



Caleb Ministry: Courage and Perseverance.

Pastoral/Administrative Report-2021 Padre/Fr. Luis Barrios

I-introduction:

We are Caleb:

My dear Santa Cruz / Holyhood family, greetings and blessings. I want to start this progress report (or reflection letter) with a kind of homily on Caleb. I am aware that it is a bit long, but it seemed necessary to put all this as a "letter to history." More than a report, it is a work agenda and a document for critical reflection. My recommendation is that you read it by sections, or in groups, or as you prefer, but read it and digest it, please. Take the good and put the bad away. And criticize with your actions and words, how things should be done. And if necessary, let's dialogue to clarify the best way to be disciples of Jesus and at the same time continue to move the vision and mission of our church. In other words, all of this is an invitation to continue working within the harmony of unity in diversity.

I share this testimony with you from the bottom of my heart. When I was only 15 years old in a biblical reflection and prayer meeting one of the church sisters approached me and said: your ministry will be like Caleb's. I had no idea what she was telling me, but I prayed, and searched the Bible until I understood this process of preparation. Later, in another

biblical reflection and prayer meeting, a priest friend approached me and said in my ear: for a pastor, for a pastor, you were born, you will take care of the flock of my church like Moses in the fold. All of this is the beginning of my ministry journey trying to seek God's will and to produce a ministry that is relevant and reverent to the struggles of the people. All this because there must be life before death.

This is a document where I let you see my humanity, my concerns, my contradictions, my motivations and above all my seriousness to carry out ministry. In the midst of my human contradictions, you must find my true motivations to try to do the right thing. If I fall, I get up and if I get dirty I come back and clean myself; I'm human. That is why this is also an invitation for you to allow me to continue walking by your side. Here I share this story of Caleb.

The LORD said to Moses, ² "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders." ³ So at the LORD's command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites. ⁴ These are their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua son of Zakkur; ⁵ from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat son of Hori; ⁶ from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh; ⁷ from the tribe of Issachar, Igal son of Joseph; ⁸ from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun; ⁹ from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti son of Raphu; ¹⁰ from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel son of Sodi; ¹¹ from the tribe of Manasseh (a tribe of Joseph), Gaddi son of Susi; ¹² from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel son of Gemalli; ¹³ from the tribe of Asher, Sethur son of Michael; ¹⁴ from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi son of Vophsi; ¹⁵ from the tribe of Gad, Geuel son of Maki. ¹⁶ These are the names of the men Moses sent to explore the land. (Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the name Joshua.) Numbers 13: -1-16.

We are Caleb

As you can see Caleb is not the best known name in the Bible. His story is one of disappointment and postponed dreams, yet Caleb is a powerful example of perseverance, faith, and enduring strongly to the end. Being one of only two people who believed that God could give the promised land to the Israelites, he was greatly overwhelmed by an entire fearful generation. Having to wait in the desert for forty years, Caleb finally saw God's promise fulfilled at 85 years of age. So what can we learn from Caleb's life? Caleb was one of the spies sent by Moses to investigate the land of Canaan, he was also a soldier and a shepherd, he was one of the only two adults who left Egypt and entered the promised land. Caleb is a reference and analogy for dreams, goals, priorities and ways of living that need to be tested. This is the biblical story: Numbers 13: 1-3: And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying: Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a male, each a prince among them. And Moses sent them out of the wilderness of Paran, according to the word of the Lord; and all those men were princes of the children of Israel. So Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, saying to them: Go up from here to the Negev, and go up to the mountain, Num 13:18 and observe the land how it is, and the people who inhabit it, whether it is strong or weak, if little or numerous; Num 13:19 what the inhabited earth is like, whether it is good or bad; and how are inhabited cities, if they are camps or fortified squares; Num 13:20 and what the land is like, whether it is fertile or barren, whether there are trees on it or not; and be strong, and take of the fruit of the country. And it was the time of the first grapes.

In my opinion, there are at least seven key aspects of Caleb that can help us to continue developing a relevant and reverent ecclesial-community ministry:

1. Remember God's promise through Moses (Joshua 14: 6) (Numbers 14:24):

And the sons of Judah came to Joshua in Gilgal; And Caleb the son of Jephunneh Cenezeus said to him: You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God in Kadesh-barnea, concerning me and you. But to my servant Caleb, because there was another spirit in him, and he decided to follow me, I will bring him into the land where he entered, and his offspring will have it in possession.

In other words, Caleb was a person of conquest who remembers the promises of God not to collect them, but to live them, he is the spearhead to go after the conquest of any challenge and adversity.

2. He brought news as he felt it in his heart (Joshua 14: 7):

I was forty years old when Moses the servant of Jehovah sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land; and I brought him news as I felt it in my heart.

Caleb had the same feeling of God. For Him there was first the word of God, then faith and then feelings. The phrase "... how I felt it in my heart" is not a drawer phrase; rather it sums up theology in action.

3. In him was another spirit (Numbers 14:24):

But to my servant Caleb, because there was another spirit in him, and he decided to follow me, I will bring him into the land where he entered, and his offspring will have it in possession.

Caleb decided to go after God. He was not carried away by the vast majority; he was not confused neither by the arguments, nor by the manipulation, nor even by the despair of those around him. Having another spirit, like Caleb, is not determined at the moment of crisis; it is obtained long before, as a consequence of guarding the heart from day to day and storing in it the treasure of the word of God.

4. He never made the hearts of the people faint, of his people (Joshua 14: 8):

And my brothers, those who had gone up with me, made the hearts of the people fail; but I fulfilled by following Jehovah my God.

It is good to ask ourselves: Has anyone fainted because of me? How many times have we made someone's heart fail because of our words, looks or lack of testimony? By focusing our attention on the giants, we can lead those we love not to believe God and his word, to live by faith.

5. He was sure of God's presence (Numbers 14: 9):

Therefore do not be rebellious against Jehovah, nor fear the people of this land; because we will eat them like bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.

Caleb's argument was that God was with them. He never ignored the giants, what happened with Caleb was that the giants did not determine his faith, because he was convinced that God was with him.

6.He was strong to the last (Joshua 14: 11-12):

I'm still as strong as the day Moses sent me; what was my strength then, such is my strength now for war, and to go out and to enter. Joshua 14:12 Now therefore give me this mountain, of which the Lord spoke that day; for you heard in that day that the Anakim are there, and that there are large and fortified cities. Perhaps Jehovah will be with me, and I will drive them out, as Jehovah has said.

Caleb was as strong as he was 45 years ago. he still had his vigor. In the same way, Abraham, although his body was weakening, his faith was strengthening, that is, he developed more his spiritual musculature (Romans 4: 19-20). Now, Caleb says: "Now give me this mountain..." Expresses her desire to go and conquer him. As he was getting stronger, he could take down giants.

7. He acted under blessing (Joshua 14:13):

Joshua then blessed him, and gave Caleb the son of Jephunneh to Hebron as an inheritance. Caleb acted under blessing, as he was clear about Joshua's authority and knew that he could not go without his blessing. He waited for God's blessing through Joshua. He who acts under blessing, he will always conquer.

The teaching is clear: Caleb was engaged. A life fully consecrated to God without reservation. Caleb was completely devoted to God. He believes in the promises of God. Even when things looked bleak, during his 40 years in the desert, Caleb never gave up hope. No matter how many setbacks, Caleb held onto God's promises. This my dear brothers and sisters is a great model of discipleship and of planting, replanting, and revitalizing churches.

If we are the Church of the People, the one that is present and knows how to accompany, our greatest challenge is like Cale's ministry: Courage and perseverance. If we deviate and put our trust in ourselves we are going to fail, we have to get self-sufficiency out of our lives, just like Caleb did, a person who believed God and conquered challenges. I summarize Caleb's message of action with this phrase: no one gives up here.

II-Historical socio-theological background:

February 1, 2022 will be five years pastoring our church. Before you gave Amarilis and me the honor of exercising a pastoral ministry, I shared with the members of the Search Committee and the Parish Board, at that time, that Iglesia Santa Cruz / Holyrood Church, needed (and needs) urgently a revitalization with sustainability in the pastoral, economic, administrative, and community matters. Since we arrived, listening to their concerns and expectations of pastoral ministries, we realized that we definitely had and we have to continue working on these four lines. Our inspiration has always been drawn from Caleb's teachings: courage and perseverance. We are not a cowardly church.

There are people satisfied with the work done and other people dissatisfied. But we cannot deny the reality, on the one hand, that most of the people in our church agree and are satisfied with the work that has been done. And, on the other hand, that, although there are

discrepancies in some people, the foundation of respect has always prevailed in most cases. That, sisters and brothers, is a triumph.

Of course, this has been a horizontal organizing work in collaboration with the ministries of the church which have become its backbone through the lay leadership that we have. For this we give thanks for the active ministries that we have and we can see this in the Ministries Report for 2021. An incredible number of lay people who with Caleb's ministry have kept this church with its doors open and in revitalization.

And although we are a church without many financial resources, we have managed to organize a tremendous volunteer team of clergy: Revda. María Isabel, Rev. Deacon Luis Antonio and Rev. Deacon Gene. And to all this was added an incredible group of seminarians of whom we are also very proud: Anahí Galante, Andrew Kumfer, and Ronnie Ward.

And of course, to all this, is added the work team of the church of employees: María Zepeda (secretary and administrator of the building), Yuly Mony (cleaning), Iván Toro (Maintenance of the building), Humberto Varona (Repair computer and technical support), Carlos Cuevas (Music Director), and William “Bill” Leighton (in accounting).

So where do we come from and where are we at?

This seems to me is the key question. I honestly do not share the idea that some sisters and brothers have that Holy Cross / Holyhood is a church in crisis or unhealthy. This has been the analysis of some people in our church who suffer from socio-spiritual myopia or who specialize in making diagnoses with the particularities and not the big picture. I can accept that we have had crises, that is to be expected, but those crises have helped us to grow and mature to keep moving forward. Currently we are a church with a sustainable and prosperous pastoral. Despite ups and downs, our current reality presents a formidable panorama, of renewal and revitalization.

We have also played a very important role in our Diocese of being a model of action of a multicultural, multiracial, multiethnic, trilingual, multigenerational church, and other diversities and identities, which knows how to build unity in diversity. Here we reinvent ourselves in the midst of every crisis because like Caleb we have courage. We are like a revolution in progress. And, above all, that it uses a model of revival, revitalization, lay empowerment, ministerial relevance, presence and community accompaniment, which keeps the doors open to the people. Hence, the diocese is using us as an ecclesial model to follow. The Bible already says: by their fruits you will know them (Matthew 7:16).

I have to admit that when the two new Guardians arrived, Pedro Valerio & Yaniris Urbáez, in the month of August 2020 and also new members of the Parish Board, everything in the church took a surprising turn. They are people with vision, mission, courage, and perseverance. And, above all, sisters and sisters of prayer. We started meeting twice a month to make up for lost time and work. The vision and mission of the church were retaken through days of prayer and Bible readings, and the new Parish Board was trained in their duties towards the church. In other words, we return to the conversion within the

Parish Board, that Santa Cruz / Holyhood is a church, not a private club. Some fatalistic and short-sighted people bet it would all be a failure. They did not count on our inspiration from Caleb of courage and perseverance under God's direction. Some of these sisters and brothers left - let it be clear, we did not vote for anyone - and that hurt us a lot because they are part of the body of Christ. There was no way to achieve a dialogue of reconciliation with justice. But we keep the doors open for them to return and have been following up on our prayers and actions.

But, on the other hand, other sisters and brothers stayed because their arrogance, bitterness, pain, desire for revenge, lack of socio-spiritual vision, and toxic life, with their direct or indirect actions, conscious or unconscious, have been obstacles. because they would like to savor the failure of this project of God. But they weren't counting on our vision of Caleb for bravery and perseverance. Nor did they count on the biblical promise when Gamaliel raised a defense in favor of Peter and John before the Council and in defense of God's project he told them: And now I say to you: Depart from these men, and leave them; because if this advice or this work is of men, it will vanish; but if it is from God, you will not be able to destroy it; you may not be found fighting against God. Acts 5: 38-39.

However, other people repented and joined his church again and they are working in that direction. That is why we are a church that believes in retraining, repentance, and restoring peace with justice.

We believe in restorative justice, also called restorative justice or compassionate justice. Not in punishment. We have relied on the inspiration of Psalm 51 as the foundation for repentance that results in restoration. David understood the deadly effects that sin produces on the soul of the believing person and for this reason he writes this Psalm.

Currently we continue every Sunday with our Masses -in English, Spanish and ASL- in person and online. Remember, our church never closed its doors when the pandemic hit us and we continue to have the doors open seven days a week, from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm.

We have been able to take advantage of the Zoom, Facebook, You Tube and Instagram platforms. And to this is added a daily reflection by telephone texts and emails, with the Monthly Bulletin of activities, and weekly audiovisual reflection (in English, Spanish & ASL), We also have a Bilingual Mass every Tuesday at 1:00 pm in our Capilla de Reposo San Romero de América and two Compline in Spanish at 9:00 pm on Mondays and Tuesdays coordinated by Pedro Valerio and Luisa Terrero. We also have under the coordination of Erma Moore & Jacqueline Kellum-Foster Morning Prayers in English from Monday to Friday at 7:00 am. We also have under the coordination of Jacky Medrano and Rev. Luis Antonio Morning Prayers in Spanish from Monday to Friday at 9:00 am. All these activities are carried out in the context of pastoral care and accompaniment.

We plan to begin Complines in English under the coordination of our Internal Seminarian, Ronnie Ward. He will also be coordinating a monthly online gathering on pastoral care and spirituality for LGBTQ communities.

And of course, the online face of our church, our website is a great socio-theological work of art. Visit it and you will check it: <http://www.holyroodsantacruz.org/>. Most of this work is coordinated by Amarilis Guzmán and part of his team; Ítalo Villanueva and Shanty Ramnarine.

And we were able to complete online by Zoom - with the support of the Hispanic Leadership Academy of the Episcopal & Lutheran Church - a course on Anglicanism under the coordination of Simón Morel, Jacky Medrano, Lucia Rodríguez and Pedro Valerio. At present we are finishing through the International Community of Hope (COHI-Community of Hope International) the first course that has been prepared in Spanish in the United States to prepare lay people in the work of lay chaplaincy: [https:// www.cohinternational.org/](https://www.cohinternational.org/). All this under the coordination of Annette Scudero, Yaniris Urbáez, Rev. María Isabel Santiviago, and a server. For now we are using the space on Wednesdays at 8:00 pm which is usually a space for Bible study in Spanish -Vida y Abundancia- coordinated by Guardian Yaniris Urbáez.

We have used the church space for families to hold wakes and celebrate memorial masses. In other words, the closing of a duel with respect. Interesting in all of this is that our church has not had a COVID-19 outbreak. We have carried out extensive cleaning and disinfection and we have maintained the rules of safety and health in public gatherings, especially the Ministry of Food and Worship.

There is no death without resurrection:

At the time of writing this document in our church we have been confronted with the painful reality of physical death, that is, the liberation of the body of some sisters and brothers. So far only two cases of COVID and the rest of the chronic health conditions, heart attacks and cancer. I believe, in my opinion, we have expressed true support for the duel with our gesture of solidarity. We have reaffirmed that there is no death without resurrection. This is why we continue to remember, because what is loved never dies to: Alejandrina Álvaro, Amada Rodríguez, Ana Jiménez, Richard Johnson (husband of Rev. Luis Antonio), Minerva Feliz (mother of Minervita), Gladys Veras (mother Gina Espinal), Luis Terrero (father of Luisa Terrero), and Chaz Zachary (boyfriend of Marien Morales). In other words, the processes of mourning, mourning, and spiritual and emotional healing have fueled our compassion and solidarity.

Weddings, baptism and socialization meetings.

Of course, not everything has been memorials and wakes. We have had countless weddings, baptisms, confirmations, receiving and blessing children who have been born. This shows us that we are still in revitalization processes.

III-Challenges and opportunities for our ministry that is courageous and persevering:

A-Diseases and aging: A challenge for our church.

Aging is a gradual and continuous process of natural change that begins in early adulthood. During early middle age many body functions gradually begin to decline.

There is no certain age that makes a person an elderly or elderly person. Traditionally, the age of 65 is considered the beginning of old age. But the reason for this consideration is not based on biology, but on history.

The question of when a person ages can be answered in several ways: Chronological age: Chronological age is based solely on the passage of time. It is the age of a person expressed in years. Chronological age makes little sense in terms of health. Biological age: biological age refers to the modifications that the body experiences and that generally appear over the years. Psychological age: Psychological age refers to how people behave and feel. For example, an octogenarian who works, does projects, looks forward to future events, and participates in many activities is considered a psychologically young person.

Since the end of the last century, humanity has faced a phenomenon of population aging. Old age is an important, final stage in the life of the human being. As an essential concern, it demands the attention of society in general and of our church in particular. Starting in the 90s, interesting theories and studies began to appear that start from an approach to old age as a vital stage; as one more stage of human experience and that can and should be considered a positive phase of individual and social development.

Faced with the myth that people in old age are very limited in their abilities, he puts before the many social and psychological possibilities they have. Aging is not a disease, nor does it have to be limiting, since old age is a stage of life that can be as healthy as others, if organs and tissues are affected over time, a social role can be designed with minor tensions that allow living in accordance with the least possibilities of life and leaving the most demanding physical tasks to the younger generations. That is why we believe in the relay that follows up on our vision and mission.

I say all this, on the one hand, because I am already in my 70s years old. And the Rev. María Isabel, the Rev. Luis Antonio, the Rev. Gene, and the Guardian Yaniris join me. Their minds (and that includes me) is very clear but the energy and physical vitality are not the same. And also, other commitments like the ones Gene has with the diocese and with St. Ann's Church.

Values in our capitalist system is to view old age as a time to cast aside, throw away, and replace. Ours is to resume and continue working as far as possible and as fast as possible. Hence, we have noticed the physical absence of these siblings in our media. But they remain connected through social media and more importantly, they continue to support and support their church.

And the same happens with the historical leadership of lay people in our church, they have aged. But let's be clear that old age is the destiny of all people; a natural phase of the human life cycle that has its peculiarities, its possibilities for human development and growth, and, therefore, it is not a stage of involution. For this I am grateful to María Zepeda's attempts with her Fountain of Youth Ministry that she identifies and is trying to be relevant to bring hope to our elderly people. We have to accept this reality, continue working to bring young people to our church and, above all, continue to respect, accept and appreciate the

undisputed legacy of our historical leaders. They remain the past, present and future of our church. They are our accumulation of social, physical, emotional and spiritual wealth.

B-Financial: On the other hand, it is not a secret that our church has suffered a negative impact on the matter of its economic income. On the one hand, roughly 60% of the membership are not paying the Promises and on the other hand we have a group of people who have chosen not to pay promises or give their promises to “designated funds”. This reality has negatively impacted the income of our church. Added to this is not having all the parishioners present when the offerings are collected in the worship spaces. Also added to this is the fact that we are not renting the Social Room space.

But if you carefully evaluate the 2021 Annual Financial Report and the 2020 Audit (the 2020 audit will be ready for the month of March 2022) we are not so bad, this despite the crisis that the Pandemic has caused. It has helped us enormously that our sister organization, the Dominican Women's Development Center, has been paying its monthly rental commitment on time, that is, that they are up to date and that the parking rental spaces are also up to date. day. We have not laid off any employees from our church, although we have significantly increased the number of volunteers. And of course, we have reduced the financial expenses of our church.

It seems to me that the big challenge for us as a church is to be able to develop a sustainable and inclusive economy. The sustainable and inclusive economy consists of carrying out activities that take into account the environment and the permanence of resources in the future. The financial activities carried out by any church (or any country) can be based on seeking both social and environmental improvement, both in the present and in the future. Ways must be found to foster inclusive and sustainable growth that allows people to break free from the structures of the violence of poverty.

At this moment we are in full swing of promises for 2022 and increasing stewardship in its three lines: time, talent and money. It is interesting in all this that the membership has increased by 25%, although it is still a church mostly of immigrants, poor people and / or working class.

We are currently organizing a strategy with the Historic Buildings Commission, our diocese and the creation of an Advisory Board to initiate a Capital Campaign to attract funds to the church. This is also taking into consideration being able to carry out socially a development of construction of social spaces that does not affect the physical structure of our building and that does not betray our vision and mission of a Social Gospel. But for rental opportunities with low-cost or homeless homes. Likewise, we have planned with our Parish Board the construction of a Columbarium in Our Chapel of Our Lady with 98 ash niches.

All of these activities can generate significant income for us to continue to revitalize our church and fulfill our vision and mission. Remember, we are in Caleb's ministry of courage and perseverance.

It must also be recognized that the tradition or custom -for whatever reasons- that some siblings in our church have followed to create designated and / or restricted funds with their donations have negatively impacted the church's operating expenses budget. . Likewise, not paying promises or having reduced them have also had a negative impact. This is a great challenge. Our Parish Board has already ruled on these issues and will be informing you.

C-Pandemic / Coronavirus / COVID 19:

It must be recognized that the reality of the Pandemic has impacted and continues to impact our church in adverse ways. No one was ready for this challenge, but we accepted it and began to see it as a great opportunity to fulfill our prophetic ministry of church people. As of this writing, we are closely following the new variant of this virus called Orion.

It is no secret that people's concern about the COVID-19 coronavirus produces what we have called the post-traumatic stress of the pandemic. Both personally, as interrelated and collectively. It has deteriorated not only physical health, but at the same time emotional and spiritual health and social relationships. Likewise, the pandemic has increased hunger, malnutrition and the economic crisis. And unfortunately, assuming that everything will be the same after the pandemic is a mistake. Nothing will ever be the same. We must learn to live with these realities without allowing a defeatist or pessimistic spirit to take over us. But at the same time allowing Caleb's ministry of courage and perseverance to inspire us.

But at the same time, the pandemic, which was not given by God, is an opportunity to rethink our way of doing ministry, to be present with the people and to accompany them prophetically in their struggles.

We have learned that in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, churches can be a valuable resource from a public health perspective. Although churches must work to change the systems that make health care inaccessible to the most vulnerable populations with or without a health crisis, there are some ways in which they must be positioned to accompany their communities during this pandemic. . In redefining our ministry and leaving our church doors open, three human values have constantly challenged us: valuing people over money, prioritizing humility over ego, and listening to the vulnerable over the powerful.

The reality of the Pandemic and keeping the building open on one side has intensified the need for pastoral care in our church. It's amazing how many people come looking for prayers, comfort, or maybe someone to listen to them. And to this is added our parishioners with their needs. Calls from hospitals and funeral homes have increased significantly.

And also keeping the doors of our church open has increased the economic costs of electricity, heating and cleaning. But so far we have been able to survive these challenges.

We understand that there is hope, but it must be recognized that there is a valid concern that the initial doses of available vaccine will not be sufficient to vaccinate the most critical and / or vulnerable populations. I believe that this is the time for the church to continue to shine and use all possible means to share the Good News and meet needs in an innovative way, while being part of a preventive public health policy. We have done it and we will continue to do it: a prophetic ministry of presence and accompaniment with the people. That is why

we call ourselves the village church. We need to prophetically keep listening to the promise made to Caleb: be brave and persevere.

This is why we have also turned our church into a vaccination center against COVID-19: vaccines save lives. You can see this more elaborate in the report of the ministries.

D-Sisters and brothers from the road and adopting a human rights-based approach to drug policy.

We continue to work directly and indirectly with our brothers and sisters on the Camino and drug users, providing them with spiritual, moral, social and financial support without allowing this responsibility to become a burden for our church but rather a blessing. We have shown them with actions that we are a friendly and hospitable church that keeps its doors open.

But in the mission and vision of our church we see these two realities as symptoms of a much bigger problem. Therefore, we do not want to fall into actions of rejection or exclusion. On the contrary, we want Jesus' model of compassion and love to also add to those who have been rejected by our society. We do not have all the answers, but we have the love, respect and compassion to continue working our ministries to be present and accompany the people.

E-Radical Catechism of a Mundane Spirituality:

The reflection from the Bible of a primary fact: the oppression and injustice of which the poor in Latin America are victims. The first step of this theology is the verification of whether we are being relevant and reverent in the struggles of the people. The next step is the examination, in the light of sociology, of the causes that explain situations of oppression and exclusion. The test is strongly influenced by the doctrine of the Social Gospel of Jesus that we bring heaven to earth.

The third step is to interrogate the entirety of Scripture from the perspective of the oppressed and excluded people. The historical-critical method of hermeneutics, the rational method, is replaced by a new "scientific rationality", which springs from the praxis of those who hope for liberation in all its dimensions.

The account of the exodus is frequently used, always cited in a partial, rapid and not rigorous way. The practice of searching for the texts of the Bible that appear to each author to be the most effective is made to demonstrate the theses previously established by analyzes of sociological origin.

Make real the deep meaning of God's saving liberation project; the insistence on the community dimension of faith; the urgency of a liberating praxis rooted in peace with justice and in love; a rereading of the Bible that seeks to make the word of God the light and nourishment of the people, in the midst of their struggles and their hopes.

In other words, we do not want to give religion, Bible or doctrines to the people so that they do not think. We want to awaken their consciences, organize those consciences and

mobilize them towards their own liberation. That was and continues to be the model of Jesús de Iglesia Pueblo.

F-Continue Developing a Credible, Believing and Incarnate Lay Leadership:

I am concerned that we can develop a relay of vision and mission with committed lay leadership that continues to revitalize our church as a church that knows how to be present and accompany the struggles of the people with a message of salvific liberation as the Gospels present it to us.

Lay leadership requires a capacity for a personal and deep relationship with Christ and a liberating spirituality, which allows it to develop a systematic, permanent, personal and community discernment, in order to be able to act as an agent of the Church in the world based on concrete reality, responding to Crucified people from day to day in the manner of Jesus.

Able to distinguish diversity and to be able to position oneself in it and understand times, places and people. That this laity have beyond the pre-established formulas, an enormous capacity for analysis, adaptability and the wisdom of being in the world, positioning themselves appropriately in each place to further promote the Kingdom in any context. A laity that rescues worldly spirituality, that we are in the world to contemplate it and change it because there must be life before death.

G-Building improvements: Likewise, there are a series of building improvement projects that we must prioritize. These include the kitchen, the church walls, the church ceiling, the staircase that leads to the basement, and the converting of the boiler from oil to gas.

In 2021 we achieved that our church became a Historic Monument (Landmark Site) <https://patch.com/new-york/washington-heights-inwood/historic-washington-heights-church-earns-landmark-status>. This is definitely a triumph.

H-Historical memory of the Church:

Collecting the history of a church is an excellent way to preserve its historical memory and identity. Plus, it's a great fundraising aid. Under the leadership of Radhames Morales, we resumed this task again through the Historical Memory Project. We must continue working in this direction so that the historical beauty of this church is seen to be its people, not just the physical structure of a building.

I-Housing and Pastoral Salary:

Among our priorities should also exist the power to strengthen finances in a way that we can pay the full-time salary budget of a priest. And to this is added the fact that we can make a real estate investment to be able to have a home that serves as a pastoral house (or apartment).

When I came to this our church with a salary from the City University of New York and with a house, this greatly alleviated the economic burden in this area. But I won't be here forever and the chances are that whoever comes needs their home and full-time salary with all the benefits. This reality has a high priority on our work agenda. It is also important to emphasize that my work in our church is full time and often more than 40 hours a week.

IV- My call as a pastor of discipleship: Criticism and self-criticism teachings of 2021

Pastors understand that they must be disciple-making leaders who create a multiplying movement of disciple-making, starting with the church they serve.

In my journey as your pastor and spiritual guide, five realities have touched, and continue to touch, my discipleship tirelessly. Great leaders lead. Implicit in the word "leader" is the idea of intentionally moving toward a clear and compelling goal and inspiring other people to move. A leader has a mission to fulfill and encourages others to work with him or her to achieve it. And there is no better example of this in ancient history than Jesus.

Leaders speak by example. In Luke 6:40 Jesus said, "The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like his teacher." Great leaders pray. "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." Luke 5:16. To pray without ceasing is to be in communication with God at all times, to immerse ourselves in his presence, in his being, in his essence. It is letting God speak to us and we also respond to him with actions. And sometimes, if necessary, use words.

Great leaders are always learning. Great leaders are great learners. They read. They listen. They reflect. And being an apprentice requires a certain level of humility. Those who think they know everything learn nothing. And great leaders have compassion. Compassion is a human value that links empathy and understanding towards the suffering of other people. In Luke 9:36 he tells us: When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

I keep searching sincerely how to make these five realities visible in my life. Sometimes I'm up and sometimes I'm down, but I keep trying. My greatest challenge as your pastor disciple has been to guide and equip the members of our church to develop and live in relationships of total discipleship. Complete discipleship includes pastoral care, and spiritual growth. This is to encourage others to live a life for Christ through times of worship and discipleship strategies for the congregation.

Do you remember in the Gospel when some people brought a sick friend to Jesus and since they could not get through the crowd they made a break in the roof of the house to bring their friend into the presence of Jesus? This shows us that being part of a strategy to break the roof of the house involved courage and confidence in every way. In Caleb's message it is courage and perseverance. True ministry will be stopped by our fear or fulfilled by our faith.

An ecclesial radiography:

a-Looking within: First, I have learned that I also somehow have responsibility in all this panorama of negative and positive things that have happened or are happening in our church.

Also, I have learned that I have to transform myself if I want to transform our church and the rest of the community. For example, I recognize that I have responsibility in the way some people in the church feel about me: frustrated, angry, disappointed, overwhelmed by my “pastoral leadership style” and “by my partner praxis theological.

It seems to me - and this without denying or trying to belittle my anger, outbursts and fury, I am human and I continue to work on these changes - that the biggest problem is that there are people who are in their comfort zone and do not want them to. get out of that place. I mean, they don't want to hear what they need to hear. My message remains the same that I have presented in my sermons: if you follow Jesus He will take you out of your comfort zone. A person who is afraid to step out of his comfort zone can never change or face life's challenges. A person has to get out of his comfort zone to be converted in the first place. After conversion, a Christian person cannot be strong and victorious without stepping out of his comfort zone to face new challenges. Jesus left his comfort zone many times and so must you and I. Therefore, there are some walls or walls that we have to destroy because they are not healthy.

I am working on my life, I trust you are doing the same because my mantra remains the same: don't tell me what to do, teach me with your actions what I have to do and I will listen to you with my heart. We have people in our church who always know what I have to do, but they don't accompany their recommendation with action. I mean, they don't know what to do.

b-Interesting dynamics in Santa Cruz: There are a series of realities that are fascinating to me within our church. My way of understanding them is from the perspective of group psychology. In other words, the influence that the group has on individual behavior and that person has when modulating group behavior.

1-The "law of antiquity" still dominates in our church. In a system based on seniority, people who stay in the church for long periods of time. These are the people who, on the one hand, flaunt the years they have been in the church or belittle the new membership. Without minimizing the importance of seniority, or our ancestors, I am fascinated by asking people what they are doing right now for their church and not so much what they did. Of course, it is not one or the other, it is both.

2-Power struggles vs. you fight for equality. Jesus speaks of the Passion of him and the disciples, however, they start arguing about who is the greatest among them. The struggle for power in the Church should not exist”, because the true power, the one that the Lord“ with his example has taught us”, “is to fight for equality in all the different human beings.

3-The culture of gossip. I constantly ask the gossiping people in our church the following: What do we gain from these things? Any. Many of the gossip you see out there are pure invention, but what no one starts to see is that they do terrible harm to the victim.

Unfortunately, gossip crosses boundaries on a daily basis, in frank violation of people's privacy. This we have to eradicate from our church.

4-Fruitless divisions. Negative divisions in the churches are a sad and very common occurrence in the body of Christ. The effects of a church division, regardless of the cause, can be devastating. Negative divisions in the churches cause sadness and discouragement. However, there is hope; churches that are divided can experience healing and restoration. Churches are like hospitals, full of injured and sick people. My experience in Santa Cruz / Holuyrood is that divisions occur when someone seeks to manipulate people and / or events for their own purposes. Do not let that happen.

5-Legalism. One of the considerations of being a legalistic person is the tendency that they tend to forget that the correct thing is not only to be blindly obedient to the laws or canons. Legalistic people believe that they possess the truth, and they attack anyone who disagrees with their interpretations, or defend their truth tooth and nail. We know that the Word of God does not need anyone to defend it, the Word of God defends itself. These people take great care of appearances, but they easily forget the love and justice of God.

And of these we also have. They spend it quoting the Regulations of the church in the same way that the Pharisees quoted the Law to Jesus. We must always accompany the humanistic aspect of our laws and regulations. We cannot demand from others what we do not give, we cannot give what we do not have and we cannot go where we do not know. Let us be faithful and admonish each other with love, then the glory of God will truly shine through us.

6-Socio-theological conflicts. It is not a secret that in my speaking, acting, writing and feeling I always look for how to find the social, political, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of the Gospel of Jesus. I am not going to change this reality because it is my pastoral identity. I have the obligation to respect those who disagree with my theology. Although for me studying religion implies analyzing theological, economic, socio-political, cultural processes, etc., I see and meet Jesus in the struggles of the people and hence the need for a salvific liberation. Bring heaven to earth. Develop a worldly spirituality that works and works in the world, because the here and now is the most important thing to me. The hereafter is less attractive to my pastoral life. That is why I am concerned that there is life before death and that we are happy. .

We have people in our church who come from a different background and that is what we have to deal with. I have no problems with these sister people. But these people want to change the way I do ministry and that will never happen because I will not allow it. These people often want me not to mention anything about the social, cultural, or political aspects of the Gospel. Only the spiritual. But they do not understand that spirituality has social, political, economic and cultural dimensions. In other words, they want me to bring an exegesis (explanation of Biblical writing) without doing a hermeneutic (application of Biblical writing). That is not going to happen because for me it is like trying to erase the holistic dimensions of the Gospel of Jesus. All my life I have practiced a vanguard ministry and I will continue to practice it. Jesus was a radical and I want to imitate him. This is why I identify myself as a Christian Socialist.

7-Profile of the Church and the Community:

At this time under the coordination of two of our seminarians, Ronnie Ward and Andrew Kumfer are working with a group of sisters and brothers from the church to prepare a profile of our church that tells us where we are and where we want to go. And also, a community profile that shows us the type of relevant ministry that we need to put into practice. These two reports are of great importance in the clergy transition because they greatly assist a Search Committee and the Parish Board in exploring new clergy, in the context of our vision and mission.

IV-How should we close 2021?

Let's learn from the past and let's let it go. Let's live in the here and now. Yes, 2020 and 2021 were hard years, it is time to move from that nostalgia. Depression right now is a luxury and I don't have time to waste. The best we can do is extract the lessons that these years have left us and focus on what is to come with the utmost confidence. Let's look for that achievable utopia and say loudly; No one gives up here, we are Caleb's people: courage and perseverance.

V-Passing the torch: But at the same time I take the opportunity to tell you again that my ministry with you as pastor and priest will not last in Santa Cruz / Holyhood for more than two years. In other words, we are going to a clergy transition and we must prepare. It may be before, but not after. Therefore, we have to start preparing for the transition of change, a healthy handover for our church. Now in January 2022 I am turning 70 years old and I feel that it is necessary to start moving in another direction with my ministry in the return to Puerto Rico, where all this began when I was only 12 years old. I am blessed that Amarilis is in the best position to be part of this process of change. I thank God for her and her prophetic vision of her.

I confess that for me this separation has begun to be a great pain. But we can overcome it. Because the good news wherever we are will comfort us that we continue to unite in the vision and mission of the Social Gospel of Jesus. It will never be a goodbye, but a see you later. You are my family. Santa Cruz / Holyhood has shaped my life forever.

VI-Conclusion: I have said on many occasions that the church is a hospital and all the people who are here in the church need healing. The church is not a museum of holy people. God knows how honest there is when I acknowledge my mistakes and know what I have to eliminate from my life or add to my life. Hence the addition of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5: 22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control ...".

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to be your pastor and help me to be a better priest. If I have offended you in something, or I have failed you, I ask your forgiveness. Believe me when I tell you that I am trying and I promise that I will continue to do my best.

Today I want to assure you that 2022 will be, let's just be brave and persevering. But as Christian people I remind you of Advent - the arrival of that hope - it is a continuous journey throughout the year.

Let us welcome 2022 with optimism and let us rescue a true cause for long-term hope. Better times will come. God is asking us to: Be brave and persevering like Caleb.

Thank you very much for accepting me and blessing me. Let's keep praying and acting.

In solidarity love, the most important sacrament; his shepherd brother and his son. Amen
and Ashe

Luis +