spanish.

The territory covers an area of 5,000 Km$^2$ (the equivalent of the area of the Mexican state of Colima). This area mainly comprises rainforest and tropical jungle. A large number of streams, several full-flowing rivers and in general a very rough terrain, full of mountains and ravines.

### 1.4 The Living conditions of the people: Their way of living, their environment, etc.

The territory the Mission covers is rich in natural resources: Water, lands that can produce up to three harvests a year, precious woods and other timbers. However, 40% of the homes do not have running water, 30% do not have electricity and those
that do, have very poor quality as power cuts during the night are an everyday event, therefore candle-light proves a better option.

Illiteracy in their mother tongue reaches indices of 70%, while illiteracy in Spanish is at around 35%. These indices are notably higher among women. Most of the catechists, deacons and other community officials learned to read and write both in their mother tongue and in Spanish from their catechist duties.

An alarming figure that gives us an idea of the indices of malnutrition and quality of life is that we are witness a new outbreak of Tuberculosis (which the government had assumed eliminated) in over 100 of the 600 communities comprising the territory covered by the Bachajón Mission.

Only 20% of youngsters have access to middle or higher education (over ten years of education). The average life expectancy is below 60. The average number of children per family lies between 5 and 6.

Together with these dramatic figures of poverty an ancestral culture appears with its own cosmovision that is very rich in symbols and human values such as respect, hospitality, beauty, the community spirit or solidarity. Maize is not only their staple diet but also a point of cultural reference in this culture along with mother earth.

1.5 What kind of commitment do they have in favour of the faith and justice?

Before such a scene we proposed ourselves as a Mission to offer a comprehensive service and to address this reality that globalisation is trying to impose, and which in many respects is going to harm the communities and the indigenous peoples. To do so we have used all the service experiences we have encountered along our way as our starting point.

The methodology of enculturation as a means of carrying out our work has enabled us, over these years, to get to know better the real situation the region is in. This enculturation methodology involves getting to know the indigenous cosmovision, the way they organise themselves, the Tzeltal grammar and language, their rites and ways of celebrating the faith and the transcendence experience. The said enculturation is only possible by being in and close to the people and their communities. Knowing the conditions they live in, their dreams, their habits and their service trajectory, lead us to render them a better service and detect their physical needs and their basic learning needs.

There are 597 hermitages organised in 54 areas and 22 inter-areas which, in turn, are grouped around 5 cultural traditions (Ts’umbal²) of the Tzeltal-Maya population present in the region: San Jerónimo Bachajón, San Sebastián Bachajón, Sitalá, Guacutepec and Chilón.

The Mission has trained over 7,800 local pastoral agents, who currently take part in community life and make up a Native Ecclesiastical organisational structure: deacons (180), catechists (1,500), presidents (2,400), principals (1,800), choirs (350) and in equilibrium between the ancestral Tradition and current Tradition There are 25 different church ministries which reproduce the traditional community organisation values in the ecclesiastical organisation.

² The word “Ts’umbal” means lineage, ancestor or forbearer. For the Tzeltals it would be our roots, where we come from.
Traditional authorities qualified in criminal law to be able to discuss the distribution of justice from the Mexican State with the authorities as well as to resolve conflicts and avoid abuses of power.

The full translation of the Bible into the Tzeltal language has been concluded; The Mexican Episcopal Conference approved the translation and its publication and 10,000 copies were published. This work has taken us over 30 years.

Together with the Federal District Ibero-American University, we concluded the Theological Bachelor for 22 deacons and their wives and it is sought that this be made extensive to the rest of aspiring candidates and indigenous deacons and their wives (200 couples).

Creation and strengthening of a culture of individual and collective rights for the Indian peoples.

Strengthening of the culture and language of the 5 Maya-Tzeltal traditions (ts'umbal).

A systematised method of research into the delegation of justice, to enhance the culture’s own ways of conflict solution. Strengthening of a network of 60 Reconciliation Promoters. 60% of these are solving problems that arise in the communities. There is a Judicial College comprising 12 Tzeltal judges for reconciliation, which act as part of the delegated structure of Tzeltal justice.

Acknowledgement has been attained of the work carried out by the traditional authorities in distributing justice and respect for Human Rights, based on their own their own ways of administering justice. The negligence, corruption and discrimination of the indigenous populations by the Mexican Government’s legal system are gradually being counteracted.

47 land tenures were obtained which have benefited 1,292 families who now have lands to work. 139 production projects were introduced in 37 or the 47 estates.

1,565 indigenous Tzeltal and Ch’ol were trained in agricultural techniques to work their land.

There is a network of approximately 100 healthcare promoters.

Women take more part and their word and work is acknowledged.

Support is given to five communities forming the "Ts’umbal Xitalha” social organisation which are devoted to the organic coffee and honey production.

Creation of sources of employment, especially for women.

With two three-year periods, the Yomlej social organisation has achieved the leadership of the town-hall authorities as a civil and political alternative to the one-party dictatorship that the country had suffered for over 70 years. Work is being undertaken to qualify teams of people to deliver personal enrichment workshops that
very clearly take into account the Mayan cultural keys for these processes. These same teams are preparing themselves to deliver the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius in Mayan-Tzeltal key. Accompaniment and advisory services to the "Yomlej" community social organisation, which has obtained the Chilón town-hall presidency for three legislative periods.

2. INTERVIEWS

2.1 Manuel Silvano Gómez

Age: 45
30 years as a catechist.
Married, no children.
*He currently works in Chilón Town Hall and forms part of the Indian Theological co-ordination body of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas.
Interviewer: Sister Ester Cueva Regla, H.D.P.
Original in the Tzeltal language.

1. You are in a group of believers in Christ and you have pledged yourself as one heart together with other companions believers in Christ, to work together with the community in announcing the salvation of the brothers and they themselves lend you support in believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What I can tell you is when I realised that our Lord Jesus Christ wants us to love each other. A long time ago, when I started work (as a catechist) I thought that the time had to come in the lives of the true landowners (the indigenous peoples) to love each other. It was then that I became aware that I had to pull out the evil I bore in my heart. I say that it is not good to hurt others; it is not good for someone to hurt his neighbours. A person should show love in everything he has and does, in his land and in his animals. He should respect other believers in Christ. This is what I promised myself and it is what I often explain when I am commissioned to preach the Word of Jesus, the gospel.

2. Are these commitments you have made the road to being with God? What do you say?

In my heart I feel that this is the path whereby I can get closer to God, because our Lord Jesus Christ told us, “He who loves his neighbour, his relatives, is loving me.” So if we say and we do so among us, the believers in Christ, it is there that we find God, and so we know that talking about it is not enough, we have to do it. That is how I understood that it is not merely a question of what I say and hear. That is how I want things to be and I want those who listen to me to do this. As I think that where we manage to do this, that is where we find God, our Lord.

3. What sign from the Holy Spirit has appeared in your commitments during your life and that you personally say are the most important? How did it show itself? In community work? In devoting your life to searching for human or other rights?
I see signs of the Holy Spirit appear when His word enters the hearts of some people and they preach it. And also when there are some who do everything they say they will. He appears when we love our neighbour, in loving our land and everything we have. It is also seen in the people who want to carry out this work and pledge themselves to do so; in those who reinforce this work because they feel this is how it should be; and thus there is harmony in the community.

4. Which aspects of your faith have become clearer and stronger? In the way you see the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in interpreting the face of God, in loving other people or in seeing the face of God in those who do not believe in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In doing our work, we are not going to express our love for our faith in Christ just to chosen people. We must love, respect and give dignity to all human beings whose life was given by God. And there are people who, because they see that by our faith in Christ good is done, who are following, who are believing, who are coming to us.

5. On the path of your commitment, what is the most difficult aspect you have had to live, and how did you face up to this?

Our commitment to the faith gives rise to many problems in our lives; as I grew up an orphan it has been difficult for me to take this path and carry out this work for over 30 years. But the biggest problem is that there are people who do not feel good and not everyone likes us to talk about love, about respecting our neighbours. There are some hard-hearted people who become angry, who block our path, who seek to instil us with fear so that we will not talk about the bad things these evil-hearted people are doing. There is fear, ridicule; they block our path in many ways. All of this since I began work maybe 30 years ago. Little by little our work is becoming stronger because there are those who help us, but there are still those who do not like it; there are those who block our path so that it is difficult for us to pass and hard to undertake our work with the obstacles we find.

6. What is the path you promised to work on with the humble that are not respected and what do you want the church to do so that it will be strong and that you want them to work as a single heart for all eternity?

I would like my church, the one to which I belong, and other churches from around the world to be together as one heart. I want them to agree to seek justice in life, well-being, love, to attain respect for the humble, the poor, those without respect, the oppressed. I would like all the churches around the world, in any region, to seek love, to seek respect. And that oppression be stopped.

In that same life, what is it that you want the different people in the nations to do and what would you like those living in the richest nations in the world to do?

I would like the richest cities in the world to become true believers in Christ. I want them to find a way to achieve equality, to respect and acknowledge the dignity of the poor as well as that of the rich. That there should be a way to support churches to seek out new ways of learning, of raising awareness, or guiding and giving
importance to respect for the poor and the ill-treated. Not for them to share out money but so that more paths be sought to increase awareness and to help those undertaking this task of taking love to the poor. This is what I should like concerning my commitment for my faith in Christ.

2.2 Roselina Díaz Cruz

Age: 37. Single. She belongs to a group of indigenous women who began experience of religious life 25 years ago. She currently forms part of a team delivering personal enrichment and Saint Ignatius Spiritual Exercise workshops, following the Mayan-Tzeltal cultural keys.

Interviewer: Father José Avilés Arriola S.J
Interview date: 13th February 2006
Original in the Tzeltal language.

1. How has God, with His Word, helped you to carry out your work, helping and accompanying the poor and how is the Word of God related to your work and to that of your companions?
It helps me in my work and also with my companions, because it is not only my will. We see in the Bible how we should accompany our companions in the communities, making women aware of their rights as women. They have the same rights to make His word known when it comes to listening to the word of God in a meeting. And the poor, too. There are widowed or abandoned women. We, men and women, also help them as far as we can, and this is doing the Lord’s work.

This is the work where I see God; in the face of our companions from the communities. There are many times when we go out to meetings in the communities and I see many things and we call the women “heart cheerers”. Some of them do not know how to read or write and so when there is a course for catechists I have to read. They cannot read but they do know how to relate and explain what they have heard during the course. They are very wise in doing this. They co-ordinate themselves. I only help them to read and begin to co-ordinate and explain the Word. They give an explanation of what God is saying and then I only complete the heart cheerers’ explanations. Furthermore, I also note down their words and then I write them or correct them and later give them to the heart cheerer concerned. She says that we are her hope; that is what we are. There are times when they come to talk to us to ask us which day we can accompany them to give this course and although I may have other jobs, I free up the days the course is planned. At midday we go with the women in groups, which is the most important thing. Although they cannot read or write, they know how to do things, they are very wise. That helps me a lot.

2. What is … God will be there, how is it that God will be there?

3 In the Autochthonous Church that has gradually been building up in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas, there is an ecclesiastical position entitled “Cheerer of the Heart” who is deacon elected by the communities to co-ordinate all the deacons in a particular region. As the position is exercised by the couple, the deacon’s wife is called “Cheerer of the Heart” and she is responsible for training the deacons’ wives and the women in the region that she has to co-ordinate together with her husband. This church ministry is also thought of as a first step towards the ordainment of indigenous uxorious clergy, which has been repeatedly hindered by the Roman Curia.
God is right there, in the midst of the communities. God is who is in our companions, we see Him there, and in the women, as they have a very sensitive heart when there are serious problems. Nevertheless, they have a very strong heart and it there that God lies; God is not at their side but in their hearts.

3. How is it that Word of God and your ancestral culture help you to carry out this work in search of women’s rights and well-being as well as the other jobs you do?

There is harmony in our parents’ rights and culture; they are in one single heart. They are united and that is what they show; they teach things as our parents allowed them to and what so impresses my heart is how our parents lived in harmony, as a single heart.

4. How or what is it that fosters that harmony for your parents to walk together, both in the past and today; who is it now ensures they become wise?

In the past our parents were very wise, they knew how to get together and how to look after each other. It is God who is in them and who instilled them with wisdom through their hearts. As in the past they were very respectful of God, they lived the Lord’s Word, they knew where harmony came from; if they had food to eat, they were not selfish, they shared it. It is there that God moved their heart, and they also knew where their food came from, because they did not make it, they only worked and the food they received was their reward. That is how our parents thought and that is why our parents’ culture is so beautiful. But the Bible also tells us of the works of the Apostles, which is that everything in the house is a whole, nothing is kept apart; there are not two or three owners, no, only one owner possesses all the things in the house. That was how it was before, but God enlightened them with that knowledge, that joy...

5. Maybe that is how God introduced Himself in search of your Parents’ life; it is God!

It is God, He Himself made them aware that they had the right, that they had a voice if they wanted something. God made them aware of those rights, of how to feed themselves. We see God’s work; we see it inside the home.

6. Your commitment will be the path whereby you will find God, how?

I can find God in our companions; my commitment that I have to be in this team came from my heart. I feel it is very important to help our companions from the communities and I have thought a lot about the importance of my work. I took the decision with my heart, and seeing myself work fills me with joy. I know it is very important although there are many things that I do not know … but I am happy to make my way when I go to communities, as I still have much to tell the men and women, and because I shall also learn more. It is there, in my companions, that I see God. It is there, as I am working, that is how I feel Him inside my heart. What I do is not only for me, what I learn is to help our companions and it moves my heart.
With respect to the work, the Bible tells us what women’s work is. As they did before. Although they cannot read or write, they are wise. They have worked hard. Previously, they had suffered many problems, but joy also lay in those problems and that strengthens my heart. That is why I decided to pledge myself to this team. It is here where I find Our Lord. Inside the communities. This is the work that so strengthens my heart; what I do, I do with all my heart, that is all.

7. What signs from the Spirit have come into your commitment that you say is very important?

Where the Holy Spirit appears is very important. In the heart of our home we see the work or the commitment and this is very important. It helps me to understand how I should continue working and it moves my heart. I cannot make a success of my life on my own. Prayer is the force inside my heart; praying always to God, asking Him how I can culminate this work. Although there are problems and we do not have any money, it is as if I were rich in the depths of my heart. My work for the Holy Spirit makes my life rich. Our Lord did not die in search of money, no, and that reminds me of the Holy Spirit’s work. He, Himself, is working in my home, inside my very home with my brothers and sisters. With my companions, my mothers, my fathers, companions. The Spirit moves my heart to search for how I can have more life, how I can continue my journey to ask our Lord.

8. How is a community made aware of the Holy Spirit’s work? How does He appear? Is He real? Is He working there? How can we say: It’s true! The Holy Spirit is there!? Why did He change His way of being? How? How does He appear in the community? How, or by which means does He reach the community?

We become aware of Him in the community’s way of being. We become aware of Him in the community harmony, tranquillity and peace. If something has to be planned, there is the organisation to do so; it is there that we can see and appreciate the work of the Holy Spirit. If there is division, lawsuits or other problems, it is clear that the Good Spirit is not present.

9. And how does the Spirit live amongst us? Is He present in the workers’ work or words, in the work of our mothers and fathers or in the work of those with the right in our community? How?

The work of the Holy Spirit is made known in the communities where there are many community officers. We see that there are already people at their service, women at their service. This is work of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord has many workers and all together they help each other; the deacons the heart cheerers. Where there are sick and ailing, they visit them and attend to their needs. It is there, in those works that the Holy Spirit is moving.

10. How does the Spirit undertake his work? Manually or by the word of those who know His language and the way of being of your mothers and fathers, and how?
It could be seen before in the work of our mothers and fathers. Some knew how to heal; there was someone who could see the disease, those who knew about herbal medicines, they could see what it was … that is where the Holy Spirit works. It is the Holy Spirit Himself who works in your life for you to help other companions.

11. And over these years, what has been the scope of your work? Has the Holy Spirit ever shown you where over companions come together in search of the good life? Perhaps there is someone who says that land can be obtained by using weapons, will the Holy Spirit be there?

That is where there are problems: Where there are confrontations or conflicts over lands. There are times when they kill. But that is not through the Holy Spirit, it not He who is working there, it the evil of darkness. The only solution we find is if there is someone who is willing or has no lands to try to reach a solution in good faith, to do so with the landowner. That is where the Holy Spirit is working.

12. I believe that it is not yet 10 years since many of our brothers came together here, they organised themselves, they sought out lands, many came together, was the Holy Spirit present there? Did He work there? How did he work? Did He work or was evil at work there?

The Holy Spirit works in the hearts of those who had the chance of peacefully obtaining lands. There were those who had no lands and were tired, hungry, sad and in need. Many things have happened. Many of our brothers were hurt as if their words lacked any importance before the mestizos, but little by little the Word of God became stronger. They had their own strength of heart; the very Spirit worked in their hearts. There are companions who had that strength to undertake that work, (“the struggle” as we call it) to return to them what they say belongs to them because they have a right to their lands. Those lands belonged to our mothers and our fathers and our parents were deceived. He helped them a lot in 94. It seemed like the power of the rich landowners fell a little. There are those who lived in suffering, those who died of hunger on the march.

13. From what I saw those who owned lands were pressured, they took possession of the lands, they pressured them, they spoke forcefully.

They spoke to them forcefully, but the their strength of heart and the Holy Spirit Himself helped them. They were not afraid because what they were doing was just, and it was the Lord Himself who stood up to resolve this, because he sees everything. The lands are His. Our Lord left the lands, but they belonged to Him. Afterwards, things changed. They fell into somebody’s hands; they fell into their hands with suffering and other things.

14. And in your faith’s work, do you see any sign and do you make it known and will it be strong?

I feel that I have strength in my work. Our Lord Jesus Christ greeted and strengthened the hearts of the sick, of those who were suffering. Our Lord makes his work known there, and it is exactly there that Our Lord’s face is reflected and that is how He teaches me and He makes me aware. When I read the Bible and see Our
Lord’s work, it is as if He were teaching me. In my life or in my heart I feel as if there were nobody else to complete my work. That is why I am here in the world. What other work could I do? This has to be it, like Our Lord Jesus Christ did, as it was before. He has given me this job. When he came, his gift to me when I was born was my work. He teaches me many things and I am filled with joy when I read the Bible, when I am with other companions although I do not have much to give them. I have no money, I have no gifts to give to the poor, not even a bag of salt or sugar. I talk to them, I tell them anything so that they find joy in God; and with the sick, too. It makes me aware, it makes reflect deep in my heart, as it must be this that needs to be done.

15. Is there anything your parents or your grandparents have taught you that is closely related to Jesus’ teachings that come in the Bible?

When I was growing up, my parents and my Grandma used to tell me that, “If you respect people, that way you will be respecting God,” “If you bump into your elders anywhere, do not let your elders give way to you; you look for a place to stop and give way to them, that is God you are showing respect for”, “If you do not do as you are told, it is Our Lord you are not obeying, you are not obeying His word”; that is what my mother and father used to say and that is what the Bible tells me. If I love the Word of our Lord, I am loving Our Lord Himself. That is how our mothers and fathers were brought up. If you do as you are told, you are obeying God Himself. If you do things properly, God will approve what you have done. Your parents will appreciate what you have done. My mother and father move my heart because they taught me many things. They taught me to work, to do as I was told without anger. What my mother and my father say is true. There words were a great help to me when I started this work. Their upbringing is the same as what the Bible says. Our parents’ words are the same as those of the Bible. There is no contradiction.

In their work, what work did your parents undertake that was more or less similar to the work of Jesus Christ?

If somebody was sick, my father would visit him and he did more than just listen. My mother prepared a tortilla, pozol to take to the sick person, just as our Lord Jesus Christ did. I see many parallels. There is no difference.

Our parents like children a lot and Our Lord Jesus Christ called the children to Him. Our parents like to care for and keep watch over their children, and that is what Our Lord does. The work is the same.

About the road of your commitment: What difficulties have you had to live through and how have you faced them?

In my commitment, what I am facing are the sufferings I have, the difficulties I feel in my life, in the way in which I am working.

What are these difficulties? That I cannot read or write, that I know nothing. This makes my work very difficult. There are times when I do not know how. Then I make an extra effort, I feel more significant if things are difficult. I have to search, to search for a way of getting out of that problem. But how and where does this strength come from? When I want to do many things and I cannot do what I want, for example to
carry on studying. There are times when I do not have enough time and I am busy with other things – that is where the problem lies.

Another problem is that in our home we have no money. It is a very important problem because we must eat to live in this world and we cannot survive. But I do not worry about that; I feel I am strong enough. It is not that I am saying that I have no money and that they do not pay me a good salary; no. Rather that I am happy to be working. I have decided to be stronger in order to continue studying, so that little by little I can manage this work, as far as I am able. While Our Lord gives me life, that is what I have decided.

16. I have something to ask you about how it is that you are in the Church, in the process of living your faith, your commitment to working to giving value to the poor, what would you like the Church, of which you form part, to do? What would you like it to change or to enhance? How would you like it to be committed to working in pursuit of us living in harmony and the path to a better life?

The important issue here is the commitment of our companions who are the poor in the community. If it were possible for their hearts to be strengthened for them to work in their own community, so that they themselves build the Church of Our Lord. But they cannot do so alone, they receive help from the Bachajón Mission, but they also see it as a very difficult task. There is no-one among Our Lord’s servers who is academically qualified. None of them have finished their studies; all of them have the same academic level. Some of them learned to read and write when the Mission arrived, and they learned to read the Bible.

These would be their commitments: Their culture’s way of being would be enhanced, in their language, in their way of working in harmony in the community itself and they should be respected by our companions, and the women too, in order to strengthen our Lord God’s Word both within the community and in the Assemblies. « Wherever God’s Assemblies are to be found, their faith has to be strengthened in their work and in their very way of speaking. They should not tire, although they cannot read, write or speak Spanish, they should commit themselves, they should ask God for this; this is what I feel.

What else do you ask of those who guide Our Lord’s Church and itsdeacons, of those who have an important job within the Church? Have you something to ask them for?

What I would like is that they lead the Church, together with the servers (deacons), that they do their work to make theirs the community, as if they were the head of the community in the inter-area where they work. But they should bear in mind that they too have their head or their leader like the Mission, the Diocese, the fathers and the other servers. This is how all this is related and the work receives a large input of energy.

What is really encouraging for me is to see that the servers are in very high spirits, that they visit the communities, they see them and they care for them.
The servers do so; they themselves work in the community, no-one else works there. They work in harmony, together with their principals\textsuperscript{4}. They bring their word together to organise themselves and to decide what they are going to do. Their work thus has force, as it is there that it is very important that they should work: inside the community itself.

17. How can the Church become a force among our Tzeltal people for it be complete? Why walk beside the Catholic Church throughout the world? What else?

It is becoming a force in every way of working, but what I would like is very difficult to achieve. It would require much thinking out and organisation. Some of our companions do not know the purpose of this work and there are those who know its purpose and therefore need more teaching. We must tell them our purpose so that it remains in their hearts, so that little by little the Word of God grows in our Tzeltal national culture. That it should become truly more Tzeltal, but it is very difficult. That is what we must ask Our Lord, what the work in this team that belongs to Our Lord’s Church is going to be like.

Prayer in its way of being. In its way of working, in prayer, in its way of living.

18. What do you say about this group that is not going in the right direction? About the process of the deacons who will receive an appointment? They are still saying in Rome that a Father (Priest) cannot have a wife.

I have given that a lot of thought, about why there is still no process for them to enter as Tzeltal priests. What I really think is that if they are admitted as Tzeltal priests, there are many places where they could be sent, other places. It is not possible, they cannot go because they have children, how can they leave them behind, how can they leave them. They have lands, they have homes. If each one was only responsible for one, two, three communities, like a heart cheerer, it is possible. This is all right because he does not go far, he does not go to distant places, and working in the community itself is important. Furthermore, deacons are in charge of five or six churches when they go out on visits; it is in this work they can be admitted as a Tzeltal priest. But there is still no process for their admission and we do not know how it will be done.

19. What do you want to ask the big servers for, those who are still not aware of this?

A new one has just come in to replace the one who just died. I believe that if those who already have appointments, such as the deacons, also ask for this, Our Lord will speak. If they really want that work, they will be given it, because the Holy Spirit Himself is what moves the hearts of those who have work received there in Rome. Nothing more; we must devote ourselves to our work, because God hears our requests; that is what my heart tells me.

\textsuperscript{4} Principals are people appointed by the community who have to accompany the couple that receives a position to advise them and to ensure that they take the right path in their work. These people are chosen because of their experience and their moral influence over the community.
20. What would you like the various groups in society to do? What else?

I would like them to do the same work as Our Lord. We see our communities have many problems; there are many problems on our land such as the use of marihuana, drunkenness, and disrespect towards women. There are times when the women are not even to blame and they are molested in the communities. These are problems in which our communities have become immersed. Things are coming: Now there is much deceit, there are many things and our companions are taken in, as if it were better where they think they are going to make a lot of money. It is a problem because they introduce it into the community and it is there that the problems begin. That is the most important problem, it where I believe that we have to see that the responsibility of the catechists and the servers really has to be reviewed.

21. And what would you ask of those who live in wealth in the cities?

Those in the cities who are very wealthy do not lead the same life as the poor, it is very different. It is the poor who have a difficult life whereas the rich have it easy. They have nothing to worry about except themselves; they do not have to think about where the next meal is coming from, they just live, that is all. It is not the same as having God’s Words in their hearts. They not interested in increasing their rights, they only listen to them, and their sufferings are not the same. These are two ways of living our lives, although I would like to say something. But, how are they going to listen to it? How are they going to listen to what I say if they do not want to do so, if they do not think that way?

I believe the rich, the rich cities do no listen; I believe they do not feel pity for the poor from the poor communities.

22. What about the United States? What do you say about that?

I think the United States is very rich; I do not know, but I believe it is a very rich country.

23. Does this country not show pity for the poor?

No, it does not show pity for the poor. The rich agree with the government. Those aspiring to enter the government only seek their wealth. But not to stand up for the rights of the poor; they only deceive them. It is not because they want to help them, but because they want their lands.

24. Is there anything you want to ask of the rich?

How are we going to ask them for anything if they do not listen to us, I can find nothing in my heart to ask them for …

2.3 Juan Hernández Guzmán and Antonia Hernández Méndez (Husband and Wife)

*Age: Juan is 48 and Antonia is 45. He is a Deacon – Heart Cheerer (the person who co-ordinates the deacons’ work) in his pastoral inter-area in the lowlands of the*
Bachajón Mission. He was named as a candidate for deacon by the community in 1985 and was ordained as a deacon in 1989. His wife always takes part in his ministry as the couple exercises the cultural issue in the ministry together. Original in the Tzeltal language.

1. You belong to a community that believes in Christ, what commitments have you had jointly with your fellow believers in Christ in working for justice and dignity for all the men and women that your faith in Christ and has helped you to undertake?

From when I was little I heard when the Bachajón mission began its work and the School was started. From then God’s Word entered my heart because my community had converted to the faith many years before in the time of our ancestors. But later Father Chagoya began work. He encouraged me; he taught me how to talk to God when I was a child. When I went to the lowlands I felt in my heart that I could not forget Our Lord. So I joined to carry on listening and learning about what Our Lord Jesus Christ’s life was like. I have been striving to learn more for many years now. What has entered my heart, what I like to do, is to listen to what the life of the Church has been like, how the Church came, how I am alive today, how I feel life in my people and there is Our Lord Jesus Christ, accompanying each and every one of the people in our nation. In the hearts of all the people in a nation that believes in Our Lord, there is reflection on how we prepare ourselves, how we view our problems, how to find out what we must do for Our Lord. Those who have a ministry are announcing that the world must be sorted out or repaired and that is what Our Lord wants.

I believe that my commitment has to do with God’s Word, with serving the community. When I entered as «presidente de la iglesia» (Church President), I accepted this, and later I entered as a Catechist and I said, “Alright.” And I asked no questions nor did I analyse if I wanted to or not, if I could or not, but rather I simply said yes.

When I was appointed as a Deacon, I did not know what we were going to do to prepare ourselves, but inside the church they told me that if I wanted to take up that work, I would learn in time. We can help each other with our problems, in the search for a good path to take in the life of our people. This path is the commitment of the servers or the deacons who are preparing themselves to preach God’s Word in the community. If there is nobody to do this, or only the priest or the principals who hold a position in the community, these take on the charge of moving God’s Word in the community; God’s Word cannot move by itself. But there are other positions or God’s servants in the community who can join to preach the Word of God in other communities. Those who join this task are those who chose to listen, not because they were very knowledgeable but they learned on the courses. This is what I felt to support the community.

5 The «presidente de la iglesia» (church president) is the person responsible for calling a meeting of the Christian community; he is the person who keeps the key to the church or the hermitage; he is responsible for all aspects concerning maintenance of the building; he is the person (together with his wife) who is responsible for coordinating the preparation of the community meal when there are liturgical celebrations. It is therefore a community service position. It is not a remunerated post.
When we give our services, we help our people. When we are serving, the Lord is with us, because we see that everyone who is working becomes responsible, and if a person becomes responsible, Our Lord is accompanying him. When Jesus came to earth Our Lord sent him and he took charge of what Our Lord wanted and he also took charge of his disciples. He left the first disciples a job to do, our life, of how we should live, how we should resolve things when problems arise, how to guide each other, to advise each other, of how to forgive each other and to have a single heart. That is what Jesus taught us in his human form. It seems like only from his human form, but Our Lord was in his heart. Therefore we must listen to what Our Lord truly wants.

That is what the faith, through the community of believers, brought to my heart. Today there is consensus as to how God’s Word is flowing inside us. I see that unity is more important than the individual in each person, because it is there where we can see what it is Our Lord wants in our lives.

2. It would be good, madam, if you can tell us a little of what you thought, what your heart-felt reflections were about these questions.

What we are reflecting on is the importance of our work with our people. And the other important issue is that we, the women, have to work for our rights. Nowadays, although there are many obstacles, we are striving to preach the Word of God, Our Lord. It is not like when teaching began. Our ancestors already had their own knowledge; our ethnic group began a long time ago, but now I can see God’s Word is growing; it is slowly coming into bloom. Now, in every church there are people who do believe and listen, but if a community does not exist Our Lord’s Word cannot flow; it is very important that it follows in men, in women and in children. The Word of Our Lord is in every community. His works are beautiful. We are doing our works together with those who are teaching and this makes us feel very hopeful.

3. This commitment, has it been a path along which you have been able to find Our Lord God? How did you find Him?

What I am learning, listening to is to do what Our Lord wants. How do we know? Listening to what Jesus did, which is the root of our faith; what Jesus wants is for us to be aware of the importance of the real life that God, Our Father, gave us.

God, Our Father, is the creator; it is He who has built His world, He who gives the world life, He who feeds His children in the world. He knows what His people want in the world. Except there are deviations when we feel we dominate it. That is why Jesus came into this world to reveal how supreme and fascinating the world is, so that we would not be taken in by evil. That is where we are mistaken; we believe that Our Lord, when what is taking us to ruin is only in our mind. This is what I have understood, that God, Our Father, looks after the world. There is a moment in which the members of the community listen to Our Lord, they feel Him in their lives, in their hearts and see the gift Our Lord has given us, and then they know Him and they believe that it was Our Lord who gave it to them. But there are people who did not manage to see, and did not recognise what Our Lord has given them.
4. Antonia, in that commitment you told us of, how can you find God? What will it be like?

We find God Our Lord where the others call us. It is precisely in our fellows that we can find our Lord. If there is only one heart amongst us, if we love and help each other, that is where we find Our Lord.

5. What signs from the Spirit have appeared in this committed life and which do you say are the most important? How, in which community works, in which aspects of life, in the way the people in the community devote themselves entirely, among other things? You have already mentioned some things but it would be good if you expanded on this or remembered something more.

The work of the Holy Spirit which reaches our hearts, which is the work of Our Lord, is, for example, his Church. His Church does not disappear and it does not end even though there are those in the world that want it to disappear. Although we say that it ends, the Holy Spirit returns and is renewed. I believe in the Holy Spirit, in the community and in our hearts. If the Holy Spirit were to leave our hearts this would mean that we have not learnt anything. But when the Holy Spirit is present, it moves us by telling us there are things that need to be done.

I have seen the work of the Holy Spirit on other occasions. For example, when there is an illness or a problem, when you pray to Our Lord and He cures you. These are the true things that we believe in and can be seen in our lives. The Holy Spirit is in our life, on the path of our labour, in our search for faith and in the search for our support for life.

6. Antonia, what signs of the Holy Spirit appear in your commitment?

What I think about in my heart is how I, who cannot feel very high up because we were chosen by the community many years ago, how we were taught by my mother and father, and if that is what our Lord demanded of us, then I have to carry out this task. I have to give myself to serve my community and obey the words of our people. This is the task for which I came to the world. And also, another place where we can find the encouragement of our hearts is in the fact that God, our Lord, helps us to do this task, and through his teaching and guidance the Holy Spirit works in our hearts.

7. What aspects of your work, your faith have become clearer and stronger? In the way you see the life of our Lord Jesus, in giving importance to the face of God, in receiving love from companions, or if not in seeing the presence of God in those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. Has your faith in God, our Lord, been strengthened in these aspects we have mentioned?

The faith of God, our Lord, has been strengthened in our lives, in our hearts, in our behaviour, through the problems and through the events that take place. If this does not exist, if the whole community is very peaceful, it seems that the work of our Lord is not there. If there are our problems, and other things, it is there that we find our Lord; it is there that we see that there is something we need to do for Him.
In all of these aspects of life our Lord appears when something happens. When there are problems, it is there that we know what God wants. If there are two groups, two people in the community who are in conflict, he makes us think whether it is good or bad. That is why God, our Lord, shows himself when something happens. If it is something good, then it is good and it is from our Lord. If it is something that can harm his companions, then it is the same as what happened to Jesus. I have thought long and hard about this. In the life of Jesus, we know that he was made prisoner, they invented a crime for him, they killed him, but not because he did something bad, instead it was because he fought for all the good that needed to be done. I want God to help me so as not to be like Judas. Jesus, who loved his people, the poor, did not want anybody to harm our people in the world. This is the path that Jesus followed. When he freed the poor, Jesus became angry with the oppressors. That is why the problems start and the rumours start. That is the situation of our people now. There are good things that we do and which many do not like, and the rumours start, and sometimes we make mistakes. That is why we get ready to receive the Words of our Lord, what he wants to tell us each day.

8. And Antonia, what do you have to say about this? What aspects of your work, your faith, have become clearer and stronger? In the way one sees the life of our Lord Jesus, in giving importance to the face of God, in receiving love from other human beings.

We are here now because God, our Lord, gave us our life. He made all of us so that we could do his work; and this has to be present in our behaviour, in our path through life, in our work, it is there that we see our way of life.

It can also be seen in all our efforts in our work, so that our hearts are not discouraged when there are problems. Many different things happen in each of our communities but we need to make a strong effort. It is there that we see the work of God, our Lord, what really has to be said, what the pure truth of the life of God, our Lord is. That is our task.

9. On the path of your commitment, what is the most difficult situation you have experienced and how have you confronted it? In your life you have possibly found something, we always find certain obstacles and which is the most difficult that we find in our lives?

Today, the world has changed considerably, there are roads, electricity, telephones, and it seems we question the Word of God with all this: what can we do to overcome all this?

We have been accustomed to travelling on foot for many years, to work with the machete, to make our milpa, to search for our food. Today our lives have changed considerably, we need money.

This is our life, as far as we can possibly analyse it. Sometimes our children need food, they need money, they are at school. Sometimes I felt I needed to do both these things. It is not that our community confronts them, we have never argued with them, instead, what I decided was to consider what our Lord wants. Only then do we not see that our people are all right. Why care? If I realise one day, then what does
the situation of my village make me do? Anyway, this is the problem that we have in our lives; we feel it as if it is a problem.

Money is power. It makes you move forward, and mankind is quite used to money. When you buy, when you sell, money changes hands, and that is how money is used. It seems that everyone has understood in their hearts that money is life. Well, that is what we see, a way to escape from our problem. This is a problem.

But now our children are older and they are going to think about how to move forward. However, what is in our hearts, as well as my community, is that we want to know what our Lord wants. Our Lord keeps us, feeds us everyday and gives us life, but there is something new that I am reflecting upon and feeling and it is that the Earth is coming to an end, that we are destroying the world, destroying the future existence of our children.

We have destroyed the beauty of our world. When I came to the low lands, everything was very green. Now all the greenery has disappeared. It seems as if we do not care about the world we leave behind for our descendants and how they are going to live. It is then that I decided how I wish to learn in the community how we are going to live off the land.

At the beginning, I did not give it any importance. But we are destroying the land, we are destroying the streams. But I became aware that I wanted to know what the future would be for our children, what they are going to eat from now on. If we give our children money, if we put money into their hearts, they get used to this. This is the problem that I feel in my life and we need to know how we can solve this problem.

If we say that it is no good that I look for money, then I cannot attend the meetings of the communities. If I stay at home I cannot do my work. It is necessary to learn how to use what there is in the world. This is what I have felt in my heart. I am getting ready to know how to use it, not to deceive ourselves in our hearts, and to have our food. I feel that this is the important problem. Another type of problem, fighting between us or with the authorities, it is really difficult.

10. Antonia. What does your heart tell you? What very difficult problems have you encountered? How have you confronted these?

There is no problem with my husband; we are both working with one single heart. Where I feel there are significant problems is in our people. The problem is that there are many ways in which the powerful parties are dominating us, they dominate our companions, this is a huge problem and it is getting stronger.

The other main problem is that our people are getting used to it. They are deceiving us a lot and present us with other ways of life for our children. But, because we are there, we also make an effort, as much as we can, to teach them, to guide them. This is perhaps the work that was left to us when we committed ourselves to this work, even if there are problems, but we are going to make the effort.
There is another very big problem among the women. Many of them are being deceived; many have been hurt by the government. In so far as their faith is concerned, there is not a problem. There are areas in which they are in peace and united in the community to follow our Lord. But then the one who disorganises everything, who harms everything appears, and that is a problem. We are going to make an effort and show our commitment. With our children inside our homes there is no problem, our children are at peace. Our Lord, according to his teaching, helps us with these problems. It is perhaps the Holy Spirit that gives us the wisdom and helps us to solve these problems. And we do not worry about this, but pray to God, our father.

11. On your path to make faith your life, in which you have committed yourself to searching for the dignity of the poor, what do you want the Church to do, a Church that you yourselves are a part of? What would you like to change or wish it were different or for it to become stronger? How would you like the Church to commit itself to working for justice and life?

The thing I would like, and that is why I have done the courses, is for others to do the courses too. With regards to our church, let me explain. We are tselteles, farmers, the indigenous population; we have our own customs and traditions. We work with our feet and hands to produce our food. This teaching of what the life of our Lord was like was given to us from those in the Mission, you learnt this at school. You adapt this teaching to the life of our village. We live in a difficult region. We realised this in the last meeting in our church courses. We listened to what Jesus taught us and there is a slight problem. The courses, or the literature of the courses, are very well organised into sections and teach us a lot about the life of the Church. But we listen to the courses and feel that the teaching has been changed. For example, in what we have just heard during the course, that Jesus received baptism when he was grown-up and we receive it when we are young, why? It seems that we do not know when and how this change took place. The community has a problem when we talk about this sacrament, this belief, so it has to be done because they have not experienced it like that, they do not listen to it completely. Every Sunday, we see the prepared religious tuition, where we listen to what we have to do. Even though it is explained very well, because it is only a short time, it is forgotten when we go back to working with the milpa. Later, there are other things that they listen to, they see other things, and as they have not learnt it, what they have to say, what they have to do and what they have to think is not in their hearts. They do not ask about it and it seems that the Word of God is not understood very well. What I would like for this group, where we are searching for the way forward, is for the Word of God to be made known in the community, in the group. What group? I do not know in which group. We are the believers and as part of the believers, how do we do it?

There comes a time in which, in the community, we look for the way forward, to continue in peace. We do not argue, we do not deceive each other, we do not harm others; this is the right thing to do. The thing that is very important, that Jesus said, is that we know that we have our Lord. We need to proclaim that it is our Lord who tells us that what we are doing is good. But as I said before, there are other groups, and our people enter these groups and forget what our Lord has said.
That is why we have to make an effort to get courses for them. If they enter a party, or become representatives of any given group or whatever, we need to know that they know our Lord and we need them to continue progressing, depending on the work they have. This is what I feel about our community. I would like us, as believers, to do our work well. We say that in the world there are two paths: the one which leads us to evil and the one that leads us to kindness. There is a moment when I would like the community to have one single heart, but this is difficult, everyone is different in their beliefs.

12. And, speaking about the Church in the world, what do you say about the Church in the world and the Dioceses? What would you like them to do? What do they want them to do?

Recently, we reflected upon the word of the Church, the Universal Church\(^6\), on how at each level anyone who has responsibility has a different way of feeling and a way of seeing with regards to what they feel and see. It is a big problem for us to tell them, “Look, this is what we have to do.” No, because that is the way it is in their hearts and it seems that our Lord wants it that way. Why? Because he believed the words they told him. In other words, we want the Church to open up the path, according to what each community needs. I listened to the words of the 2nd Vatican Council, who said, “for each community, there are different ways that our Lord speaks to them.” This word is very good. The path is open so that, as we say in Bachajón, we can say our prayers in the way we feel God our Lord.

But in the church we reach agreements that have limitations. Where there are Church agreements, we cannot do what we want. What we want is for the Church to listen. But when we speak it does not listen to our opinion. If we, the deacons ask you, “Father Felipe, we want this, what do you say?” It seems that it is not possible, because we have to ask the Bishops if it is acceptable. There is an agreement, and if we say that it is all right and later what we wanted is not acceptable, then there is a problem.

If there is something that we say, “we, the deacons, think that we are going to do this,” and it did not turn out very well, our Bishop and others from the Church will say, "it was not a good idea for them to do that." Then there is no freedom, or “libertad” as they say in Spanish. It is important that we do it and if it does not turn out well, we can do it again in a different way. But it is not like that, instead that path is closed because you cannot do what you want to. Why do I say this? I can see that if you are here in Bachajón and if the Provincial, the Superior says, “go to Jalisco,” then you obey. You cannot say, "I want to work for my village here in Bachajón, I want to work in Bachajón," like Father Mardonio, who grew old here, lived here until he passed away. This is what I would like from the Church. If there is an end to the agreements or if there is no end, the Church has to think about this issue in depth, and also its leaders, because we follow the path of its leaders, and it is not right for

\(^6\) Here, it is referring to a letter where the Bishop informs them of the decision of the Interdicasterial Commission (made up of five Roman discaesterial: The Congregations for the divine Worship and discipline of the Sacraments, the Clergy, the Catholic Education, the Bishops, the State Secretary and the Commission for Latin America, as well some Mexican cardenals and the President of the Episcopal Conference) where they prohibit the ordaining of more permanent deacons among the indigenous communities of the Diocese.
me to say, “I am leaving the church and doing what I want.” We are weakening it again. We all need to listen to what others think. If we tell the Pope to “do this” first he asks for an opinion and he cannot do it straight away because there are many people leading in the world. It is all right to obey, but we ask them to please explain things to us. There are things that we too would like or I would like us to do. This is what I interpret and which is in my heart. The same happens in the chapel in my community: if I tell the community, “let’s do this,” perhaps the community will say “no, we cannot, let us do this instead”. The good thing is that we enter a dialogue; the path is for us to create a dialogue, for each of us to find the right path. If I do what I want to do and if it is not what our Lord wants, then I am deceiving myself. If they say, “all right,” let us do that and we will see what happens. And we ask our Lord for it to turn out all right. This is what I believe.

What do I ask the Church? That we reflect on how to do things. If each local Church, each Diocese has something it wants to agree on, the Bishop acts upon it. This is what we have just said, that Jesus is our root. If it is for the good of our people and they get angry, it is the same problem that you are going to ask me about later. What do you say to those who will live in the rich countries, to the people who have all the wealth? If the Bishop does not ask the rich nations for an opinion and does what he pleases, he distances himself from his people. The rich form one group and the poor another. This is what happens when the Church says, “you do not obey on how we have to help each other.” If we support the poor, then the Church is divided. On what side is the Bishop going to be? The Bishop is in the middle of the two. If there are the rich and the poor, then he says, “do not harm your companions,” which is the same as Jesus says, “do not harm others, help them, if you are somebody who knows a lot, then help others.” But this is where we find a small difficulty, a problem, because we start by saying that the poor are stupid, they do not want to work, they do not know how to work, that... depending on what we think. That is the problem. That is why our work in the world is how to become believers of our Lord. It is what I feel, where we have to make an effort and have to help the poor. That is why Jesus, as far as I know of his life, told the poor, “I free them from their suffering.” And he was not afraid. He was not saddened, but fought on until his death.

13. Antonia, what would you like your Church to do, not only for your community, which is very important, but also with regards to the Universal Church and the Diocese?

When I heard this I felt that where it needs to be stronger is in the Word of our Lord and for the Word of our Lord to be followed in each community and for our teachings and our understanding to come from this. As we have a lot of children today, we have to live in our culture so that our life can follow the correct path at this time. In the same way as the parishes, which give us courses. The courses we are teaching are really good. The Word of God, our Lord in these days is moving forwards, but it needs to grow more in each of the communities in which we are present and the Word of God, our Lord needs to be strengthened. This way our children will also learn more. In the same way as our ancestors had great wisdom, we need to be united in the Word of God our Lord so that the lives of our children are not ruined and for each community to progress along the right path. If we do not have the Word of God, our Lord then many different problems arise, many confrontations. Perhaps,
other kinds of things may appear, even a drunken state, which does not have the Word of God our Lord.

It is ideal that there are courses for our people to progress in each of the communities. And not only this, in the same way as the word from our Diocese reaches us, it is also good that we receive the courses in our communities. I can see them and I can learn. And it is for no other reason than to help us all to improve. For each of us to find our help, our support, like in baptism, marriage and everything else. The courses they are giving to the people to improve, to feel looked after, to know they are loved, are very good.

14. From this life itself, what would you like different groups of society to do? What would you like those from rich countries to do?

When I was growing up everyone survived as best they could. At the beginning there were not many of us. Now our numbers are increasing and what I would like our people to know that the world is coming to an end. It is not only for our food. If we only searched for food, the world would not end. But wealth has been in our world since the time of Jesus, even before Jesus. Before, when we were in the low lands, in our ethnic community, we did not buy things, we exchanged things with people that had other goods. If they have a chicken, if they have a pig, if they have beans, they exchange them.

It seems that in the past, before Jesus Christ, that is the way the communities ran. What they had, they exchanged. But now, since money appeared in the world, that is when we started to see the rich, another country looks for money. But if you do not look for it, if we tell our people “do not have earning money as an objective, look for food”, they cannot survive that way, they have to search for money, because the rich make everything work with money. This is what I would want for my people, but we will have to change when such a big problem arises in the world, if the world starts to come to an end….

As for Mexico, well it has been at war for almost 500 years and there comes a time when it becomes a big problem. Why? Because of this way of life. People do not realize that they should only search for their food, because they are all one big family. We cannot find this because today we find ourselves deep within the way of life of the USA, Mexico and other rich countries in the world. If we talk about the dollar and the euro in Europe, they do not want this wealth to come to an end. Why? The rich say, “if money disappears, the poor die with it,” “that is why we have to give them some help.” Apparently, this is what the Word of the Lord says, but it is something else. I have considered what Vicente Fox said, “I help the elderly.” It seems to be what Jesus had said. He gives money to the elderly, gives money to the poor in the “opportunities programme,” he gives food to the children. What he says is what our Lord said, they say. But it is not only that which is in his heart, but the wealth of the world. That is what the rich world cannot understand.

Tax. Every year the price of things increases. Why? Because the government says, “the budget has to increase because we need a lot of aid for our people, there is a lot of building to be done in our communities, or we need to do a lot of things in our country and I have to pay more to the employees because the prices of things are
increasing." Money is doing its evil work in the world. We cannot tell the rich countries to "change your way of life," because it has already entered their hearts, and it seems that our Lord wants it that way. That is why he wants us to reflect upon this. How are we going to survive? How did our Lord tell us we need to live? But we cannot, because I am searching for a little money, I want a little money to be able to travel. The same applies to our brothers and sisters in Madison: I need a lot of money to travel. Why? Because we travel with the company. We need to pay for the plane, the means of transport. The company cannot say, "You, who preach the Word of God, I am going to take you free of charge." They cannot. They seem to be helping others, but are searching for wealth. This is what I feel in my community. In our community, people want us to search for things that will help us improve our lives. The same as now, with what we see in the analysis: the other groups in southern Latin America want the Banco Sur, it seems that they put people first, but then a rich one will enter again. Why? That is the way it is, they go in. It is the work of the deceiver in the world and one can see the work of each of the leaders.

If the Pope constantly tells the rich that they cannot do certain things, they are going to block the path. If our Bishop Felipe constantly talks about what companies and other nations are doing here in Chiapas, they are going to become enemies.

What are we afraid of? Yes, for example, we tell you, Father Felipe, "what you are doing is not right, what you say is not the Word of God, what you are doing is not the Word of God." Then, you become saddened and say that perhaps it is true that it is not the Word of God. Then, fear enters our hearts and we back down. That is why we let our community consider what they want to do.

15. Antonia, what would you like the different groups of society to do? What would you like those in the rich countries to do?

In our communities, in the whole of Mexico, there are many problems. Why do these problems exist? Because our community no longer wants to live off mother Earth? What people want to do now is to live a life with money? But our Lord, when he fed a crowd did so with two loaves of bread, with two fish and everybody ate. That is why our Lord kept that sacrament, not because he cannot feed us now. He can do so, through his own power that he gives his children, to us, who still do not know many things, that is where I would like our world to change. The truth is that we remember God if he accompanies us and gives us our food. That is why when we eat the food that he gives us, our learning and our minds are complete, and our minds and our hearts are wide open. But, because there are many problems in our communities, we cannot eat only with what the land gives us and we do not reflect upon what is happening in our minds or in our hearts. The rain, the sun are being given to us by God our Lord, but it is necessary that we convert our hearts if we are to find our true life and we will also help the world to live longer and for it to continue giving us the strength and give our descendants strength, and that the future sons of God do not die, as they are yet to come. This is what I ask for.

2.4 Manuel Cruz
Age: 38, his mother tongue is Tseltal. Married and with four children. He worked for more than 15 years as a Catechist and later participated in the processes of land recovery and the accompanying and counselling of the indigenous organization "Yomblej" which appeared in the territory covered by Bachajón Mission.

Interviewer: Lic. Francisco Meneses

1. What commitments for justice and a dignified life for all have been acquired as a Christian community and which, in your opinion, has been helped by the committed Christian faith? What are the commitments that you can see for justice and a decent life for the community we work with?

I believe that this is quite extensive and honestly, at the beginning, when I started working with the Mission, it was a commitment that I acquired gradually while I started to understand the Word of God. First as a Catechist, later as jColtaywanej (a person who promotes the rights of the indigenous population), and then as a Jucawal (coordinator of catechists between different areas) which at that time was not called that. The Word of God opened up a great door for me, firstly by getting to know myself, as a person, understanding my situation, understanding the situation of families, of the people, first of all, in my family, listening to the voice of my parents with the history of my grandfather. That was a very difficult situation at first, and at the same time very sad. We felt this because through the injustices that existed at that time or even before the time of my grandparents, those two ways of living, of how the authors of the Bible lived it, of how God's people are presented in the Scriptures and how the prophets preached the Word of God through the different means. After listening to all this, the Word of God and the story of my grandparents, the marginalization, the injustices, the slavery they had to endure, it was like a kind of... sometimes my voice gets very frail when I say it because it is not only that but when I listened to their voices, when I listened and how they told me, how it starts to break your heart, my grandfather and the family and the people, that sometimes you have to give your own blood, you have to give your life for the piece of land where you are, but at the same time you were removed from this land, because we do not come from heaven and descend upon the earth, but we are from here, we are natives, our grandparents, our ancestors are from here.

I compared it a little with what the Pharaohs did to Joseph, it remains implanted in my memory. Joseph, who was the man who planted the seed in Egypt, went to live there without knowing, without thinking, only because his evil brothers sold him. This is where this entire situation stems from. Not because the lands did not belong to him, nothing belonged to him because he fell into the hands of those who had power. That is where the Word of God comes from.

My story: I am one of those; I am a son of the Mayas. I am a descendant of the Mayas, who were the owners of the lands and suddenly a powerful force arrived and placed them in a critical situation within their own way of life and within their environment, within their actual territory, so to speak.

On a personal note, I tried to join together these two very paradoxical situations, even though it should not be that way, but the total opposite. We are from here; we are the ones who should have, in some way, a social, family, economic well-being in every sense and not the other way round. Because we are from here and that is what happened to them, nothing else since they left because of the hunger and already
since the Old Testament, and they were enslaved only because Joseph had already
died, he left his descendant. After studying the stories of Moses a little and of all the
others who were servants of God, I became committed to God. Perhaps, with the
very little I knew, as I can hardly read, I can hardly write, I hardly ever went to school.
Three years of schooling. One starts to think that this cannot be so, there has to be a
way, because, after studying all the Old Testament, God does not abandon you, God
said this and I believe he will keep his word. So, God, it needs to be this way and
needs to be just. And quite honestly I believe he has been just with me and with
others in his own way, because he guided me in the objectives that I set myself
during my hard work and I am never going to stop being thankful to God.

Let me go a little further back in time. The question at that time was that the
Bachajón Mission gave us encouragement; it gave us strength to take the Word of
God into our hearts. Because we, the Mayas, the indigenous population, had not
studied the Bible, we had never heard of it because nobody knew how to read. I think
learning to read has been a blessing for me, also for the people and for my family.
The Mission, through its work, encourages us to do courses, workshops in the
catechist courses that they do. This really filled me, perhaps partly with joy and partly
with great sadness. I always do it that way. But I always maintain my faith, a faith in
God which I still keep today. Although, like anyone else, we may sin.

In this lapse of time, I started to preach the Word of God. To tell the people, "we
need to do this; we need to look for a way to escape from this predicament in which
we find ourselves, because God does not want this. This was the Word I conveyed to
the people, but, where do I get this from?, of course, studying the Bible; I saw that he
never abandoned Israel, he was always at its side, as long as the people had faith
and were motivated. Because God says this quite clearly, God does not help you
when you do not want his help, as you have to help yourself for him to help you. I
think this time was very very important, a time when I learnt the Word of God, in the
Old Testament, and what life is, history, what it says. I am not going to go into what
it was like, the idea I had with my parents, for my parents and what they did, what
they did to them, because that is another story.

But, back in the time when I was a Catechist I began to understand the Word of God.
At first, I found it very sad, on the other hand, the joy, the joy of having understood, of
having heard the Word of God through the Old Testament. And through my faith, I
began to acquire the strength to give me encouragement. This arrived, just as I had
been working for three or four years in this, preaching the Word of God; do not be
discouraged because God is with us, with us who are poor, us who are sad, one day
he will brighten up our hearts, he will give us something, I do not know when, but
something, something that will fill us with joy.

Like everyone in the world, even the greatest prophets, we all at some time or other,
are disillusioned, and you say, "Do not abandon me, do not leave me alone.” And
no, he did not abandon me. There were people without any land, without anything.
At that time I felt a little disillusioned. Sometimes you lose your faith, the moment
does not come. Yes, I fought a lot with the authorities as a Catechist, to get some
land for those who did not have any. But there was no answer. That was back in the
years 87, 88, 89. I was greatly disillusioned. Then I said, "No, I am not going to
continue. But, one must find a way of collaborating with your fellow man, I do not
have anything either, I have nothing to offer them, nothing." Sometimes the Bible said, "to follow God, you have to abandon all your possessions," I have nothing, what am I going to abandon? I tried to escape from the hands of God or from the task that he held me. I went to the jungle to search for a land. But my conscience, my remorse did not abandon me, and I was the one who told them not to despair, and it was me who was despairing. I was not happy. Yes, I obtained land in the jungle, in Chamizal, but I was not happy deep within myself, because I had abandoned my people. That was back in 91, 92; the time when we started our fight, our fight through the social organisations. Xanich' already existed at that time, in 92, and we organised a great march. In 1991 I went to the jungle and in that same year I returned with 20 hectares of land. I managed to obtain 20 hectares of a land in the jungle, they gave it to me. But my conscience would not leave me in peace, as I had abandoned my people here, the people I had told what God was, God loves us and God is going to do something for us.

They came for me. I came home one day and they said, return because people are asking for you here. As soon as I heard this, I returned with my family. I did not care about the 20 hectares I had in the jungle and I returned again, without any land, to live with these people, to encourage them again.

That is how my faith started and that is how I have shared it. After that, what had to happen, happened. The uprising of 94 and we did not miss the opportunity. There, I felt the hand of God, yes, now I feel that he did not abandon me there. After having been a little disillusioned, "There you have it, take it." And we did, not only in the community where I live, but also in those places where I have been during the preaching of the Word of God as a catechist, (I was the head of the catechists). We invited them together with Pepe. It was a great feeling in that house, in the room where the actual administration is, that is where the agreement was signed, that is where we started to develop the agreement back in June or July. We were delighted, "praise be to God, this is the moment," that is how I managed to comfort the people. Although the people, as always, were frightened. "We have studied the Word of God so much, remember this," I reminded them, "remember that God also did this, he also did this with his people. We are his people."

This is the answer to a part of your question and the truth; I have answered you with great emotion and joy. Later a lot of land was bought for the communities of Sitala', we have Yaxte', we have San José Nap'ilha', we have San Francisco Duraznal, we have Suspiro, Pomiltic, a lot of communities here in Sitala', in the Encanto, in Wolol Chan, in the Unión, and I feel happy.

2. Are these commitments places where you can meet with God? In what way?

I think so, firstly, it is a commitment that I gradually acquired, and the nicest thing is that we connected very well with the people. Because it is not only a question of reading the Bible, reading the Scriptures and reading the signs of history. Once you know all this, once all the suffering of our grandparents, my grandparents, is in your heart, your head, your soul, like the other story of the Sacred Scriptures, you cannot escape from that. But I felt that you could not distance yourself from the responsibility because God also said that he created us in his likeness. If all the people you see, the suffering, pain, what they say about their history, because they
have nothing, because they also want a decent life, you cannot escape. I, Manuel, am not simply going to escape. But it is a commitment that fills you, not just any commitment... it is something that gradually filled me as I accomplished it. And, who does it have to be accomplished with? With the people, because according to the Scriptures, the people are the true likeness of God. It is there where you find the essence of life, which is where God is, he too suffered. And when you make comparisons between the Old and New Testaments and with Jesus himself, who is the master of masters, as the son of God, as a baby, who was born through the Holy Spirit. How much more can we suffer? But at the same time, be able to recognise this person as the image of God. And those encounters have helped me to become more relaxed, to do away with my anger. And when I see that God is really love, he is not only God, God is not only what you see in an image, but you see him walking, you see him alive, you see him suffering. It is then that I realised that this God is alive, and lives with us. You ask me how I fulfilled those commitments. It was this way.

Today, every time I go to Yaxte’ (my community) is I am relieved when I see the people, although they have all their problems, which is logical. I am relieved when I see children playing in an open field, in the streets, on the grass, on the pastures. That is where you find it, and I continue to thank God, "thank you again, because you did not abandon me when I was down, thank you." That is how I thank God, because now you can see them playing, you see them sharing with others. Sometimes the children come to my house saying "I brought you this bamboo or I brought you this banana, or I brought you... whatever, an orange, this is for you. Because that is how their parents have taught them. Some of them come to visit me when I arrive. This is very rewarding for me, it fills me with joy. And that is to a certain extent what you asked, and those are signs that the Holy Spirit works that way, because in some way, the Holy Spirit is in your heart although sometimes they forget what the struggle was like, what the improvement was like. Sometimes we allow ourselves to be influenced because we already have a piece of milpa; we already have the beans, the corn. I am already working in the Pueblo, I can earn my keep, and sometimes I forget about God. Actually, this morning I went to Yajalón early in the morning and on the way I remembered to "give thanks to Our Lord," and at the same time I started to cry with joy because God loves me that way. I began to thank God, "and I do not know how I can repay him, I do not know how I can thank him." That is how God rewards us, I feel that, and it is what I said about happiness, they are the signs of the Holy Spirit, they are the signs that God gives his people but we do not know how to receive. Sometimes we are distracted and good things come to our lives which we do not value. This is the attitude that the Holy Spirit gives us and encourages us to continue.

After all this time, difficulties appear, a time of disillusionment, a little of everything arrives. There are moments in which you become very sad. There are moments in which you become very happy because things turned out well. But because of that same compliance we sometimes become weaker as people, given that we are only human. But suddenly the Holy Spirit picks you up again, and precisely today, at this moment in time, I feel happy because there is a very important thing: they are things that you are going to tell God to do for you, for your family, for your children and for these things to be fulfilled. In other words, that you are presented with this opportunity, you are presented with this experience of how you have asked for this.
That is how it has happened to me. I am not able to describe many of the things here. As an example: on one occasion when I left the community, when I was administering the land, I asked God to give me a little wisdom, and a little understanding to solve this case, to solve this matter. And I feel that he has obliged me, he has given me the opportunity to feel happy for doing what I want, and why not? I also asked God, "well, if I can, Lord, give me a little to live on, give me a house or something," and now I realise that I have a house, I have my children and I leave peacefully. I do not live with money, I do not live with a lot of money, I live day-to-day but I already have my house.

3. In all this work that you have carried out, all these signs that you have discovered from God, what are the aspects of your faith that have become clearer, stronger for you, in how you understand the life of Jesus or in interpreting the face of God you mentioned previously? What aspects of your faith have become stronger?

Possibly the aspect that has become the strongest at the moment is that you ask that a certain point be fulfilled and you ask this with faith, and really there is no doubt, no possible doubt that God does fulfil what he promises. In this case I asked to be able to work with people in a certain way. And my personal life, what I had asked him for with faith. There are two very important things left, two aspects: the first aspect is as a community; what one has learned with the Word of God and the commitment that this is fulfilled. This is a very important aspect. And with regards to the personal aspect: the experience that I asked him for, to a certain extent, this too was fulfilled. They are two very important things, although there is also a story of a personal aspect, health. I nearly died, I asked God and here I am, and those are very important things.

4. On the path of commitment, what are at the greatest difficulties you have encountered? What have you experienced and how have you confronted them?

We are human beings and there are many obstacles but I believe that I have gradually solved these because I have faith in God. Although I am this, I feel that God does not reject me because of it, because if I ask for forgiveness, he has understood me, and he has even given me more. As a human being there are many obstacles but with a lot of hope we can solve them, always being positive, to search for a solution, that leads towards a constructive life. Faith has always helped me; it has always been the faith in God.

5. From that life of faith and your commitment to justice in favour of the poor, what do you ask from your Church today? What do you think should change or become stronger? How would you like your commitment to justice and life to be?

There are many things that I would discuss or rather present. There are many churches. Here, in the Church where we are, in the Compañía where we are. There are other churches that do not see, that cover their eyes when faced with the life of the poor, with the suffering and they only focus on the beautiful aspects of life, on the beautiful things that God gives us. But one forgets that as human beings we can
have difficulties and through these difficulties we become disillusioned. I am not referring to the Jesuit Church nor to the... but there are churches that are a more conservative, there are churches that do not see the suffering. This is a way of escaping from the hands of God or from the presence of God. To a certain degree comparing it with what I wanted to do, I wanted to go to the jungle, as I said before, and I had the opportunity of having 20 hectares of land and I would have stayed there, I would have settled down there, but it was not to be that way, at least I do not think so. This is what the other churches have not been able to see. I think this is essential, because in a way, like a lot of people who picture heaven as a paradise, if we combine our hearts, our faith, our belief in Jesus, then that is paradise, that is heaven, that it is the dignified life that we can have and nothing else, not to be anything else, as I would say, is to be blind in one eye. Yes, only to see with one eye and not with both. When you see with one eye, you can see but not everything. I believe that the Church should have both eyes to be able to distinguish and see what is beautiful, marvellous about the life of the rich, which is also valid, why not? Those who have obtained their wealth legitimately, fair enough. But also the Church can see, reach and move the hearts of the rich as Jesus did with Zacchaeus who had a lot of money, he was a jc’anpata’ winic (tax collector), but he was affected by it and it made him look towards the poor, "anyway, do you know what? I am giving you back five times what I have stolen from you, what I had taken of your money." Perhaps it is not the money they should give us back, but for it to enter their hearts. Not because they are not sons of God, they are also sons of God, but they have a different way of seeing things than the way we see things and a different way of living to the way we live. I believe that the Church in which we are, the Mission, which I thank God for it to have come here, has made us stronger, has given us life, and we are working for our brothers and sisters and that is the most important thing.

6. What do you ask from the society in which you live and what do you ask from the people who live in the rich countries of the world?

I think I would ask the society in which we are living, in which I was lucky to be chosen to live, to have understanding and faith. I would ask that we have faith, not only in the individual but also a collective faith, a faith that will lead us to organise ourselves better, to understand each other better, to not create conflicts among each other as a society, to live like brothers and sisters as Jesus asked us to do. To live like friends or brothers and sisters, not like blood brothers but in a way that we may feel supported by our neighbours and by other communities. I think this is very hopeful. More than anything else, to have faith, to have the faith that with faith we can move forward, we can achieve a more just and dignified society.

With regard to the people, to the society that has a higher economic level, for them to open their hearts and, as I said before, that we should no longer see the beauty of wealth or money, but for it to touch their heart, to feel that some day we have to leave this paradise, this beautiful world and if we do not know how to appreciate it and if we only live hidden and within the world of money, we cannot enjoy life to its fullest, the beauty of nature, the beauty of having a friend like you, in the same way as having a brother like others, or being able to have a friend in Africa, the USA, in Europe, anywhere. This is the most beautiful thing in the world. For me, my friends are a priceless treasure, friendship has no price.
2.5 Abelino Guzmán Jiménez

Age: 52, married, with six children. He worked translating the Bible into Tzeltal for over ten years. Today he is coordinating the programme to strengthen culture (which is a training programme for the young Tzeltal population) and participates in the translation and inter-culturalization of the Liturgy. He has a deep knowledge of his language and culture.

Original in Tzeltal

1. What commitments for justice and a dignified life for all have been acquired as a Christian community, i.e. helped by the Christian faith and a shared faith?

My commitment for justice, for my other companions within the same faith, a faith in Christ, is for there to be a way for my Tzeltal companions to have a strong heart, for them to realise that we are all human beings, that we have the same rights, that together we can move forward wherever we are as inhabitants of the Mexican territory. Also, for them to know that because we are the indigenous population we cannot be rejected, and if they do so, then this should not be. My commitment is for there to be one single heart in the communities, to work for Justice. They need to reason so that they do not forget that our ancestors had their own ways of solving their problems, of searching for a solution to their problems and what is more important, to live in peace. If there is a solution to problems, then peace exists among them. They do this so that men and women find life. Why do I do this? Because I have faith. There are those that understand this, there are those that understand very well the knowledge that is given to them. It has helped my heart and my mind a great deal; importance is given to the way we live our culture. Because, the Tzeltal culture is very organised, there are also those who give advice, when we speak about faith. For us it is something which we want for it to take place, we want it to happen. Faith is having hope.

2. Are these commitments places where you can meet with God? In what way?

There are times in which I am disillusioned, there are times when I see I have worked hard, first with the translation (of the Word of God), and it seems that I found God there, my heart found encouragement there. But I start to reflect in my heart. Here or there (in the translation of the Bible), did I finish what God asked me to do? I still cannot see if God is in heaven. I feel God in my life. God. For example, if something beautiful comes from my labour, whether it is in my work, in my house, it is God himself who moves my heart. Years ago when I started working, I was very ill but every time I finish my work I see its beauty; and even though I was ill, I tell God that he has given me wisdom. I have something here in my heart, but that is thanks to Him. He showed me the path, he gave me the light to be able to do my work, so that I could help my community, I could teach them, make them see what God has given me and us.

And if you ask me about my commitment, I have no commitment. I feel that I have never been committed. I do what my heart tells me to do. I do what my heart tells me, that is where my work lies. It is what I feel is right. Sometimes I also feel disillusioned if I think my work is not worth doing. Even among my companions, among the very people who are working here, it seems that my work as a translator has no value. But my heart tells me that they only say this because they do not want
to recognise this path, only through envy because God gave me the power to learn Tseltal. You might say, how are you not going to learn Tseltal if you are a Tseltal? To learn Tseltal is to understand it in depth. For example, there are the ritual greetings, the Prayer of our mothers and fathers. I investigated everything, I was not afraid and I asked our parents. I listened to their words, my heart told me that it was beautiful to see all this, beautiful to listen to it, it is wonderful to say the Prayer according to our culture because God gave me the understanding to do this and I believe it will always be useful. It seems that he made me grow; it seems that this is my life.

Up to now, that is the way I am, as if I did not know which way to turn. In these last few days my heart has been telling me something, "Yes, you can, yes you can." The day before yesterday, a prayer was said in a meeting, and it moved my heart and I started to dance. It seems that God told me to "do it like that, dance like that, dance like that." I believe that nobody sees the face of God but it is as if we felt it, as if we saw it. For example, I am going to the captain's house and I feel very nervous, I have a lot of things in my heart. Perhaps, because of that I did not sleep very well in San Cristóbal de las Casas, because my heart told me, "I am going to play, when I finish with Paco, I will go to play, I will cure my feet tonight," and I told my wife, "what do you say?" "Shall I go to play or shall I go to the Captain's house?" "It would be better if you went to the Captain's house." What does that mean? God told me, "Go to the Captain's house." If you go to play, you might easily break the bones in your feet and you will not be able to see the Festival and you may not have time until tomorrow. I do not have time because yesterday the Principal, Antonio, came to my house to see me. Why? Because he is fasting. Like this example, where do I find God? There, where there is peace, where the captain is fasting, that is where peace lies, there you drink a cup of coffee, there you listen to nice words. You do not hear if there are court cases, you do not hear if there are problems with lands. It seems that God is there. I feel my heart is at home there. And it does not mean that I do not like beautiful things, I do know how to work with this to. Also, if it is an organisation for a festival (the traditional festival) I know this but it does not fill my heart. This does fill my heart. Therefore, when Father Pepe was the Captain, all his words came to me, "I am going to make your work successful" (as a Captain) and I wanted to also go to the house of the other Captain, but no, "I am going to make your work successful", because that is what God tells me, "it is here that you must work." I asked many people. I asked my wife, "What do you say? I am going to the other Captain's house." "You have work in the school," she said (the school is the place where Father Pepe is having the festival). I asked Roselia, "now that you can, you can both look after yourselves," I said strongly. "Oh no, you must stay here, if you abandon us we do not know what we will to do." That is enough. I do not want them to say, "please, stay here." I do not like that. When they are saying this to me, "finish your work," for it to be complete, I felt very happy. This remained in my heart, I will never forget it. That is it; that is where I find God. It is God who is here. "There goes Pepe," (in other words, there goes the one who does the work of the Captain), "it is the work of our Lord," you say, there is peace. It is there that I find God, where there are festivities. But for me to have commitments? I really do not want to have commitments. I am not that way. I do not commit myself. I never said that I would commit myself. If I say that I will do something it is because it is already done, that is

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7 The "Captain" is a person with authority in the traditional Tseltal culture, and this person organises a festival for the patron saint.
different. It is not because I am committed. I say what my heart tells me, that is what I do, it is not, as I said, a promise. It is not that I promise to do this, no. I simply do as much as I can, what my heart tells me.

3. What signs of the Holy Spirit have appeared in that life of commitments and what do you consider as being especially important? Attitudes, comments, a way of life and the involvement of other people

It is the spirit that moves the heart, I do not know if it is the Holy Spirit. What signs? What signs have appeared in your commitment? As I said before, I have never had any commitments in my life; my life is not mine, but God's. I have not bought it, it is not mine. My life, is like me, if something needs to be done, that is what is done. I do not know. If I am working alone, then maybe it is not the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit moves my heart. We already looked at that example, "I'm going to the captain's house, that is where the Spirit is," that is all right. There is work, we cannot say that there is no work but this also fills my work for me to do it, "to be able to do my work well I must be spiritually complete and healthy." That is the way I have heard you call it, and I also say that.

What is it like? Is it in the work of the community? Yes, that is not there in the work of the communities when you arrive. But go and look at a community. Everyone is working: some are cutting firewood, others are grinding the corn; that is where the spirit is, it embraces you, it greets you. They never do that in your house, we never do that here on the corner. Why? Because when you arrive you brighten up their heart. It shows you a way forward. When he goes to your house you will do the same. As I say to Paola, "Paola, look when we go to visit, they kill the chicken for us to eat, but when they come to us (to the village of Bachajón) how do we receive them? This is when Paola realises, "we have to give them some soup, even if it is not our turn because it is not the community. The spirit that is shown there, "our heart at home." You arrive to a place where there is a Spirit and this changes you. So what happens? It is that you are going to leave your own life there. That is where we see it in the community.

4. What aspects of your faith have become clearer, highlighted, strengthened in the way you see the life of Jesus or interpret the face of God?

I am working. I started this work years ago. I have something in my heart, something I have to give. There is something for which I am still not prepared, something is still not ready in my heart, in my head and heart. With this work that I am doing now there is something that is going to come of it, which will be something that can be used in other jobs. We do not know in which jobs, I am building up my strength here. I worked in the CEDIAC (Centre for Indigenous Rights, A.C.), we solve the problems (in the indigenous communities), we worked on several problems, (although I did not solve them, but I saw it, I heard it because I translated into Tseltal). Later, I started to translate the Bible and now I am in the Cultural Strengthening Team and that is where my faith is strong. We cannot say that I do not receive a wage for my work in the Mission but it is not my wage. I can find other attractive things, but these are not interesting for my life. I am here because of my work, I do not feel that I am tied to my job, my mind and my heart are not imprisoned, that is the sign of my faith with God which has left me here. God has not moved me yet. We do not know if God will
move me from here, I am preparing my mind and my heart here. We do not know if God will take me to the other side. I would like to work in Human Rights, in the Carers of Mother Earth, I would like to be in everything but I have it here. My life is here. I can be in Human Rights, in the Carers of Mother Earth, in the Spiritual Exercises, in the Migrants, in other things. I have it here in my mind. That is why anything I want, I do not know everything.

It is like one day when the previous municipal president said to me, "what do you want? Do you want the Treasury? Do you want the administration? What do you want?" "One day I thought it would be better if I were sweeping the park." "Why? he said. I am going to ask if it is necessary to have qualifications to be a professional in the Justice Department." Maybe he never asked. I asked him, "Why?" "Because you know a lot about everything." Then, why does he say that, I don't think I am like that. Here I have my brothers and sisters next to me. If they listen to my words, as Jesus said, those are my brothers and sisters, I sit down and speak to them, I tell them what is in my heart, what my heart says. If you want to learn then listen, but this is only to get a little angry later, I speak too loudly. As I said to Roselina, "if you do not learn what I tell you, if you do not learn what discernment is, what will happen? If you do not listen to the words you cannot learn and you cannot give." "You must listen." She gets angry, what am I going to do, that is the way I am, but I am here until God tells me otherwise, "you are not going to tell anybody off anymore, leave this world."

I feel love for human beings in a different way. "If you cannot, go there, go and speak there," that is my way of feeling love for others.

With regards to seeing the face of God in those that do not have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, no, I do not care about that. They are sons of God. I can only see that they are sons of God. I do not tell them, "Why haven't you got faith in God?" No, you cannot do that. One day a shepherd who knew that I used to drink said, "You are not drinking anything." "No, I thank God that I am not drinking anything." That is the way to say it, "I haven't drunk." Why don't you embrace the faith in God? That way you will stop drinking once and for all. Or, do you have faith? Do you have a religion? "I am in a religion," I answered, "but having faith in God does not mean that I should be in a temple shouting, it does not mean that I clap my hands, having faith for me is if I am living," I answered, "if I help my brothers and sisters, I am not going to publish it everywhere, I do not advertise it, I only helped them and that is all, and that I keep quiet. "Faith without deeds is a dead faith," that is what the Bible says. And the poor shepherd remained speechless. That is it. If they have faith in God, I never look at that aspect. If one has faith in God, it does not matter if one enters the church or not. We do not know why, how he does what he does, how beautiful it is, that is the one who has faith in God. And I do not see they believe in God because they go to church every Sunday, that is not what I call having faith in God; that is not the faith in God that my heart says. The person who has faith in God, helps his brothers and sisters, that is the image I have of God.

5. On the path of commitment, which are the greatest difficulties you have experienced? How have you confronted these?
My life involves moving around within society, but not simply making an appearance, instead something cultural. I can advise, advise on the things I know. For example, it may be with a lady, "madam, I think you cannot do this or that." "That's fine." To a principal I could say, "excuse me sir, it seems you cannot do that here, you need this other thing", "of course." Even though I am not the Principal, and that is all. But who is going to direct me? For example, I could say to that man over there, "what you are doing is bad." This is the obstacle that they are in placing in front of me. And how have I confronted these? By trying to be more humble. I do not know if it is pride, but being able to listen, listen and listen. Of course my heart says, "that is not the point!" Listen, listen and listen. The problem I also have is that I do not accept myself. I am not what I think I am; when my companion Beto once said to me, "you are going to give a speech here." My first speech in Castilla. I answered, "what, who am I? I am ill, the deacons are there, you know how I speak." "No, I want it to be you." "How many minutes? Not five, if they give me 15 minutes or half an hour, after that, they are not going to speak, I cannot, I cannot." "Yes you can, you can, you are going to speak about the Acteal Massacre." He told me three times. They gave me this opportunity, I went up and I gave them a little speech. I made the people cry. But when you say, when you ask me, do you think I can do these things? Let me be clear about this, and if you did not ask me, I would not tell you. But I can go even though I find it difficult. "Look Paco, I think this can be done, this can be done." How do you prepare it? What do I say? If it is not Tseltal, he is not going to believe me; they say that I have a very low esteem.

How have I confronted them? It is rather as Francisco Villa once said, "Shoot him and later we will find out." I do the things, later I think about them. I have to ask another person to listen and see if it was okay. "Of course, it is going to be okay. Then, little by little I became stronger, because I did make a mistake. That is how I am confronting it.

6. From that life of faith and commitment with justice for the poor, what do you ask your church? What do you think should change or become stronger? How would you like your commitment with justice and life to be?

I would like the Church to continue its work, to continue making it stronger. The Church is moving forward, the Church already has members, but it needs to remember that there are other companions who are not members of this Church but who need attention, they are also working.

What I would like to change, maybe there is not a lot to change, only to strengthen it, to correct it. For example, there are times when we mock others from different religions; we make fun of them, "why is he there?" "He is a member of the Pentecostal Church." "He is a Sabbathist." If there is a way to present this word, they should choose the words so that they do not make a mistake. It is not to say that they should come with us, we are brothers with them.

With regards to how to behave, how are they to behave if they have not made this way of life their own? When one can offer their commitment to help, this means they could help themselves. This is all I say to them.
7. And from that life, what do you ask of the society in which you live? What do you ask those who live in the rich countries in the world?

The work that was given to them by God when they came to the world is what they have to do. They should use their minds and hearts. Those who are in other countries must not forget that they are also land and rubbish, that we can come off the right path and that we are human beings. Perhaps their work is for them to be aware that God has already given them, they have already found their wealth, but there are other countries who have not received their wealth yet. There are other poor people without food, not even a glass of water a day. They have a lot of food and drink, they have a lot of clothes, while others have absolutely nothing, and that is what they need to do.

2.6 Felipe J. Ali Modad Aguilar, SJ.

Age: 43. He has worked for eight years in the Bachajón Mission. Currently holds the position of the Parish Priest in the Mission. This "interview" was carried out by means of a direct written reply to the questionnaire presented by ALBOAN.

1. What commitments for justice and a dignified life for all have been acquired as a Christian community, i.e. helped by your Christian faith and a shared faith?

The Bachajón Mission has found inspiration in our Christian faith and we have acquired these commitments, among others:
- The collaboration to strengthen the indigenous cultures of the region, with special emphasis on strengthening the use of reading-writing in the mother tongue.
- Helping to create a Local Church from a solid organisation with ecclesiastic ministries that present the true side of its culture and which at the same time has an intercultural liturgy. The ministry of the diaconate has played a key role in the consolidation of the Local Indigenous Church or “Autoctonía Eclesial” and now we are searching for other ways to reach the indigenous presbytery and even the episcopate.
- From the deep spiritual experience present in the Tseltal, we hope to enrich and consolidate this spirituality with the support of the Ignatius spirituality, through the experience of Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, in the Maya-Tseltal language.
- The fight for the repossession of lands which were taken away from the indigenous population in the last century.
- The introduction of alternative production, where the indigenous producers stop offering only the raw materials (giving the profits of transforming these products to the businessmen, intermediaries and industrialists) and create industries, cooperatives and organisations made up of producers that are capable of processing their own products and placing them on the market. This way they obtain the profits from the transformation of their products.
- The rescuing and systemisation of the traditional knowledge in medicine and the necessary training in preventive medicine and to improve health in the community.
- The translation of the Bible into the Tseltal language and its publication, with the support of the Mexican Episcopate.
- Emphasis on the growth and participation of women within the actual parameters of the Maya-Tseltal culture. Facilitate the growth of women's organisations both in economical-production areas and organisational-promotional areas.

2. Are these commitments places where you can meet with God? In what way?

Yes, they are places where we find God. They are very special places, because it is here that I find God working so that we can have a better life, a life in abundance. I find that it is God who brightens up the hearts of those who work and is pleased with the progress that is made. I also find Him in the midst of all the problems of our community, calling us there to work beside him, with our "burning hands."

3. What signs of the Holy Spirit have appeared in that life of commitments and what do you consider as being especially important? Attitudes, community actions, a way of life, the involvement of other people, etc.

One of the signs of the Holy Spirit that I notice is the large number of ministries that have appeared in this Local Indigenous Church. We could speak of more than 25 and what most surprises me in this process is seeing how this ecclesiastical organisation is reproducing many of the characteristics which belong to the organisation of the traditional ministries of Tseltal culture and also seeing the large number of people who are available and who want to train to offer their services or a ministry to their community.

4. What aspects of your faith have become clearer, highlighted and strengthened? In the way you see the life of Jesus, or interpret the face of God, or in receiving the people, or seeing the presence of God in non-Christians...

The effort that Jesus made to support that which gives more life to his people, not to impose a religion that places a heavier load on the human being. The will of God to free the human being of all slavery and anything that does not permit man to develop fully.

The richness with which God portrays himself through the diversity of cultures, languages and religious belief.

The role of the Gospel as a message which aims to strengthen, encourage and rescue the best aspects of the different cultures, so that they can show their best qualities and offer these to humanity as a sign of the beauty of the face of God. In other words: seeing how the Resurrected reconstructs and makes the hearts of the cultures and its people beautiful so that this can be seen in all its splendour.

The mysterious and kenotic presence of this God who wants to portray himself in the faces of the poor, the ill and those who are considered as the "rubbish" of modern society.

5. On the path of commitment, what are at the greatest difficulties you have encountered? How have you confronted them?

One of the greatest difficulties that we have found has been in the strength and deep roots of the social structures of sin, which are really difficult to tackle. On certain occasions we realise that we are not even able to convince ourselves that these can
be changed. To deal with this issue, a continuous and in-depth reflection at the Sunday Catechist meetings on the praxis of Jesus Christ has helped us to open up our awareness when we are called to eliminate those structures and search for those ways that give greater life to our people. The deep understanding that the Crucified Christ is the Resurrected Christ, which without a doubt is the thing that has given us the greatest strength to deal with these situations.

The actual "human condition" which appears in the disorderly trends for a search of power, a search for prestige and to obtain exclusive personal advantages, leaving all common good to one side. These are different ways of behaving which, in just a few days or weeks, destroy the path which has taken years to construct. To combat this the only thing we have found is to maintain a deep experience with God, based on continuous dialogue with a given group, feeding and guiding the spiritual experience and helping to perceive it, having the praxis of Jesus as the main referent. We have seen that when we enter into the day-to-day living and the routine of life, this "human condition" tends to silently wreak its havoc.

6. From that life of faith and commitment to justice in favour of the poor, what do you ask from your Church today? What do you think should change or become stronger? How would you like your commitment to justice and life to be?

I ask that our point of reference be more the Gospel, Jesus, his word, his praxis, the Kingdom of God, than that of the Canonical Right, the signing of the Liturgy, and the hundreds of the ecclesiastical documents; that our criteria to decide has more to do with what gives more life to the poor, with what helps to make people's lives more dignified, with what helps us to identify each other as brothers and sisters between different countries, cultures and religions, and that the value of being in possession or not of "the truth" does not prevail, or the safe keeping of certain interests however "saintly" or "sacred" these may be.

I believe that our Church should open up more to today's world and try to look on this world with God's merciful vision, to be a better friend and companion of humanity, rather than "a primary school teacher" and "mother" (which, at times is more like a stepmother). It needs to be closer, more human, more catholic.

For it to strengthen the idea of being One, by recognising that it is our Lord who unifies it and not its doctrine, that it is He who has called upon us and chosen us and we have not chosen Him.

For it to strengthen the idea of it being Holy, through the humble recognition that its "holiness" comes from its faithfulness to Him, who wanted to get closer to those who have sinned.

For it to strengthen its Catholicism through its ability to recognise the difference and diversity of the different communities and people, through its ability to make everyone get on with each other, through the grateful and pleasing recognition of the light of Christ in the enormous diversity of cultures that makes up our world.

For it to strengthen its Apostlehood, through the awareness of having received a treasure in clay cups, of being Apostles (those sent) and therefore called to continuously review our fidelity to that sending, and not to make the Apostlehood a kind of ancestor of nobility that connects us with the “prince’s of the Church” and which gives us a “sacred power.”
7. And from that life, what do you ask of the society in which you live? What do you ask those who live in the rich countries in the world?

I ask that we learn to live in a culture of austerity, that we abandon the false illusion of the high levels of life that cannot be offered except to only a minority, or to achieve this through the using up of the Earth’s natural resources. I ask that we establish ourselves as a culture that works to live and which does not live to work. That the market again be a place of reunion of people and not of goods. That the debt of “third and fourth world countries” be cancelled, with clauses that ensure the destination of those resources to eradicate hunger, endemic diseases, the provision of basic infrastructure to the population, education. To those who live in the rich countries of the world, I ask that they become committed, putting pressure on their governments to take decisions to change the trend towards the poverty of a huge part of humanity and also the ecological deterioration of the planet.