

# Atypical Inter-Volunteer Conflict Management

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## Abstract

Volunteers are an important and useful group for the functioning of certain micro-social organizations such as parishes. But managing them is fraught with tension and internal conflict. The strategies adopted by leaders to manage these conflicts vary from one organization to another. This article looks at the strategies adopted by expatriate missionary priests to manage the multiple conflicts between volunteers engaged in parish service. We use the concepts of mediation and class-destroying as a theoretical basis, followed by an empirical base of semi-structured interviews with 40 priests and 80 volunteers to make some contribution to the managerial literature. The issue of conflict management between workers in an organization is an important and abundant one in the managerial literature. By contrast, the management of conflicts between volunteers in a parish seems to be relatively rare. The parish as a field of research also appears to be unexploited by researchers. The parish is an important base for managerial practices.

## Keywords

Volunteering, Expatriation, Conflict Management, Mediation, Class-Destroying, Africa

## 1. Introduction

Volunteers “freely choose their commitment, giving of their time, energy, skills and passion without financial gain” (Thibault, Fortier, & Albertus, 2007: p. 20). Volunteers have merited particular attention in management science research. The very term volunteerism is too vague and therefore uncertain, as it can refer to a form of grassroots, local activism, particular individuals, various forms of environmental and other social movements (Yanitsky, 2020). A better understanding of the current profile of volunteers and their motivation can improve recruitment and retention strategies (Ward & Mckillop, 2011). Because of the nature of these

non-salaried actors, the issues surrounding their activity call for fluid and more organized thinking than might be imagined a priori (Pujol, 2009). Volunteers are characterized by being available and capable, within groups, movements or associations, of helping someone else. Instead of being the recipient of someone else's help, the volunteer becomes an actor in his or her own life, the ultimate proof of this being that he or she is now capable of helping others (Hamidi, 2002). Today's volunteers must be available and able to remain both amateurs, literally people who love, but also quasi-professional amateurs, inspiring confidence in both the public and professionals (Chatel, 2015).

Today, volunteering is facing major difficulties within teams. According to France Bénévolat (2010)<sup>1</sup>, 48% of volunteers are hindered by a lack of availability and time. Many other difficulties can be linked to multiple causes, leading to profound crises within the organizations that engage them. According to Tanguy Chatel (2015), volunteering is faced with a great tension, which consists in knowing how to retain its freshness, spontaneity and concern for the present, while at the same time being credible, convincing and motivating. Associations are also often faced with the problem of the quality of their volunteers. The "right man at the right place" principle becomes an important parameter. To avoid certain malfunctioning situations, the mobilization of volunteers with specific skills seems a godsend for associations whose needs are growing and sometimes urgent. These associations adopt a variety of strategies to find the right people for the right tasks (Gateau, 2007). But whatever the recruitment methods and all the precautions are taken upstream, crises are bound to occur. And no organization is immune to these crises in volunteer management.

Normally, volunteers come to offer their labor without any direct or explicit consideration. However, this free will is embedded in a formal, regulated framework, a common feature of all organizations, which imposes various obligations, including the basic one of respecting operating rules (Cousineau & Damart, 2017). Such is the case with Catholic parishes, which constitute a considerable pool of volunteers and have internal rules for their operation and the sound management of their personnel. This study focuses on the management of crises arising from the operation of volunteer work in parishes. Through a survey of 40 priests in charge of parishes and 80 volunteers involved in the running of parishes in France, we set ourselves the goal of discovering the ways in which crises are managed in a mini-social organization of a religious nature. The greatest interest in this study lies in the specificity of the actors managing these crises. These are African priests who have come to France as missionary expatriates. These expatriates are certainly out of the ordinary in their crisis management practices. How effective are conflict management strategies when implemented by expatriate mediators?

To answer this question, we mobilize the managerial concepts of mediation and

<sup>1</sup>France Benevolat is a nonprofit, apolitical association dedicated to promoting, enhancing and fostering volunteering. It was created in 2003 from the merger of the Centre National du Volontariat and Planète Solidarité.

class-destroying. The revival of mediation is a relatively recent phenomenon, which explains why it is a mode of social regulation under construction and why there is still a certain conceptual vagueness around the very notion of mediation (Bonafé-Schmitt, 2017). Indeed, the success of a collaboration lies in the art of getting through difficult times together; if conflicts are not defused quickly, collaboration can stagnate or even stall (Poitras, 2015). Mediation is considered to be one of the most common and effective ways of managing crises within any organization, while class-destroying offers specific features that are proving very useful for crisis management among parish volunteers. The parish is considered to be the place where all diversities come together, due to the Catholic nature of the Church. We therefore draw successively on the work of Grima and Trépo (2009), for whom mediation is becoming the norm for organizations faced with individual or collective problems; then on the work of Gray and Kish-Gephart (2013), who propose a renewed reading of the confrontation of social classes at a micro-social level.

Our results suggest the existence of several axes. We have discovered that the diversity of volunteers inevitably leads to a diversity of problems, which in turn generates a variety of crises, some of which we have described in French parishes. While priests in general have strategies for calming the ardor or discontent of volunteers, missionaries from Africa are demonstrating new skills in managing these crises, taking into account the criteria of ethnic diversity, languages, social classes, intergenerational diversity, gender diversity, etc., present among volunteers. All this manifests itself in highly heterogeneous collectives. And different strategies are developed by each according to his or her experience and skills for better crisis management.

This article is divided into four parts. We present the theoretical underpinnings of crisis management through mediation and class-destroying strategies. The major contribution of this study lies in experimenting with these strategies and comparing them with those developed by expatriate managers in a mini-social context. We outline the methodology and detail the results, followed by a critical discussion.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. Mediation

The management styles were compromise, competition and collaboration (Galman et al., 2021). Associations, like parishes, are subject to tensions that are partly explained by recent demands for professionalization. They make massive use of volunteer resources, which by definition are based on a free and not very formalized commitment (Cousineau & Damart, 2017). While contracting parties have little recourse to formal, institutionalized conflict resolution mechanisms, in particular mediation (Stimec, 2003), it should be noted that since the early 1980s, an abundant research literature on mediation has evolved. Bercovitch (1992) defined mediation as “a conflict management process, related to but distinct from the

disputants' own efforts, whereby disputants or their representatives seek assistance or accept an offer of assistance from, an individual, group, state or organization to change, affect or influence its perceptions or behavior, without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of law". According to [Luison and Valastro \(2004\)](#), mediation mobilizes a project to re-establish places of socialization, working in parallel to re-establish social bonds and support alternative ways of managing social relations.

Numerous studies have attempted to better understand the behavior and effectiveness of mediators. This third party does not exercise decision-making power, but this does not prevent him/her from having a strong influence and encouraging the emergence of an agreement between the parties ([Le Fanchec & Rojot, 2009](#)). At the same time, the reasons behind mediators' choices remain relatively unknown, according to [Grima and Trépo \(2009\)](#). These authors analyzed the mediator's role in relation to his or her cultural context and the influence of personal variables; and, more specifically, examined the implementation of different mediation tactics. They believe that the mediator will declare himself as external to a conflictual situation and attempt to encourage the parties to the conflict to find a solution. They have shown that a perception of the mediator's impartiality helps the parties to feel secure and accept mediation as a framework within which their conflict can be resolved.

Conversely, impartiality, which is synonymous with the pursuit of a tactic based on the mediator's exteriority to the conflict, can undermine his mission, even where it is simply a matter of putting an end to the conflict. Thus [Demoulin \(2021\)](#) demonstrates that the mediator, whether professional or amateur, is first and foremost a human being providing assistance to other human beings; he is therefore subject to the same kinds of analytical errors as the parties he frames, he acts emotionally to the narratives he hears, he acts as a consequence of the beliefs he entertains and the ideologies to which he adheres. However, it is important for the mediator to take a keen interest in the situation and devote the time required for an efficient resolution. For, more broadly speaking, mediation makes it possible to rebuild the social bond that exists between several individuals ([Viaut, 2020](#)). To this end, the mediator's status helps him to implement his influence. Ultimately [Grima and Trepo](#) list four types of conflict management strategy:

- An aggressive approach. In this first group of tactics, mediators are particularly active and explicit, working intensively alone. Uncooperative or bad-faith litigants are dealt with relentlessly, and reminded by mediators that, beyond this role, they are also labor inspectors charged with ensuring compliance with the law. That is, they may in fact penalize the recalcitrant challenger for any aspects of the contract that conceal wrongful behavior. Mediators' desire to remove any obstacle to agreement means they will try to sideline anyone who gets in the way.

- Collective pressure. Once again, intense pressure is brought to bear on recalcitrant opponents to bow out. There is, however, a collective dimension here. Whereas mediators pursuing an aggressive approach act alone to persuade people,

here the mediators analyze their interventions in a broader perspective. Irrespective of any desire to participate fully in the debate, they act in a more subtle way, bringing in third parties to put pressure on uncooperative parties.

- A surgical approach. Once again, the mediators would be heavily involved in the negotiations, without this necessarily meaning that they would be present, and exerting pressure, all the time. They would concentrate their efforts on key moments in the discussions. By doing this, and by rarely intervening outside the formal negotiation sessions, they forced the parties to adopt a more open attitude to dialogue and to take back full responsibility for the negotiations.

- A comprehensive approach. The desire to reach an agreement is what drives the mediators in this scenario to enter into negotiations in much the same way as a third party would. However, unlike the aggressive approach, here they are more flexible. This approach is often developed when one or even both sides have no experience of conflict management. Mediators will inform these parties, teach them how to draw up a prioritized list of complaints, and remind them that industrial action legislation includes both rights and obligations. They also reassure disputing parties as to the terms and conditions of strike action, and ensure that matters remain under control to minimize any damage to their interests.

## 2.2. Class-Destroying

The human beings who are the focus of strategic public relations are more complex (Edafejirhaye & Alao, 2019). If it is possible to understand how social class distinctions are maintained within organizations (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013), it will be interesting to understand how the priest manages to prevent the emergence of conflicts that could be born or transposed within the volunteers working for the running of the parish. Critical reading grids such as the work of Gray and Kish-Gephart (2013), which proposes a renewed reading of the confrontation of social classes at a microsocial level; as well as the work of Acker (2006), which proposes an examination of specific organizations within which complex inequalities are reproduced, seem useful to us. There are several reasons for these choices. Analysis of the work of Gray and Kish-Gephart (2013) enables us to understand the possibility of the work of social homogenization that the priest carries out with volunteers within parishes where inequalities persist. Also Acker (2006) was able to define inequality in organizations as systematic disparities between participants in power and control over objectives, resources and results. In his view, equality rarely exists in the control of objectives and resources. He believes that regimes of inequality are highly diverse in other ways, and also tend to be fluid and changeable.

Present everywhere, social classes are expressed in the Churches as minorities or majorities, and not in terms of inferiority or superiority. This diversity can be a source of conflict, or of real wealth. Diversity is said to respond to economic concerns, helping companies to be more efficient and make better use of their human resources (Cornet & Warland, 2008). Diversity is an asset for corporate

prosperity. [Watson et al. \(1993\)](#) have shown that newly-formed heterogeneous groups are less efficient and effective than homogeneous teams. On the other hand, when group members have been working together for a long time, diversity can be beneficial for group functioning and performance ([Bauweraerts et al., 2017](#)). Within this diversity, individual competence must be sought out and promoted by managers for the performance of the entire organization. Diversity management was originally a set of policies which, in addition to combating discrimination, aimed to ensure that everyone's skills were recognized and benefited from ([Hornsey & Hogg, 2000](#)). Discrimination and frustration are frequently observed in organizations, perpetuating the eternal struggle between social classes. Previously focused on exploitation, the factory and working-class labor, the social question has shifted to "difficult neighborhoods", youth unemployment, cultural diversity and the formation of new classes ([Dubet, 2014](#)). It would be absurd to deny the existence of social classes, or to pretend they don't play a major role in social inequalities. The reproduction of inequalities is the fact of an entire society, where the advantaged are now in the majority ([Perrenoud, 1994](#)).

The study of social class can be approached from multiple points of view ([Wright & Kehoe, 2008](#)). [Gray and Kish-Gephart's \(2013\)](#) approach is useful to us insofar as these authors show how social distinctions are maintained within organizations and how inequalities are perpetuated within them. Although their focus is on the maintenance of social distinctions, they have given significant consideration to tracking what they call "class-destroying work", which consists of actions or practices aimed at disrupting social distinctions in organizations and stimulating emancipation or resistance ([Ezzamel & Willmott, 1998](#)). It's about interrogating existing hierarchical arrangements to determine who they privilege and who they oppress ([Hinings & Greenwood, 2002](#)), and investigating how language and everyday practices normalize inequality in organizations. It's about destroying ideas of superiority of one class over another, or one category of person over another. Once we've identified everything within the organization that militates in favor of social class inequality, it becomes easier to propose remedies for individual and organizational fulfillment. It's important to identify the obstacles to creating equality in work organizations ([Acker, 2006](#)). So when we ask ourselves how we go about perpetuating equality in organizations, we might consider diversity management training ([Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006](#)). This would inculcate an idea of justice in everyone's mindset.

### 3. Methodology

To validate and enrich these theoretical considerations and to understand how the priest acts to prevent the emergence of conflicts within volunteers in a parish context, we carried out qualitative research by surveying 40 missionary priests, mostly from French-speaking West Africa, working in Catholic parishes in France. In fact, according to a study carried out in 2023, there are many priests "from elsewhere" in France: an estimated 3000, or 20% of the total number of priests in

France<sup>2</sup>. African priests are in the majority among the Fidei donum received in France. 60 to 80% of foreign priests in France come from the African continent<sup>3</sup>. They are more numerous in some dioceses than others. This is the case in the diocese of Beauvais, where 13 of the 60 active African priests have joined the diocese to make up for the shortage of personnel<sup>4</sup>. For the purposes of this study, which is limited to the Paris region, we have opted for a convenience sample for practical reasons of accessibility.

These 40 priests ranged in age from 30 to 60, and had been working for a significant number of years since their ordination as priests. Having first served in their own country, they come to France under a clearly defined contract between the hierarchies of the African churches and France. During their stay, they occupy the same positions of responsibility as native French priests. They are responsible for parishes, communities or groups. It is in this capacity that they manage the inter-volunteer conflicts they told us about.

We also interviewed 80 lay volunteers to get their views and impressions of how priests handle internal crises among volunteers. Once again, this is a convenience sample for practical reasons of accessibility. Our investigation was limited to the Paris region. Some of the people we interviewed live alone; others, younger students or university graduates, still live with their parents, while others, older people, are already married couples. We didn't take into account the gender of the individuals; we were interested in the men and women available. Younger people are involved in scouting, reading or choral movements. Adults are involved in catechism formation, or couples' preparation for marriage or children's baptism, or funeral celebrations, or pastoral animation teams, or parish finance and property management teams, etc.

The interviews were carried out between 2020 and 2024. We finished just before sending this article. Our approach was much appreciated by the protagonists, who found it an opportunity to take stock of their relationship with their colleagues and collaborators. Some of the interviews were conducted by telephone, due to the confinement of the COVID period. Lasting an average of 40 minutes (i.e. from 20 minutes to 1 hour), the interviews were conducted in the presbyteries and priests' offices, or in the homes of the volunteers interviewed. Outside COVID time, we managed to meet volunteers during their parish meetings. Some received us before the meetings, others after, depending on their availability. We were sometimes refused registration, and then decided to carry out intensive note-taking.

The questionnaires used for the interviews were drawn up by us. We took into account the problematic of this study and the major concepts mobilized. The volunteer questionnaire we used included questions such as: What are the recurring

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.rfi.fr/fr/religions-du-monde/20231117-religieuses-et-prêtres-africains-en-france-de-nouveaux-missio>.

<sup>3</sup><https://www.famillechretienne.fr/40349/article/pretres-etrangers-un-accueil-plus-cible-et-mieux-encadre>.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.leparisien.fr/le-depayement-des-pretres-africains-en-mission-dans-loise-24-12-2023-2R>.

causes of conflict or misunderstanding between you volunteers? Are conflicts frequent or just temporary? What do the conflicts often concern? Do these conflicts have an impact on the life of the whole parish, or is it just between you and your group? Tell us about a conflict you've had personally since joining the parish, and how it was resolved. How do the priests resolve these situations with you? Do they succeed in reconciling you and restoring final peace? The priests' questionnaire included questions on strategies: Are there often conflicts between your volunteers in the parish? On what issues are your volunteers often divided? What do your volunteers disagree about? What strategies do you use to manage these conflicts? Are these strategies effective?

We built up a theoretical sample (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) by varying both the personal characteristics of the priests and the professional and social characteristics of the interviewees. This dynamic approach to the actors in our study enabled us to identify the real problems priests face in their role as parish conflict managers. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. We then transcribed all the material and carried out a content analysis using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Coding with NVIVO software enabled us to identify all the elements present in the corpus and to group the units obtained for axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). In this way, we were able to identify the common points regularly evoked in the interviews. We then proceeded to compare and reformulate the field data to obtain the result of our research. Open coding was developed (Charmaz, 2006). The analysis was interactive. The first codes were often pieces of quotes from interviewees. They were continually tested by new interviews, leading to the disappearance of some while others emerged. This process led us to modify our interview protocol, as certain questions appeared redundant. Over 50 different codes were identified at this stage. We then coded each interview independently, enabling us to identify interpretive differences. NVIVO proves to be a very efficient software for qualitative data analysis.

## 4. Results

In parishes, the faithful who come to church for religious services are certainly numerous in the dioceses of the Paris region. But there aren't many who volunteer. It would be difficult to provide demographic or statistical information without risk of error. Since we opted for a qualitative study, we present a summary of some of the causes of conflict mentioned by the volunteers and priests we met. We then present the strategies used by missionary priests to manage conflicts.

### 4.1. Causes and Manifestations of Conflict Among Volunteers

#### 4.1.1. Abandonment or Neglect of Work

There are many reasons why volunteers may find themselves in crisis. The voluntary nature of their mission means that many of them show a lack of assiduity and seriousness. Some complain about others being late, others about absenteeism, and still

others about neglecting their work. These are just some of the reasons for crises that can range from the mild to the serious, depending on the parish and the context. “The lack of availability on the part of some puts the burden of work on others, who are quick to complain. The crisis becomes crucial when the lack of availability spreads to the majority,” asserts Jean, a volunteer involved in the readers’ group in the diocese of Saint Denis. His 45-year-old Benedictine wife adds, “when this happens, discontent grows among the volunteers, because the work entrusted to them is not working properly”. In some parishes, it’s as if some people are called upon to be more enthusiastic than others. It’s a feeling that revolts those most dedicated to the task. “The lack of availability of young people is a real concern for us. Most of them already have a job and it’s difficult for them to commit themselves full-time. Also, not all catechists are always present,” says Pierrot, a 46-year-old volunteer catechist from the Paris diocese. “We notice disruptions in the progress of projects or programs. Sometimes activities are slow. Initiative-taking is less prolix,” asserts Fiacre, 60, a member of the Pastoral Animation Team (EAP) in a parish in the diocese of Meaux.

#### **4.1.2. Poor Financial Management**

The choice of a group financier calls for greater trust. It’s a question of great responsibility. The problem that arises afterwards is that tensions quickly arise from suspicions and doubts about the treasurer or accountant. “Lack of honesty leads to serious crises within groups,” admits Justine, a 76-year-old retired accountant and volunteer member of the Evry finance team. It’s an unpleasant situation that often destroys groups, starting by creating a bad atmosphere. “Unemployment, lack of employment or poverty have unpleasant repercussions on some people’s behavior when it comes to managing parish finances,” says Joyce, 65, a volunteer in a Paris parish.

#### **4.1.3. Lack of Team Spirit**

It’s hard to coordinate the diversity of cultures, temperaments, moods, ages and ethnic groups. Everyone comes to the parish with his or her strengths and weaknesses. And within the groups there is a multiplicity of characters. Sometimes it’s the ambitions or objectives of commitment that vary from one volunteer to another. This justifies crises of sentiment or temperament. “We experience crises linked to mood swings and feelings,” says a 30-year-old Jacqueline, a choir volunteer in Créteil. Feelings of pride sometimes prevail in relationships between volunteers. “Some people feel superior to everyone else,” laments Paulette, a 32-year-old West Indian volunteer in the same choir in Créteil. In such cases, collaboration becomes difficult. There are times when volunteers fight amongst themselves. This often happens in female-dominated teams. “Between women it’s more difficult. They don’t often get along, and they’re afraid of reporting each other. One lady tries to impose herself on all the others. And that creates a lot of misunderstanding,” says Dominique, 43, who is involved in a choir in the diocese of Versailles.

#### **4.1.4. Lack of Solidarity**

Lack of solidarity is also one of the evils undermining relations within volunteer teams. Yet it is unity that constitutes the strength of any group. “Disassociation often leads to unfortunate and deplorable consequences. It’s particularly harmful in the religious sphere, where the parish is considered Catholic,” asserts 56-year-old Antoinette, a member of the EAP in a parish in the diocese of Pontoise. Her husband Benoit, of the same age, adds: “Issues of jealousy are frequently cited as a reason for crisis among volunteers. This is due to the fact that some volunteers find that the priest is more attentive to one than to others.” It’s a human feeling that can be observed in any group. Because affinities exist, and the bonds of friendship are not always the same between individuals.

#### **4.1.5. Job Attachment**

Another reason for crisis among volunteers is becoming attached to a position and seeing oneself as indispensable and unavoidable. “The difficulty can sometimes come from people who have been doing something for a very long time, sometimes too long, and it becomes their business, one person’s business,” asserts 60-year-old volunteer Violette in Versailles. Her husband Grégoire agrees: “It’s difficult because the parish isn’t private or family property. Everyone has the right to apply to be a parish volunteer”. We deplore behaviors that seek to arrogate to themselves the right or privilege to serve in the parish. “No one is indispensable, and we have to learn to make room for other volunteers at the right time and in the most dignified way possible”, reports Clément, 28, from the Readers group in Paris.

#### **4.1.6. Lack of Resources**

Just as you need financial resources to run a business, you need them to run a parish. When a priest refuses all requests from the faithful for no other reason than a lack of funds, that’s a problem. Money is an excellent motivator. As a result, his absence leads to a loss of dynamism among volunteers, some of whom become discouraged and give up. “People expect everything from the priest. And it’s normal for the parish to provide the means when it entrusts a mission to volunteers,” asserts Georgette, 52, a member of the EAP in Pontoise. “This unsatisfied expectation of volunteers leads to discomfort in relations with priests and between volunteers”, says Prisca, 61, a catechist in Créteil. Lack of resources is therefore a significant problem when it comes to volunteer management.

#### **4.1.7. Lack of Volunteer Spirit**

All the crises linked to volunteering in parishes seem to have a common denominator: a poor understanding of the concept of volunteering. “It’s mainly the gratuity aspect of volunteering that’s discussed, because it’s misunderstood,” admits Jeannette, 43, an instrumentalist and choir member. So a lot of people get involved in voluntary work without really understanding what’s at stake. This state of affairs lends credence to the view of some priests that “true voluntary work no longer exists, because the mercantile spirit has taken over everything”, says

Claudette, 39, a reader in the diocese of Saint Denis. “The spirit of the market has taken over people’s minds, driving away the spirit of gratuity. We’re witnessing a generalization of this mentality throughout society; all this means that there’s no longer a spirit of volunteerism in the Church,” laments Prudencia, a 24-year-old volunteer student we met in Evry. As a result, some faithful volunteers are carrying this worldly mentality into the parishes, and it’s disrupting the way they function. “This lack of volunteer spirit has serious consequences for parishes. The work is slowing down,” says Mr. Nicolas, an 87-year-old volunteer living in Meaux.

## **4.2. Strategies Used by Missionaries to Manage Volunteer Conflicts**

### **4.2.1. Finding Out about the Protagonists**

When informed of a crisis situation, the missionary priest’s first reaction is to find out who the protagonists are. This is a complex task for the foreign priest, who often doesn’t know where to find the right information. “As long as I don’t know the people in conflict, I don’t know whether my proposals for reconciliation will be accepted”, says Father Firmin, 37, a Beninese missionary in Paris. He adds: “The priest therefore undertakes to question his immediate entourage, consisting of other volunteers and all those close to the protagonists who are supposed to provide him with the necessary information in complete discretion”. Father Moïse, 48, from Burkina Faso, on mission in Evry, adds: “I ask the other volunteers and a few other parishioners what they know about the protagonists’ past since they started volunteering in the parish. This information gathering enables the expatriate priest to have a more or less precise idea of each protagonist”. After that, he can try to meet them to listen and get to know them better. In this way, he already has many elements that can help him understand the protagonists and better manage their conflict.

### **4.2.2. Meeting the Protagonists Individually**

When crises arise, they need to be managed to avoid degenerating into an opportunity to destroy the organization, or becoming an obstacle to the parish’s. His parish priest, 54-year-old Congolese Father Jonas, adds: “Conflicts are managed on a case-by-case basis, depending on the context and the individual. You have to study and analyze the conflict in depth before committing yourself to resolving it”. If we can’t prevent a crisis, we need to know how to tackle it by taking a fundamental interest in the various protagonists. Father Maxime, 56, from Togo, on mission in Versailles, explains: “This is done through meetings and individual contacts; when you meet them and consider them, you talk to them and they pull themselves together”. For the priest, it’s a question of taking an interest in them in order to inform himself as the head of the organization, and above all to seek and reflect on the solutions to be found. “Dialogue and listening are the first steps in conflict resolution,” says Father Eric, 64, a missionary from Benin in Pontoise. These dialogues can also provide an opportunity for the priest to explain certain aspects of the requirements for volunteering in the parish.

### 4.2.3. Community Conflict Management

Community crisis management involves involving other leaders or informing them of the crisis before a decision is taken on how to handle it. It provides a forum for reflection, enabling the priest to study the ins and outs of a crisis, and to foresee the possible consequences of a crisis. “With my policy of interactivity, i.e. my concerted and not solitary management, this enables me to defuse many crises,” asserts Father Louis, 52, a Senegalese on mission in the diocese of Meaux. This kind of strategy is adopted by many priests to calm down anger or ardor. “Sometimes I call a meeting to get advice from the right people before meeting and proposing directives to the protagonists,” adds Father Alphonse, 42, a missionary in Créteil. “Catechists’ or other volunteers’ meetings become places of crisis management, places where sometimes the protagonists are called upon to justify and reconcile themselves. They are also places where the priest is called upon to give explanations, places where other volunteers share their point of view,” explains Serge 57, a Togolese on mission in the diocese of Saint Denis. Some priests especially rely on the wisdom of pastoral council or EAP members to manage conflict situations.

### 4.2.4. Applying the Sanctions Provided for in the Texts

“In the Church, I don’t know if we should talk about sanctions, because of its special status. Because the Church is a family, it’s a place where charity is exercised. If people happen to be undisciplined, we can talk about a call to order,” says Father Epiphane, a 59-year-old Burkinabé on mission in Paris. And his Ivorian colleague, Father Cyprien, 44, adds: “We talk about sanctions when we’re in a hierarchical relationship where there’s the boss, and there are the employees. But in the case of voluntary work, where people give of themselves voluntarily, we can’t talk about sanctions, but rather reminders”. The point of view of these two missionary priests is not without relevance. Like them, many other missionaries believe that the Church is not there to judge or condemn. “Sanctions are not the ideal way of resolving conflicts”, many priests maintain. Rather, some of them fear the consequences that sanctions can have on individuals and groups. “Sanctions don’t solve the problem. If you sanction a group or a choir, the group risks disappearing. So we’re careful. However, we threaten them with sanctions, and they’re afraid,” say Fathers Anicet and Marcel, both aged 46 and based respectively in the dioceses of Evry and Meaux.

However, many priests adopt the strategy of actually punishing volunteers in crisis. Some do so rarely, and take this decision in spite of themselves, i.e. when all attempts at appeasement have failed. “For me, sanctions are a form of education, so I don’t hesitate to apply them,” says Father Jacob, 64, an Ivorian on mission in Saint Denis. Sanctions can be applied to an individual or an entire group. This is often done on the basis of the group’s internal rules. “Yes, we sanction them on the basis of their internal regulations. I apply the sanctions provided for in their text or in the texts of the Church,” says Christian, a 61-year-old Congolese priest in Pontoise. His young colleague, Father Francis, 32, from Benin, adds:

“There are penalties for misconduct in their internal regulations, and the diocese is very rigorous on these points. We try to apply what the diocese stipulates in each case”. Missionary priests can therefore easily rely on the statutes and regulations laid down by the diocese to apply to volunteers in their parishes.

#### **4.2.5. Threat of Public Denunciation**

This is another crisis management strategy that is rarely used by some priests. Denouncing someone publicly can be seen as a sign of humiliation. “Volunteers don’t like to be humiliated, and they’re often afraid I’ll quote them in the middle of mass,” says 48-year-old Roland from Togo, on assignment in Paris. “Twice I’ve had to name choirs or groups who’ve behaved badly, and that’s hurt them; but it’s been a lesson for all the rest,” says Justin, a 57-year-old father from Côte d’Ivoire on mission in Evry. Sanctions applied to one group or individual have repercussions that can be positive for all other groups. “The faithful prefer to be publicly rewarded or congratulated rather than denounced,” says Father Nestor, a 40-year-old missionary from Burkina Faso in Créteil. This seems quite normal. Denunciation thus becomes a weapon of persuasion that the priest cleverly tries to manipulate. “The consequences of this practice are often serious, as it affects individuals and, at the same time, their families and loved ones, who feel frustrated out of solidarity. This can lead to their definitive resignation from the Catholic Church,” adds Congolese Father Boniface, parish priest in the same parish as Father Nestor.

### **5. Discussion**

Having set out to address the issue of crisis management in parishes by expatriate priests on mission in the Paris region, we were able to observe numerous confirmations of the theoretical study by our empirical research. Looking at the results, the study reveals that volunteering does indeed give rise to crises, even in parishes. Many crises were identified among the numerous cases mentioned by the volunteers and priests we met. These crises discredit the real motivations for volunteering. Understanding volunteer motivation can help associations better target their canvassing and communication efforts, tailoring their message to the motivations of the volunteers they wish to attract and retain (Bussell & Forbes, 2002). While many volunteers often justify their commitment by the desire to be useful to others, in literature as in parishes, there is no reason to justify absence from work or neglect of duties. Volunteering calls for solidarity within the team and solidarity with the community. These impulses of solidarity are then presented as natural dispositions to altruism (Havard & Nicourd, 2005). Volunteers who remain loyal to an association, for example, feel driven by the desire to be useful and take it for granted. Many authors have shown that this desire to be useful, this drive to help others, is the product of specific socio-economic, historical and political contexts (Collovald, 2002).

The parish context is not lacking in solidarity on the part of volunteers, but the crises evoked by some volunteers lead us to believe that not everyone fully

understands the meaning of a voluntary commitment. Admittedly, the motivations for volunteering appear to be multiple, which undoubtedly helps to understand the diversity of forms of volunteer involvement (Bougard et al., 2014). But the literature recognizes that when there is a lack of fidelity to initial motivations, volunteering is bound to fall into crisis (Cousineau & Damart, 2017). This is exactly what the behavior of parish volunteers reveals.

The practice of mediation presented in the literature by Grima and Trépo (2009) finds concrete application in the parish when difficulties arise among volunteers. The various strategies associated with mediation are easy to put into practice, with highly conclusive results. These authors confirm the hypotheses of Luison and Valastro (2004), who believe that mediation fosters new models of conflict management and regulation, based on trust and reciprocal collaboration. It is therefore essential for organizational managers to know how to make the most of the mediation strategy to manage the crises inherent in any workgroup.

Our results attest to the fact, based on the behavior of expatriate missionaries, that “the mediator is not a negotiator, he is not a stakeholder, but he has - or gives himself - a certain exteriority”, as Stimec (2004: p. 4). These African priests in French parishes adopt strategies that take into account the organization’s well-being, survival and profitability. To preserve the parish’s religious character and defend its reputation in society, missionary priests meet with the protagonists in crisis situations to help them individually understand the benefits of living well together in the parish. At this point, they become aware of the influences they are subject to, and of the subjectivity inherent in their analysis as imperfect human beings (Demoulin, 2021).

Relationship crises among volunteers can have unpleasant repercussions for the whole parish. Missionaries do everything in their power to extinguish the fire of discord between volunteers in crisis. Except that today, in the context of volunteer management, there are new techniques that potentially contradict the traditional values of associations (Ughetto & Combes, 2010). And the development of these new practices also creates specific areas of relevance (Luison & Valastro, 2004).

As presented by Gray and Kish-Gephart (2013), the strategy of class-destroying consists in managing crises by taking into account the parameters of social class, culture, ethnicity, gender, age, etc. In this way, the individual is approached by taking into account the parameters of social class, culture, ethnicity, gender, age and so on. In this way, the individual is approached in terms of his or her multiple identities. This strategy enables the leader to better understand the motives behind the crises shaking the organization. It’s a good strategy for solving problems quickly and definitively. This strategy, widely used by missionaries, enables them to avoid the recurrence of crises once the protagonists have been reconciled. Crises do not risk superficial or random solutions, but are managed in depth. If it’s not easy to know or understand what motivates a person to do a job (Esmond, 2001), it’s equally not easy to understand what might drive a volunteer to provoke a crisis. While class work in organizations perpetuates inequalities (Gray & Kish-

Gephart, 2013), in the parish this reality is not so noticeable, as the parish priest treats all volunteers equally, without exception. The strategy of class-destroying allows him to question the history of each protagonist. This enables missionary priests in the parish to understand, for example, that a particular group situation is merely the result of another situation experienced by the volunteer in his family, childhood or elsewhere. So the missionary priest first helps the volunteer to heal his personal history before seeking to undertake individual or group mediation. This strategy of class-destroying requires a great deal of tact and tactics on the part of the missionary, as he solicits the volunteer's trust. This is how we discover that people who are really enemies outside the parish manage to work together in parish volunteering. And the conflicts in which they are so involved in society have no place in the parish.

So the volunteer offering his or her "knowledge", "know-how" and "know-how to be", expects to receive in return, a feeling of "well-being", "learning" about himself or herself and/or new knowledge, as well as "the hope of a positive return" from his or her good deeds (Cousineau, 2017). For other authors, "the reasons why they do or do not remain in the association are unclear" (Hoye et al., 2007). Before any attempt at crisis management, it is up to the leader to understand the true motivations of the protagonists involved in parish volunteering, and to correct their vision and value their mission. For even if "volunteering is a gift par excellence" (Godbout, 1995), this does not mean that volunteers expect nothing in return. Many expect a degree of recognition. Bazin and Mallet (2010) emphasize the importance of recognition. This is the strategy adopted by expatriate missionaries, who get as close as possible to volunteers to help them manage conflicts. This enables them to get to the heart of the matter and attack the problem at its root. So, despite the low profile of mediation and arbitration practices in labor relations in France (Le Flanchec & Rojot, 2009), it is no less true that mediation still has a place in the church.

## 6. Conclusion

Crisis management work is not easy, whatever the nature of the organization. Each crisis management job presents difficulties that vary from one individual to another and from one organization to another. The cases of African expatriate priests and volunteers working in French parishes were the focus of our research. It was found that the reasons inherent in the emergence of parish crises can have diverse and deep-seated causes. These difficulties can have unfortunate consequences for the crisis manager and the volunteers themselves, as well as for the parish organization as a whole. It remains to suggest that leaders such as missionary priests also take an interest in risk management or consequence management. This is part of the globalization of such important micro-social organizations as the parish.

The issue of conflict management between workers in organizations is an important and abundant one in managerial literature. Conflict management among volunteers in parishes, on the other hand, appears to be relatively rare. The parish seems to be an unexploited field of research. This is interesting enough for our

study, given that the parish is a foundation for the common managerial practice of priests. The notion of “class-destroying work” will also have helped us to address scientifically the question of crisis management by missionary priests.

There are a number of limitations to this work, but they are also potential openings. Methodologically, even if the situations described are similar and similar to each other, there are strong nuances that distinguish one parish from another. And this state of affairs prevents us from generalizing our results. Its external validity should be questioned in other religious contexts, other micro-social organizations or other NGOs.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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