



CONGREGATIO
PRO GENTIUM EVANGELIZATIONE

Prot. N. 4364/17

To the Eminent and Most Excellent Ordinaries

Vatican City State, 3 December 2017
Saint Francis Xavier

Dear Brothers in the Episcopacy,

In response to the personal invitation of the Holy Father in his letter dated 22 October 2017, I would like to share with you and with the Churches entrusted to your care some reflections and proposals regarding the celebration of the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019.

At the heart of this initiative, which involves the Universal Church, will be prayer, testimonies, and reflections on the centrality of the *missio ad gentes* as a permanent state of being sent out for the first evangelization (Mt 28:19). The obligation of personal and communal conversion to Jesus Christ crucified, risen, and alive in the Church, will renew the fervor and the passion for giving witness to the Gospel of life and the joy of Easter, through both words and actions (Lk 24:46-49). The mission of the Church in those human, religious, and cultural contexts not yet permeated by the Gospel requires that the transmission of the faith bring about a personal way of life, a culture, and a way of living in communion that are forged by the joy of the Gospel and Christian values. The Christian faith manifests its authentic mission when it is completely dedicated to the salvation of the world. The witness of charity, commitment to justice and peace, and intercultural dialogue with Religious Traditions in mutual respect for human life and its dignity, especially that of the poorest of society, all serve to orient the mission of the Church around the proclamation of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The *missio ad gentes*, identified in *Evangelii Gaudium* as the paradigm of the ordinary pastoral action of the Church (EG 15), represents that which Pope Francis asks us to place at the heart of the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* of his predecessor Pope Benedict XV (30 November 1919). In other words, we are “to place the mission of Jesus at the heart of the Church, making it the criterion for measuring the effectiveness of her structures, the results of her labors, the fruitfulness of her ministers and the joy they awaken. For without joy, we attract no one.”¹

The Holy Father indicated four dimensions,² or ways to prepare for and live out the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019, in order to overcome divisions and opposing views between ordinary and missionary pastoral work, and between the challenges of evangelization in previously Christian areas that are now secularized and indifferent to religion and the *missio ad gentes* among cultures and religions to which the Gospel is still foreign (EG 14). These four dimensions are:

1. a personal encounter with Jesus Christ alive in His Church: Eucharist, Word of God, personal and communal prayer,
2. the witness of the Saints, the Missionary Martyrs, and the Confessors of the Faith, who are unique expressions of the Churches throughout the world,
3. biblical, catechetical, spiritual, and theological formation regarding the *missio ad gentes*,
4. missionary charity as a material support for the immense work of evangelization, especially the *missio ad gentes* and Christian formation in Churches that are most in need.

¹ POPE FRANCIS, *Meeting with the Executive Committee of CELAM*, Apostolic Nunciature in Bogotá, 7 September 2017.

² POPE FRANCIS, *Speech to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*, gathered in General Assembly, Vatican City State, 3 June 2017.

In a way appropriate and suited to the Christians of the area, I suggest that each particular Church and each Episcopal Conference determine how to live out and be molded by these dimensions, so as to bring about a renewed conversion to the mission of Jesus. Additionally, I ask you to inform and invite, as active participants in this missionary initiative of the Holy Father, any local members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, as well as those of the associations and ecclesial movements present in your Dioceses.

In this time of remote preparation, I propose that each one of your particular Churches commits itself to prayerful reflection, engaging the local contemplative monastic and cloistered communities in this same spirit of prayer. In the midst of the world, these brothers and sisters of ours, thanks to the baptismal radicality of their contemplative vocation, are efficacious signs of the sonship of every man and woman of God. They live, in the ordinary, daily rhythm of their monasteries and communities, the essential elements of Christianity that represent the heart of the mission, the heart of every Gospel proclamation and witness. It is necessary to make reference to them, so that indeed all throughout the world may be transformed and conformed to the mission of Christ and of His Church, to the glory of God the Father. I am certain that every particular Church will be able to find the ways and times, properly suited to each unique context, to involve monks and cloistered Religious in this initiative of the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019.

The Pontifical Missionary Societies (PMS) together with this Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples are directly involved in the work of preparing and implementing the Extraordinary Missionary Month. The national and diocesan PMS Directors, present and active in your particular Churches, are asked to work together with you so that this initiative of the Holy Father may indeed bring about renewed passion for the Gospel, greater zeal, and missionary fervor within our Churches. I have asked the International Secretariat of the Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU) to coordinate the preparation, formation, and implementation of the Extraordinary Missionary Month. Collaborative efforts are also underway with our Pontifical Urban University to organize moments of reflection and theological-missiological formation at the international and continental level.

Furthermore, in order to assist the creative action of particular Churches, some suggestions and indications will be offered by way of texts and reflections, the fruit of a wide consultation of Christians from throughout the whole world. In due time you will also be informed about the celebrations over which the Holy Father will preside, proposed as events of the Universal Church that will directly involve the Church in Rome.

Finally, I kindly ask you to identify particular examples from among the sons and daughters of your particular Churches who have witnessed to the mission, who are known for their Christian example and enjoy the recognition of holiness in your Christian communities. It would be most helpful if their biographies could be forwarded to the email address noted below. I would also be grateful if you could identify some members of your Churches who might be able to compose spiritual and missionary reflections based on Sacred Scripture. I kindly ask you to forward these and other suggestions and proposals to the International Secretariat of the PMU (october2019@ppoomm.va).

Attached you will find a copy of the Holy Father's Letter to me, dated this past October 22nd, as well as the text of his Speech given to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies on 3 June 2017.

During this season of Advent, we entrust these preparations to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles, to St. Francis Xavier and St. Thérèse, and to Blessed Paolo Manna. I extend to you my heartfelt greetings, with hopes of abundant fruits of conversion to Christ for the benefit of the missionary work of the Church.



Fernando Cardinal Filoni
Prefect



The Holy See

**LETTERA DEL SANTO PADRE FRANCESCO
IN OCCASIONE DEL CENTENARIO DELLA PROMULGAZIONE
DELLA LETTERA APOSTOLICA "MAXIMUM ILLUD"
SULL'ATTIVITÀ SVOLTA DAI MISSIONARI NEL MONDO**

*To my Venerable Brother
Cardinal Fernando Filoni
Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*

On 30 November 2019, we will celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the promulgation of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*, with which Pope Benedict XV sought to give new impetus to the missionary task of proclaiming the Gospel. In 1919, in the wake of a tragic global conflict that he himself called a “useless slaughter,”^[1] the Pope recognized the need for a more evangelical approach to missionary work in the world, so that it would be purified of any colonial overtones and kept far away from the nationalistic and expansionistic aims that had proved so disastrous. “The Church of God is universal; she is not alien to any people,”^[2] he wrote, firmly calling for the rejection of any form of particular interest, inasmuch as the proclamation and the love of the Lord Jesus, spread by holiness of one’s life and good works, are the sole purpose of missionary activity. Benedict XV thus laid special emphasis on the *missio ad gentes*, employing the concepts and language of the time, in an effort to revive, particularly among the clergy, a sense of duty towards the missions.

That duty is a response to Jesus’ perennial command to “go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature” (*Mk 16:15*). Obeying this mandate of the Lord is not an option for the Church: in the words of the Second Vatican Council, it is her “essential task,”^[3] for the Church is “missionary by nature.”^[4] “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity; she exists in order to evangelize.”^[5] The Council went on to say that, if the Church is to remain faithful to herself and to preach Jesus crucified and risen for all, the living and

merciful Saviour, then “prompted by the Holy Spirit, she must walk the same path Christ walked: a path of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice.”[6] In this way, she will effectively proclaim the Lord, “model of that redeemed humanity, imbued with brotherly love, sincerity and a peaceful spirit, to which all aspire.”[7]

What Pope Benedict XV so greatly desired almost a century ago, and the Council reiterated some fifty years ago, remains timely. Even now, as in the past, “the Church, sent by Christ to reveal and to communicate the love of God to all men and nations, is aware that there still remains an enormous missionary task for her to accomplish.”[8] In this regard, Saint John Paul II noted that “the mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion,” and indeed, “an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service.”[9] As a result, in words that I would now draw once more to everyone’s attention, Saint John Paul exhorted the Church to undertake a “*renewed missionary commitment*”, in the conviction that missionary activity “renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. *Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!* It is in commitment to the Church’s universal mission that the new evangelization of Christian peoples will find inspiration and support.”[10]

In my Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, drawing from the proceedings of the Thirteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which met to reflect on the *new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith*, I once more set this urgent summons before the whole Church. There I wrote, “John Paul II asked us to recognize that ‘there must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel’ to those who are far from Christ, ‘because this is the *first task* of the Church.’ Indeed, ‘today missionary activity still represents the *greatest challenge* for the Church’ and ‘the missionary task must remain foremost.’ What would happen if we were to take these words seriously? We would realize that missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity.*”[11]

I am convinced that this challenge remains as urgent as ever. “[It] has a programmatic significance and important consequences. I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion that cannot leave things as they presently are. ‘Mere administration’ can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission.’”[12] Let us not fear to undertake, with trust in God and great courage, “a missionary option capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to *go forth* and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself. As John Paul II told the

Bishops of Oceania, 'All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion.'"[13]

The Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* called for transcending national boundaries and bearing witness, with prophetic spirit and evangelical boldness, to God's saving will through the Church's universal mission. May the approaching centenary of that Letter serve as an incentive to combat the recurring temptation lurking beneath every form of ecclesial introversion, self-referential retreat into comfort zones, pastoral pessimism and sterile nostalgia for the past. Instead, may we be open to the joyful newness of the Gospel. In these, our troubled times, rent by the tragedies of war and menaced by the baneful tendency to accentuate differences and to incite conflict, may the Good News that in Jesus forgiveness triumphs over sin, life defeats death and love conquers fear, be proclaimed to the world with renewed fervour, and instil trust and hope in everyone.

In the light of this, accepting the proposal of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, I hereby call for an Extraordinary Missionary Month to be celebrated in October 2019, with the aim of fostering an increased awareness of the *missio ad gentes* and taking up again with renewed fervour the missionary transformation of the Church's life and pastoral activity. The Missionary Month of October 2018 can serve as a good preparation for this celebration by enabling all the faithful to take to heart the proclamation of the Gospel and to help their communities grow in missionary and evangelizing zeal. May the love for the Church's mission, which is "a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people,"[14] grow ever stronger!

I entrust you, venerable Brother, the Congregation which you head, and the Pontifical Missionary Societies with the work of preparing for this event, especially by raising awareness among the particular Churches, the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and among associations, movements, communities and other ecclesial bodies. May the Extraordinary Missionary Month prove an intense and fruitful occasion of grace, and promote initiatives and above all prayer, the soul of all missionary activity. May it likewise advance the preaching of the Gospel, biblical and theological reflection on the Church's mission, works of Christian charity, and practical works of cooperation and solidarity between Churches, so that missionary zeal may revive and never be wanting among us.[15]

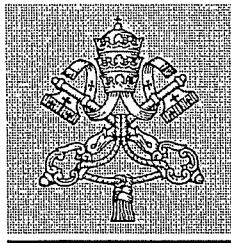
From the Vatican, 22 October 2017

*XXIX Sunday of Ordinary Time
Memorial of Saint John Paul II
World Mission Sunday*

Francis

- [1] *Letter to the Leaders of the Warring Peoples*, 1 August 1917: AAS IX (1917), 421-423.
- [2] Benedict XV, Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*, 30 November 1919: AAS 11 (1919), 445.
- [3] Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 7 December 1965, 7: AAS 58 (1966), 955.
- [4] *Ibid.*, 2: AAS 58 (1966), 948.
- [5] Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8 December 1975, 14: AAS 68 (1976), 13.
- [6] Decree *Ad Gentes*, 5: AAS 58 (1966), 952.
- [7] *Ibid.*, 8: AAS 58 (1966), 956-957.
- [8] *Ibid.*, 10: AAS 58 (1966), 959.
- [9] Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, 7 December 1990, 1: AAS 83 (1991), 249.
- [10] *Ibid.*, 2: AAS 83 (1991), 250-251.
- [11] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* 15: AAS 105 (2013), 1026.
- [12] *Ibid.*, 25: AAS 105 (2013), 1030.
- [13] *Ibid.*, 27: AAS 105 (2013), 1031.
- [14] *Ibid.*, 268: AAS 105 (2013), 1128.
- [15] *Ibid.*, 80: AAS 105 (2013), 1053.

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BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

Audience with participants in the Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies, 03.06.2017

At 11.00 today, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Holy Father's Address

Dear Cardinal,

Dear brothers and sisters,

I welcome you with joy at the end of your General Assembly and I thank Cardinal Fernando Filoni for his words. With him I greet all the Superiors, the General Secretaries, the National Director and all of you present here.

You well know my concern about the Pontifical Mission Societies, very often reduced to an organization that collects and distributes, on behalf of the Pope, economic aid for the neediest Churches. I know that you are seeking new ways, more suitable and more ecclesial methods to carry out your service to the universal mission of the Church. Let us allow ourselves to be sustained, in this process of urgent reform, also by the intercession of the Saints Charles Lwanga and companions, martyrs of Uganda, whose liturgical memory we celebrate today.

To renew ardour and passion, the spiritual motor of the apostolic action of countless missionary saints and martyrs, I have very favourably received your proposal, formulated together with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, to announce an extraordinary time for prayer and reflection on the *missio ad gentes*. I will ask all the Church to dedicate the month of October of the year 2019 to this aim, as in that year we will celebrate the centenary of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum illud*, of Pope Benedict XV. In this very important document of his Magisterium on the mission, the Pope recalls how necessary the holiness of life is to the efficacy of the apostolate, he recommends, therefore, an ever stronger union with Christ and a more convinced and joyful involvement in his divine passion for announcing the Gospel to all, loving and employing mercy towards everyone. Men and women,

"distinguished by zeal and holiness", are increasingly necessary to the Church and to the mission. "May he who preaches God be a man of God", exhorted Benedict XV (cf. Apostolic Letter *Maximum illud*, 30 November 1919; AAS XI [1919], 449).

Renewing oneself requires conversion, and it requires living mission as an ongoing opportunity to proclaim Christ, to let Him be encountered by bearing witness and making others participants in our personal encounter with Him. I hope that your spiritual and material assistance to the Church makes it increasingly based upon the Gospel and the baptismal involvement of all the faithful, lay and clerical, in the single mission of the Church: bringing God's love to every man, especially those most in need of His mercy. The extraordinary month of prayer and reflection on the mission as first evangelization will serve for this renewal of ecclesial faith, so that the Easter of Jesus Christ, the only Saviour, Lord and bridegroom of His Church, always be and remain in her heart.

May the preparation for this extraordinary time dedicated to the first proclamation of the Gospel help us always to be a Church increasingly in mission, following the words of Blessed Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, magna carta of the post-Conciliar missionary effort. Pope Montini wrote: "The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself. She is the community of believers, the community of hope lived and communicated, the community of brotherly love, and she needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love. She is the People of God immersed in the world, and often tempted by idols, and she always needs to hear the proclamation of the 'mighty works of God' [41] which converted her to the Lord; she always needs to be called together afresh by Him and reunited. In brief, this means that she has a constant need of being evangelized, if she wishes to retain freshness, vigour and strength in order to proclaim the Gospel".

In the spirit of the teaching of Blessed Paul VI, it is my wish that the celebration of the centenary of *Maximum illud*, in the month of October 2019, be a favourable time for prayer, the witness of many saints and martyrs of the mission, biblical and theological reflection, catechesis and missionary charity to contribute to evangelizing, first and foremost, the Church, so that having rediscovered the freshness and zeal of the first love for the crucified and risen Lord, she may evangelize the world with credibility and evangelical efficacy.

I bless you all in this day before the Solemnity of Pentecost. I ask the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles and Mother of the Church, always to inspire us with the testimony of her faith and the reassuring guarantee of her motherly intercession. May the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, the holy martyrs Carlo Lwanga and his companions, and Blessed Paolo Manna never cease to pray to God for all of us, His missionaries.