

**Commented Presentation of the Mission Statement
of the RML (Lay Missionaries Group)
by Rosario Demers , President**

The Lay Missionaries Group (RML) is a christian non-profit organization which encourages international solidarity initiatives toward a struggle for justice, for the well-being of people and a culture of peace.

The RML uses the word *christian* to indicate the primary – but not exclusive – source of its inspiration which are the teachings of Jesus and of his disciples through the Gospels and other books of the New Testament.

Its commitment is to promote international solidarity initiatives. The RML is not a group of reflexion and analysis of the world great stakes. It sustains tangible solidarity actions by people committed to social causes related to:

- *justice*: respect for equal rights and opportunities for each and everyone;
- *well-being*: the possibility for all, both individually and collectively, to live in dignity and happiness through being together, owning together and living together;
- *peace*: gathering of required personal aptitudes along with social measures aiming to create adequate conditions for durable peace which would not only bring an absence of violence or what the ancients called «tranquillity through order» (Saint Augustin) but a fundamental process of *living together* with respect for others and social order based on equity. Peace is a dynamic reality.

With its frail means, RML wishes to support (here and elsewhere) all solidarity initiatives included in the above three orientations.

The RML creates parterships for a human, interdependent, participative and durable development, with a propension for the poorest.

The organization does not identify itself as a distribution service of goods in a purely caritative perspective. It is meant to create and develop partnerships. By using the word ‘partnership’, we signify that all interventions are part of a dynamic exchange among all other organizations serving the same objectives. The word ‘development’ indicates any process bringing into play all the potentialities of a group or society, in order to create favourable conditions for a life based on human ideals. Since the word ‘development’ is vague and outdated in the collective awareness, we add some terms to clarify it:

- *Humanity*: that is taking into consideration the global rights of a person, right to a decent existence through access to all material goods essential for a quality of life, right to health, right to education, right to spiritual life.
- *Solidarity*: considering the interdependency of all people, development can only be achieved in a spirit of solidarity, that is one with the other, in togetherness, to produce something «solid» (Solidarity comes form the latin word – *solido*: in the solid, for the well-being of the whole) and nowadays, solidarity goes beyond geographical frontiers.
- *Participative*: development is participative when individuals and groups feel they are part of the decisions concerning them. The participative aspect of development

brings up the whole question of democracy, an essential condition for balanced and interdependent development for all.

- *Durable*: the results of a development project must last longer than the project itself, that is to say that it has to survive on its own. It also has to include an ecological aspect: the changes brought up through the project must not compromise the well-being of future generations.

Our preferential choice goes to the poorest. In an evangelical spirit, the RML chooses to look onto the most underprivileged social class. Its preoccupation, however, is not only to support initiative that will «relieve» misdeeds but also and mainly to encourage actions concerning the socio-political and economical roots of poverty.

The RML gathers and supports volunteers who are engaged in an international cooperation project and who subscribe to the values of our organization.

One of the main functions of the RML is to gather and support individuals. This gathering of volunteers answers the need to find a place for mutual enriching exchange. Thus, the RML has to create more gathering events to meet and share each other's experiences. It is part of its mission. The Group also offers an opportunity to pick up some opinions and suggestions on how to promote our ideas or how to initiate actions amidst the organization.

The support offered to members of the RML is subjugated to resources of the organization and to the established politics on the subject. It is thus different for different members.

Volunteers' commitment in a process of international cooperation reflects the will for gratuitousness and professional achievement. In the process of cooperation, a volunteer is «an individual who, by contract and for a predetermined period of time, donates its time and work, and participates to enhance personal value of people, to develop communities capacities and to create a greater international solidarity.» (R. Demers, 2001)

The values of the RML and of its members gather around three aspects of human life:

Survival and better-being of any society rest on three necessities:

- The need to adjust to its environment and to judiciously use the essential life resources;
- The need to live together harmoniously;
- The need to find an individual and collective meaning to its human destiny.

The values promoted by RML are built around the following three axis.

First Axis

Fair measures in the exploitation and use of the world's goods, a value which is revealed through:

- **A moderate use of consumers goods;**
- **An ethical and simple way of life;**
- **A will to share.**

«The drastic transformation of our ways of living, among which the return to chosen simplicity, has now become the *'sine qua non'* condition of any serious struggle against new ways of producing poverty.» (Majid Rahnema, 2003)

A *fair measure* is the balance between too much and not enough. Our modern society made us eager for limitless consumption of material goods in order to fill some artificially created needs. Yet, the ideal human happiness, according to ancient traditions, lies in the art of exploiting natural resources and to use material goods for the only purpose of answering daily needs and ensuring cohesiveness among different societies.

Excessive overconsumption fills in the necessities of a certain commanded economical order which is not imperative for a good happy life. Productivist and commercial economy motivated by profit growth has turned us into consuming machines. Deprived from the principles of reasonable and moderate use of resources and goods available to us, the overconsumption is likely to bring about three negative consequences:

- First, people and societies that are liberally overconsuming easily accessible material goods will, in time, be unable to appreciate the real value of those goods. They will consider the goods as ordinary and will not be able to savour them. When oriented exclusively on the thirst for plenty, our dealing with things is no longer a way to humanization but an impoverishment of the human aspect of our innerself. The human being thus becomes only «a consumer» who keeps the economical machine turning.

«Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust do corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust do corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.» (Gospel according to Matthew 6, 19-20)

- Secondly, productivist and commercial economy based on overconsumption will create destitution and poverty. The machine producing goods will also produce rareness, iniquity and poverty because, facing such a large quantity of goods to be consumed, no society will be able to create an equal access to those goods and products for everyone.

«The modern productivist economy can boast about having given the world an unusual abundance of goods and services, but it also created privation for four of the six billions of people on the planet; and this, in less than two centuries.» (M. Rahnema, 2003)

- Thirdly, the overconsumption brought about by the conditioning through a worldwide productivist and commercial economy compromises, as we all know, the health of the planet itself. Good utilization of goods and products is a principle of responsibility toward our natural environment.

«Mother Earth supplies enough to satisfy everyone's needs but not enough to satisfy everyone's cupidity and greed.» (Gandhi)

It thus becomes imperative to revise our actual notions of poverty and wealth. Poverty is presently considered as the situation of those who cannot join in the modern consumers society. Contemporary concept of poverty, defined as a lack, that is *deprivation* of

available goods offered by commercial economy, should be an indication of the need to return to ancient conceptions which are expressions of the wisdom of older generations. In many a society, poverty is the expression of a way of being alive and of making a wise use of the goods which Mother Nature makes available to us. It is the art to use with moderation the abundant natural resources, thus preventing rareness through abusive exploitation of these same resources.

In our actual development practices, it might be important to fight against certain ways of managing wealth and to promote poverty for all, that is moderate and faire access to goods and products that are necessary to ensure quality of life and social peace.

On a personal level, it is imperative that individuals manifest a sense of poverty in their fundamental choices and their simple way of living. Chosen poverty is a positioning toward an impersonating overconsumption that increases the gap between the possessors and the destitutes and that contributes to the exhaustion of nature's limited resources.

A spirit of poverty is the attitude of the person who chooses to live a life that is simple but rich in human, emotional and spiritual values. The person who is poor in spirit does not allow to be overloaded with unnecessary goods and saves a space for others and for The Other in his or her life. Here, poverty is not perceived as a lack or deficiency; it is rather defined as an awareness of limitation, as an openness to others and a quest for the absolute. In this sense, the poor is a free human being.

«Water in the boat ruins the boat, but water under the boat is a support... The closed jar, even in troubled water, will float because its heart is filled with air. (Likewise) when the air of poverty is inside someone, this individual will rest peacefully on the waters of the world.» (Rumi poet quoted by M. Rahnema, in *Quand la misère chasse la pauvreté*, Actes Sud, 2003)

Moderate use of consumption goods does not require a life of sacrifice or a renunciation of life's pleasures. On the contrary, an individual who is cautious in his consumption will know what to choose and will appreciate good things. But he will avoid non-essentials which bring nothing good to his body or spirit.

«But godliness with contentment is great gain... For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.» (Gospel according to Paul, 1 Timothy 6; 6,10)

Through an ethical simplicity of life, the individual who is motivated by a spirit of poverty becomes a witness of the possibility to live a happy life without being overloaded with a quantity of goods and products offered by the consumers society. He/she will witness the possibility of liberating oneself from the conditioning created by commercial economy.

The will to share is an essential aspect of the poverty virtue. Every great spiritual tradition has associated the spirit of sharing to the moderate use of goods which primarily belong to the entire humanity before being an object of individual property.

«For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.» (Gospel according to Matthew 6, 21)

Second Axis

Caring for others is a value which expresses itself through:

- **altruism;**
- **generosity;**
- **devotedness;**
- **respect of people and of their opinions;**
- **struggle against every kind of alienation of human dignity.**

Caring for others, including all living beings on earth, means «entertaining a loving relationship with reality and with every living being of creation» (Leonardo Boff, 2001). To care for others is the expression of an interior loving call, and not an obligation we fill in to increase our value in our own eyes or to make a good impression on others.

« But when you do alms, let not your left hand know what your right hand is doing: that your alms may be in secret; and your Father which sees in secret himself shall reward you openly.»
(Gospel according to Matthew 6, 3-4)

Through *altruism, generosity and devotedness*, the benevolent will show that he/she is moved by kindness toward his/her fellow men or women. Kindness is universal. It excludes no one for every person is a neighbour. But it is a kindness which has hands and which expresses itself through self-sacrifice and work.

The highest form of self-sacrifice is listening to the other. In a cooperative context, as everywhere else, giving, which is opening to otherness, implies a great capacity of listening, a respectful distance, and a good judgement as to what is convenient to give for the other's benefit.

«The golden rule should be this: - do not do to others what you would like them to do to you; their likings may be different.» (G.B. Shaw)

Caring for others thus implies *respect for the persons and for their opinions*, especially when it concerns relationships between individuals from different cultures, as it is the case with international cooperation and solidarity relationships.

Struggle for human dignity has its foundation in the christian concept of the infinite value of the person. A human being has a divine filiation and an eternal destiny. He/she is consciousness. When this dignity is compromised through all kinds of injustice, caring for others can translate into struggling strategies, denunciations or even anger. But love of our neighbour is always the underlying motivation of our commitment.

«These things I command you, that you love one another.» (Gospel according to John 16, 17)

Third Axis

Integrating spiritual dimension in human commitment, a value which means:

- **motivation rooted in a strong spiritual basis;**
- **quest for meaning;**
- **opening to transcendency;**
- **respect and consideration for spiritual and religious values in the practice of cooperation.**

In our Western countries, spirituality and religiousness have been pushed away to a private sphere and are now considered as a personal choice. It is seldom welcomed to mix religious or spiritual beliefs with political affairs. Nevertheless, religious matters take over and occupy the front scene of many national debates. And almost everywhere in the world, the religious need is collectively expressed through an increasing number of cults and religions.

The RML agrees that spiritual life is a fundamental aspect of human equilibrium and considers that this phenomenon has to be taken into account in every cooperative and solidarity actions undertaken.

Integration of spirituality is thus lived on a personal basis as well as part of the professional commitment.

For the RML volunteers, spirituality is an interior garden «cultivated» through a constant search for meaning. And the fruits of this interior garden are an awareness of the others, a compassionate spirit and an openness to 'transcendence'.

Volunteers do not have to express their commitment on the basis of an official christian belief but through their spiritual source of inspiration. And they are required to respect the faith of the people they work with.

Spiritual life advocated here is characterized by a great opening to the diversity of ways heading to full human expression. Deepening one's spiritual aspect of life should prepare individuals to accept and welcome different beliefs as being different ways to reach the infinite, and not as a being a wandering or shelter for weak persons.

Respect and consideration for spiritual and religious values in the cooperation practices means, in concrete terms, that the RML as well as its volunteers consider that these values affect the success of cooperation and solidarity projects. Spiritual aspect is also part of the whole human development, called «fulfilment paradigm» by some authors.

Partnerships and projects in which RML and its volunteers have subscribed can be included in any religious institutional frame and have a religious purpose, the criteria being that they encourage human order based on the dignity of the individual, on justice and peace, and on the better-being of all and everyone.

Integrating spiritual dimensions in our solidarity projects allows us to find, beyond all kinds of divisions (whether ideological, economical or political) what fundamentally links all societies in a «common humanity».

«I learned so much from my God that I can no longer say if I am christian, hindu, muslim, buddhist, jewish...» (Hafiz, Persian sufi poet of the 14th century).

This quotation is stated by Rama Mani, Indian by nationality, and specialist in conflicts management in Geneva. He completes this quotation with the following comment: *«Let us free our spirit and open our heart to the one and only reality, as eternal as it is real: we all share the same humanity, a collective conscience.»* (Found in Foi et développement, No 223, April 2004).

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