



Strategic Plan for the ICF Chair for Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing at KU Leuven

1. Introduction

In its last meeting, ICF asked me to present a strategic plan for the Chair, also in view of the expansion of the Chair, to 40% on the basis of the funds found until now, or to 50% if additional funds are found. I am happy to present here such a plan.

A Chair has three main goals: academic teaching, research and service. These goals are realised by practical activities, that are not carried out in a spirit of mere pragmatism, but on the basis of a well-chosen policy. This policy is described first in this strategic plan, and then the application of it on the main goals of the Chair.

2. General Policy

The general policy that this Chair follows, has four elements:

- ◆ Preference for internationalisation over activities restricted to Western Europe.
This is a logical consequence of the fact that ICF is an international organisation. This preference is guaranteed by the fact that KU Leuven¹ is one of the few Catholic universities with an international character, having a strong international programme. The majority of students in the international programme are from those countries in which ICF has not yet a basis (African countries, Southern Asia, Eastern Asia, Eastern Europe). Moreover, an international approach with respect for diversity is in line with the traditionally open attitude of the University with its tradition of liberation theologies, Gutierrez and Sobrino being alumni of KU Leuven.
- ◆ Relevance for the practice of Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing.
The primary task of an academic chair is scientific reflection, also fundamental scientific reflection. This reflection is directed on experiences, questions and themes that come forth from the concrete life of deaf persons, deaf communities and pastors in the field. It has, however, to be clearly more than the mere transmission of skills and knowledge about deafness developed by other sciences (psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, medicine) to those who want to prepare themselves for pastoral ministry. As far as possible, students should be given at least the intuition an inside view in the life of deaf persons and communities as a *locus theologicus*. Students should develop a certain level of *deaf awareness* and insight in the pitfalls for pastors working with the deaf.
- ◆ Being a resource centre.
Although most European atlases represent Europe almost as the centre of the world and out of proportion, for the majority of humankind Western Europe is just an outpost. That has consequences for the content of the programme, but also for the way in which insights and information gathered by Chair should be made and available and accessible for people in other parts of the world. By consequence, the "official" language of the Chair should be English (and if it were possible Spanish), and not a regional language such as Dutch, French or German. Publications should be made available by means of the internet, preferably in English.
- ◆ Involvement of deaf persons.
One of the goals of ICF is empowering deaf people and making them aware of their dignity as full members of Church and society. Involvement of deaf persons should be a central goal, and might take place in several ways: participation in the courses, participation in activities of the Chair, and service. At the moment, participation in the courses as students is rather difficult. In Flanders and the Netherlands, there are rather few deaf young people who meet the requirements for admission to an academic study, and these requirements are hardly negotiable. Moreover, deaf youth in these countries is very secularised, most of them living in a world that is remote from Christian tradition. Involvement has to be an enduring goal.

¹ The official name of the Catholic University of Louvain is KU Leuven, KU being the abbreviation of Catholic University, and Leuven the Flemish word for Louvain.



3. Application on the core tasks of the Chair

The core tasks of the Chair are teaching, research, and service.

a. Teaching

The primary task of the Chair is teaching. At the moment, there are three courses given by the Chair:

- ◆ “Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf and Partially Hearing”.
In the uneven years, this course is given in English and in the even years in Dutch. In the international programme, the number of students is larger than in the Flemish programme, which is logical. Four points should be discussed with the Faculty’s programme committee:
Firstly, that the course might be given each year in English, also for the Flemish students. That might lead to a slight decrease of Flemish students, especially those in Master programmes that do not give direct access to the doctoral (Ph.D.) programme, i.e. the Master programmes for teachers of religion and for practical theology.
Secondly, that the name of the course be changed in “Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing”, which seems to be more in line with how people call themselves.
A third point to be discussed is whether the programme, which can be followed in the form of guided self-study with additional practical assignments, can be followed by students living in other countries, by means of tele-learning.
A fourth point to be discussed is whether it is possible to depart from the rule that students who want to follow the course in the form of a credit contract, should meet the complete requirements for admission to an academic programme. If admission might be obtained also by means of a *colloquium doctum*, an admission examination, participation of deaf persons might be better possible.
- ◆ “Pastoral Work in Care Services: Fundamental Issues” and “Pastoral Work in Care Services: Practical Issues”. These courses, both of 26 contact hours, are given in English and are combined courses for the international and the Flemish programmes. I share these courses with my colleague Prof. Axel Liégeois – both of us give 13 hours of each course. There is a logical relationship between both courses, of which one is given in the even years and one in the uneven years. These courses substituted a course that I gave during the first two years, which was a duplicate of the Flemish course for Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf and Partially Hearing, for students in the programme of Advanced Academic Formation, a programme with a rather small number of students. A course shared with Prof. Axel Liégeois was strongly wished by the Faculty’s programme committee. I feared an overlap with the course for Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf and Partially Hearing, and I felt some tension between the goal of this course and the goal of the Chair. From the other side, it is a course that is followed by all students in the programme for pastoral theology. For this course, I chose themes that start broader than deafness, but most concrete applications are given in reference to deaf people. These themes are: the deconstruction of the concept of disability, logocentrism in Christian culture, functional impairment and worldview, what are language and communication about, the impossibility of the correlation paradigm in a highly secular culture or with the worldviews of people with functional impairments. The goal of these courses is to develop in students a first, global awareness that the world of normally hearing persons or persons seemingly without functional impairments is not the only world that can be conceived, and the world view of so-called normal persons is not absolute and should be put into perspective, and the practical consequences for pastoral ministry are discussed.
- ◆ “Religion, Meaning, and Philosophy of Life”: the Faculty asked me to give this course in the third year of the Bachelor’s programme for Speech Therapy and Audiology in the Medical Faculty. Since KU Leuven is a Catholic University all students in all departments have to follow these courses, which are as much as possible related to the study in that specific department. The themes that I treat in that course are: toward a Christian view on functional impairment, language and communication in relationship to religion and meaning of life, ethical issues in the field of deafness, and religion in Deaf culture.

Each year, these courses are prepared extensively. Course texts with literature references are prepared carefully and provided to the students through Blackboard. From year to year, course texts are reworked and made up-to-date, in order to make them a possible starting point for publications



preferentially in international peer reviewed journals. This has yielded up to now several articles published or accepted by or submitted to journals.

Reworking, deepening and making up to date the course texts requires much literature research, research being one of the tasks of the Chair.

Up to now, these activities have filled my contract time at Louvain (30%).

b. Research

As to research in the sense of projects made possible by a grant, up to now the Chair has not been successful. The way towards funds for projects in the field of theology are not easy, and certainly not in the case of international projects. Until now, the strategy has been to write an application for a grant to be given by the Flemish Fund for Scientific Research, which has a clear preference for objective and secular research that takes place within an international network, but oriented on Flanders. European funds have a strong preference for research on an European level on topics relevant for economy. It is clear that a different strategy has to be followed, i.e. a strategy that is not directed primarily on Flemish or European funds, and that not requires the formulation of goals, content and methods of the research to be squeezed within the straitjacket of secular language use.

Research should take place within an international context, and oriented on themes relevant for pastoral ministry with the deaf. A major topic of study should be which factors make pastoral ministry with the deaf effective. Within an international context, this will be a very complex research theme, for the following reasons:

- Effectiveness of pastoral ministry can be studied from the perspective of the pastor, individual persons ministered to, or the community in which the pastor works. When pastors are hearing, their perspective can be quite different from the perspective of the deaf community. Methods by which effects are studied, are often directed on the spiritual and pastoral needs of individual persons, tending to individualise people's pastoral needs, whereas various deaf authors state that many deaf cultures tend to be collectivistic, even in countries with an individualistic culture like Western-European countries.
- Deaf pastoral ministry takes place in very different ways in different countries, by various motives:
 - Differences in general cultural (e.g. USA and Latin America);
 - Differences in religious culture (e.g. religious pluralism vs. homogeneity, level of secularization);
 - Differences in Deaf culture (different phases of Deaf emancipation, different social-economic status of Deaf leadership);
 - The degree in which pastoral models are applied. In some places, clear models of pastoral ministry are applied, whereas in other places just pastors try to serve with much energy the Deaf community in a practical and pragmatic way, on the basis of common sense, loyalty to the Deaf community, and the formation they received in seminary.
- The method to be used has to be considered very well. Information gathered by means of questionnaires, a method that is frequently used, might be biased in the case of the Deaf. Other methods should be used too, e.g. ethnographic methods developed in cultural anthropology, such as direct and participating observation, but these methods would require a period of time to be spent within a specific pastoral programme. This would require large funds.
- Methodologically, a comparative study that yields a statistical comparison of data, will not be possible because of the many factors involved, and the high number of programmes that should be studied.

My proposal is to choose a limited numbers of examples of "good practice" in different cultural contexts, that should be studied stepwise in a qualitative way. I propose the following steps:

1. At first, through different channels, agencies for pastoral ministry with the deaf should be contacted. In this phase persons involved in pastoral agencies should be invited to be contacted by means of MSN, in order to have a possibility to ask preliminary questions and getting concrete information about pastoral programmes. A pitfall in this phase may be that valuable pastoral projects that cannot be approached through the internet, will not come into



the picture, e.g. projects in African and some Asian countries. Another pitfall will be that some countries will remain outside of the picture because of the language of that country (Slavic languages, Arab, Portuguese); for deaf persons written communication in their country's official language is often already a problem, and communication in a foreign language will be impossible with most deaf persons. Step 1: 40 hours.

2. In the meantime different models of pastoral ministry and descriptive characteristics of pastoral projects are described in such a way that they can be operationalised. Models of pastoral ministry might be Baart's presence theory,² narrative pastoral ministry,³ contextual ministry,⁴ liberative pastoral ministry,⁵ base community pastoral work.⁶ The choice of the models should reflect pastoral models in different cultures.
Descriptive characteristics concern observable facts, such as numbers of participants, kinds of activities organized, courses offered, liturgies, interpreters.
The results of these descriptions should be laid down into a checklist that can be used as a guideline for in-depth interviews, that for motives of distance and money should be carried out through MSN or Skype (chatting mode). This checklist will be tried out with one particular pastoral project. Step 2: 160 hours.
3. On the basis of the preliminary information gathered in step 1 potential examples of "good practice" are chosen and approached. These examples should be located in different cultural settings: Latin America, Southern Asia (Southern India or Sri Lanka), USA, Southern Europe (Spain or Italy) Western Europe, and if possible Africa (Nairobi or South Africa). Three contact persons in these examples of good practice should be found, with whom communication by means of MSN or Skype is possible: a pastor, a volunteer and a person involved as a common participant. Step 3: 40 hours.
4. When the examples of good practice are chosen, additional information is gathered about the general culture, religious culture and Deaf culture in the area of those examples. Possibly additional questions are added to the checklist on the basis of this information. Step 4: 160 hours.
5. The interviews with the contact persons take place through MSN or Skype. Step 5: 200 hours.
6. First drafts of the results are written. Step 6: 80 hours.
7. Dependently from the possibility to gather funds for it, each example of "good practice" is visited, and for a short period the life of the community is shared, as far as possible. The first drafts of the results are discussed with a group of members of the community, and corrected if necessary. Step 7: 5 periods of 3 weeks, 15 weeks. This would require funds for travel and lodging during those five periods of three weeks.
8. The final report is written, published on CD-ROM (pictures and movies included) and handed over to ICF and the communities involved in the study. Step 8: 200 hours.

² Presence theory is an approach for social case work by the Dutch social scientist Andries Baart, and applied on pastoral ministry in lower class districts in big cities, i.e. especially with people who are socially and economically superfluous. Pastors are present in people's daily world, try to understand that world from an inside perspective, and join into that world. Pastoral ministry is not "interventionism", not primarily problem and product oriented, although the starting point may be a specific intervention. Pastors find a good balance between friendship and professionalism.

³ In an narrative approach of pastoral ministry, pastors take people's stories about their life and their daily situation serious, and try to correlate these stories with the story of God.

⁴ In contextual ministry a pastor sees people within the contexts of their relationships, relationships that have led to growth, but also relationships by which people have been wounded. Pastors try to reconcile the pains and sorrows that relationships have caused, with the loyalties with which people may be tied to those same relationships.

⁵ The goal of liberative ministry is to enable people to live in full dignity, and to recognize within themselves the image of God. It demands a conscious commitment to empowerment of communities as people of God.

⁶ Base communities started as faith communities of poor people in Latin America, who because of a lack of priests and pastors started to read and to explain the Bible by themselves. The theology that arose from these communities, liberation theology, influences from the sixties and the seventies of the last century on also the Church in other countries. Theology, as speaking from and about God, should be a reality that could be experienced, people should be better off with it, that was the primary goal. Often, injustice had been glossed over in an erroneous way by the established Churches.



If expansion of the Chair takes place to 40% (one additional day every week), 880 hours means 110 weeks, two years and two months, to which 15 whole weeks have to be added (2½ years in total). If expansion of the Chair takes place to 50% (two additional days every week), 880 hours means 55 weeks, one year and two months, to which 15 whole weeks have to be added (1½ years in total). Students of the Faculty's international programme might participate in the study, e.g. for a licentiate thesis, under strict conditions: familiarity with deaf persons.

c. Service

A third aspect of a Chair is service. Service shall take place in the following ways:

1. A first way of service takes place through the internet. On the website of the Faculty of Theology, a page has been made with information about the Chair: <http://theo.kuleuven.be/pages/icf> . On this website, publications are made available, and other information too will be made available, such as some of the information about pastoral programmes for the Deaf gathered in the course of the research study, i.e. only that information for which persons who gave the information, give their consent.

The course texts, i.e. the texts that the students registered for my courses, receive, are not made available on the website, but might be made available in a selective way for members of the board of ICF, e.g. password protected against opening, selecting text and printing. Since this is an ongoing activity, I do not specify the time it takes.

2. Contribution to the formation of a network of persons involved in pastoral ministry with the deaf. Next spring, 2009, the meeting of the board of ICF is proposed to take place at Louvain. This might be an excellent opportunity for the organization of a meeting for persons involved in pastoral ministry with the Deaf from Flanders and surrounding countries. On that day members of the board present at the meeting of the board, might give a presentation, e.g. about their work, about the practice of pastoral ministry in their place, or about ICF in general, e.g.:

- Ian Robertson: narrative approach in pastoral ministry with the Deaf, or the STU programme
- Chelo Manero: Catholic Deaf communities in Central and Latin America
- Peter McDonough: the Catholic Deaf community in Great Britain, or translation of the Bible into Sign Language
- Frankie Berry: Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf in Ireland
- Mary O'Meara: the Catholic Deaf community at Washington DC

The following categories of persons might be invited to this meeting:

- Students in the Master's programmes for Pastoral Theology and Practical Theology
- Staff of the Research Unit of Pastoral Studies and the Centre for Practical Theology
- Pastors, volunteers and other persons involved in pastoral ministry with the deaf in Flanders and surrounding countries, in the Catholic Church and other Churches
- Other persons interested, like deaf persons, persons interested in Deaf culture.

The meeting will be supported by the Faculty, it will be an obligatory meeting for students in the programmes of Practical Theology and Pastoral Theology (Flemish and international programme), and it will figure on the conference programme that is sent to all pastors and pastoral programmes in Flanders. In the conference programme, a Friday at the end of March or April 2009 would fit best. A date in the first half of February, would not fit, since in that period students and staff may be absent.

The conference language should be English. Preparation should start early, also in view of the organization of interpreters, since Sign Language interpreters should be found who are able to interpret directly from English into one of the Sign Languages and vice versa. Since European states give deaf persons a certain number of interpreting hours (travel costs for the interpreter included), deaf participants should be contacted in time before the conference in order to ask them to contribute to the interpreting hours, which is a normal procedure.

I can organize the practical aspects of the conference, introduce the speakers, setting up a system for exchanging post and e-mail addresses in order to stay in touch.

The organization of this day will require 60 hours.



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3. The goal of the Chair is teaching and research on an academic level. There is, however, among deaf persons a need, surely not excessive, of formation and courses. It is not the task of the Chair to organize or to give courses on a lower than academic level. If a conference in 2009 takes place, deaf participants will be contacted afterwards and asked about their needs for formation and courses. They might be informed about the courses that are given on different levels, and support might be given in finding ways that enable deaf persons to follow regular programmes as a group. In total this will require 40 hours.

This service proposal will require a total number of 100 hours.

4. Concluding remarks

If accepted by ICF, this strategic plan will be published on the website of the Chair.

If this plan is to be carried out, that requires a total number of almost 1000 hours and three full weeks in addition to my actual contract hours. This means that some aspects of this plan will remain a form of pious hope if expansion of the Chair is not effectuated, at least to 40% and possibly to 50%. Therefore, I hope that ICF will sign an agreement with KU Leuven about a change of my contract.

At the end, I want to thank Prof.Dr.Matthijs Lamberigts, Dean of the Faculty, whose term of office as a Dean is drawing to a close. The Chair, and by consequence also ICF, owes very much to him, or his continuous support, his trust and his constructive remarks. Without his support, a lot of things might not have been possible. I propose that, when a meeting of ICF at Leuven will take place in 2009, Prof.Lamberigts will be invited and honoured by ICF.

Prof. Dr. Marcel Broesterhuizen