



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY  
OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES**

*Clementine Hall  
Thursday, 3 December 2015*

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**[Multimedia]**

*Cardinals, Dear Brother Bishops and Priests, Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I welcome you on the occasion of your Plenary Assembly, in which you focused on the *Missio ad Gentes*, in addition to offering precious indications for the future. As Cardinal Filoni said, I have just returned from my first [Apostolic Journey in Africa](#), where I saw firsthand the spiritual and pastoral dynamism of so many young Churches of that continent, as well as the serious difficulties in which a large part of the population lives. I was able to see that, where there are needs, the presence of the Church is almost always there, ready to heal the wounds of the neediest, in whom she recognizes the wounded and crucified body of the Lord Jesus. How many works of charity and of human promotion! How many anonymous Good Samaritans work every day in the missions!

An evangelizer by nature, the Church always begins by evangelizing herself. A disciple of the Lord Jesus, she listens to his Word, from which she draws the reasons for the hope that does not disappoint, because it is founded on the grace of the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5). Only in this way is she able to preserve her freshness and apostolic impetus. The Conciliar Decree *Ad Gentes* and the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, from which your plenary drew inspiration, state that “it is from the mission of the Son and from the mission of the Holy Spirit that [the Church] draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father” (*Ad Gentes*, n. 2). The mission does not respond, in the first place, to human initiatives; the principal agent is the Holy Spirit, this project is his (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 21). The Church is servant of the mission. It is not the Church that makes the mission, but the mission that makes the Church. Therefore, the mission is not the instrument, but the point of departure and the goal.

In recent months, your Dicastery has carried out an inquiry on the vitality of the young Churches,

to understand how to render the work of the *Missio ad Gentes* more effective, also considering the ambiguity to which the experience of faith is exposed sometimes today. The secularized world, in fact, even when it is receptive to the Gospel values of love, justice, peace and sobriety, does not show the same willingness to the person of Jesus: it neither regards him as Messiah nor as Son of God. At most it considers him an enlightened man. Therefore, it separates the message from the Messenger and the gift from the Donor. In this situation of detachment, the *Missio ad Gentes* acts as engine and horizon of the faith. It is vital at the present moment for the Church “to go forth and preach the Gospel to all; to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 23). In fact, the mission is a force capable of transforming the interior of the Church even before the life of peoples and cultures. Therefore, every parish should make its own the style of the *Missio ad Gentes*. In this way, the Holy Spirit will transform habitual faithful into disciples, dissatisfied disciples into missionaries, drawing them out of fears and closures and propelling them in every direction, to the ends of the earth (cf. Acts 1:8). May the kerygmatic approach to the faith, so familiar among the young Churches, also find space among those of ancient tradition.

Paul and Barnabas did not have a missionary dicastery behind them. Yet, they proclaimed the Word, gave life to several communities and shed their blood for the Gospel. Over time grew complexities and the need for a special connection between the Churches of recent foundation and the universal Church. Therefore, four centuries ago, Pope Gregory XV instituted the Congregation *Propaganda Fide*, which since 1967 has assumed the name Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. It is evident that in this phase of history “mere administration [of the existing reality] can no longer be enough. Throughout the world let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission’” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 25): it is a paradigm. St John Paul II specified the modality of it, affirming: “All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion” (Post- Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania*, n. 19). “Going” is inherent in Baptism, and its boundaries are those of the world. Therefore, continue to commit yourselves so that the spirit of the *Missio ad Gentes* may animate the path of the Church, and that she may always be able to hear the cry of the poor and of those who are distant, to encounter all and to proclaim the joy of the Gospel.

I thank you for your work of missionary enthusiasm and cooperation, with which you remember all the Churches that, if constrained within their own horizons, run the danger of becoming atrophied and of dying out. The Church lives and grows by “going forth”, taking the initiative and becoming neighbour. Therefore, you must encourage the communities to be generous even in moments of vocational crises. “For missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes the faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive” (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 2).

The dawn of a new day is already visible in many areas of the *Missio ad Gentes*, as demonstrated by the fact that the young Churches are able to give, not only receive. The first fruits are their willingness to give their priests to sister Churches of the same nation, of the same continent, or to

serve needy Churches in other areas of the world. Cooperation is no longer only along the north-south axis. There is also an inverse movement of restitution of the good received from the first missionaries. These are also signs of an attained maturity.

Brothers and sisters, let us pray and work so that the Church may be ever more in keeping with the model of the Acts of the Apostles. Let us allow ourselves to be urged on by the strength of the Gospel and of the Holy Spirit; let us go forth from our enclosures, let us emigrate from the territories in which we are sometimes tempted to enclose ourselves. Thus we will be able to walk and sow further, a step beyond. May Mary Most Holy, Mother of God, St Francis Xavier, today, and St Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Patrons of the Missions, illumine our steps in the service of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. I accompany you with my blessing and, please, I ask you to pray for me. Thank you.