

Brazil. Our Floating Church.

There are more than 120 communities distributed on the islands of the large Santana archipelago on mouth of the Amazon River, in Amapá, one of the States of Brazil. The fundamental role of community leaders. An urgent need to have permanent deacons. Two missionaries explain their pastoral activities.



The Alpino, the boat used by the missionaries.

We are in the North of Brazil, in the diocese of Macapá. Father Raul, a PIME missionary from Guinea-Bissau, West Africa, has been parish priest of Santana for about two years. The parish includes the large archipelago at the mouth of the Amazon River. His assistant is Fr. Carlos, a missionary for Mexico has been working in the parish for one year now. The parish has 120 communities distributed in 16 sectors. Some sectors

are close to each other, others are not. Therefore, the parish does not have a central church on the mainland, but only an office in the city of Santana and a pastoral centre for meetings in the community of Guajará.

“When visiting the communities”, explains Fr. Raul, “our itinerary lasts from ten to fifteen days. In every community we do formation of the community leaders and celebrate Holy Mass and the sacraments. Once back in the city, we make a new plan and resume the visit to the communities as soon as we can”. The Alpino, the boat that the missionaries use to travel, has everything like a parish church: books and liturgical objects, basic food parcels for needy families and food for the journey.

Father Carlos adds: “Boating on the river is not like driving in the city. Real-time communication is difficult because, on the islands, not everyone has access to the internet. Another challenge is economic because, although the parish is the largest in the diocese, it is the poorest. And there is the problem of making sure that we are present in all the parish areas: for



The parish is the largest and the poorest in the diocese.

example, the community of São Bento is on an island 7-8 hours away by boat and its accessibility depends on the tide”.

Although the logistics are challenging, this is not the biggest concern for the missionaries: “The pastoral difficulty at the moment is the lack of catechists in some communities”, explains Father Raul. “In our absence, it is the local leaders and coordinators who provide assistance and accompany the faithful. When we return, six months after the last visit, they inform us of the community’s difficulties and achievements. Therefore, lay people are indispensable to pastoral activity: if the parish moves forward, it is thanks to their work. Everyone tries to do their part, but more catechists are needed,” says Father Raul.



The parish has 120 communities.

Mr. Elton Monteiro de Costa leads the community of Guajará when the priests are absent. He leads the community prayer on Sundays, visits families and recites the rosary with them. Though he is very active and enjoys his service, Elton admits: “The arrival of the priests is a bright moment for us. It is the warmth of the emotion of welcoming the priest. It is a light that lights things up more and more”. The feeling is mutual, confesses Father Carlos: “The greatest happiness I feel during the visits is when I perceive the joy of the people when the priest arrives. Everyone is waiting anxiously to celebrate the sacraments, receive some formation and spend the whole day in community”.

This year the communities worked on the theme of the Synod, convened by Pope Francis: ‘Participation, communion and mission’. There were moments of training and reflection, starting from the answers to the Synod questionnaires. At a local level, the parish has taken a concrete step: “We are putting into practice the three words: participation, communion and mission, uniting small communities to create a spirit of sharing. We work so that this mentality of participation and openness embraces the entire parish”, says Father Carlos, adding that with the unification of smaller communities, it becomes easier for missionaries to carry out visits and pastoral work.



Celebrating the Sacrament of Confession along the river

The missionary admits that the visits are insufficient to promote good pastoral and social work in the islands: “It is important to have fixed places, houses within the territory so that we priests can be more available to anyone in need, and guarantee a service that goes beyond scheduled visits. We have only one of such houses now...”.

Father Raul also wishes that more permanent deacons may be instituted for his parish. The priests are encouraging lay people who feel this calling to come forward and to dedicate more of their lives to the service of the parish. Currently, the parish has one active permanent deacon, as well as a candidate in training, and the two missionaries are confident that in the future they will have others: “With the help of deacons, catechists, leaders and local coordinators, the pastoral work will be much more fruitful”, the missionaries conclude.

Author: Fr. Carmine Curci

Source: www.southworld.net

