

EXTRAORDINARY MISSIONARY MONTH OCTOBER 2019

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Bangalore, India – 08.03.2018

The Centennial Celebration of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*, issued by Pope Benedict XV on November 30, 1919, will be a great providential opportunity for conversion to Jesus, and for renewed pastoral care and missionary animation of the Church for the sake of the *missio ad gentes*. October 2019 could bring the entire People of God to a new awareness of Christian baptismal responsibility for the Church's mission to evangelize to the ends of the earth.

The essential goal of the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019 lies in the spiritual and pastoral renewal of the personal and community awareness and commitment to the mission of the Church in order to regenerate missionary zeal and passion in every Christian heart. *Evangelii Gaudium* 15 thus represents the guideline of all our effort, prayer and reflection for this month: "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.**"

During the General PMS Assembly, on Wednesday 31 May 2017, the attending National Directors were given a detailed presentation of the new missionary initiative. The proposed EMM OCT2019, welcomed by the Pope (March 31, 2017), was fully exposed and discussed in order to establish, from the very early stages of preparation, in-depth participation of our PMS National and Diocesan Directions and PMS co-workers all over the world.

Later, on 23 June and 8 September 2017, two more meetings of the CEP and the PMS were organized to discuss in detail the modalities and contents of EMM OCT2019 preparation.

These meetings led to the acceptance and articulation of four dimensions which will characterize EMM OCT2019. These dimensions were indicated by Pope Francis in his address to the National PMS Directors on 3 June 2017:

1. A personal encounter with Jesus Christ living in his Church: in the Eucharist, in the Word of God, in personal and in community prayer.
2. Witness of missionary saints and martyrs (canonized and not).

3. Biblical, catechetical, spiritual and theological formation, for missionary activity.
4. Missionary charity as commitment on the part of the whole Church to share the “costs” of Gospel’s proclamation and of the formation in the faith and in mission, especially in the most needy Churches.

These four dimensions, which could mark the four weeks of the month, besides qualifying each week chronologically, should be considered first of all spiritual dimensions that individual Christians and individual local Churches can live in all freedom and creativity during the EMM OCT2019, or indeed all through the year 2019.

A working group was formed of six members: two representatives of the PMS, two from the CEP and two from PUU. The group met on the 14th of September, the 10th of October, the 5th of December 2017, and on the 26th of February 2018. Furthermore, there were frequent informal meetings to discuss the specific working competences of each member.

On Sunday 22 October 2017, World Mission Day and also feast day of Saint John Paul II, Pope Francis sent a letter to Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the CEP, entrusting to him “the task of starting preparations for the event, in particular by means of capillary sensitization in Particular Churches, Institutes of consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and associations, movements, communities and other ecclesial realities”. During the midday Angelus on that same Sunday the Holy Father made a public announcement to the whole Church expressing his intention to call an Extraordinary Missionary Month for October 2019 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* issued by his predecessor Pope Benedict XV. “It is with these sentiments that, welcoming the proposal by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, I call an Extraordinary Missionary Month in October 2019, with the purpose of reawakening awareness of the *missio ad gentes* and working with new impulse to further the missionary transformation of life and pastoral activity”.

On 24 November, we hosted a meeting in order to begin to plan an International Theological Missionological Congress, organised by the Pontifical Urbaniana University, for the year 2019, with the theme “*Missio ad gentes. From Maximum Illud to Evangelii Gaudium*”.

On 3 December 2017, Cardinal Prefect Fernando Filoni sent a letter, in six different languages, addressed to all the Bishops of the Catholic Church informing them of the missionary proposal made by Pope Francis (text attached). The letter requested that the Bishops share the news of this initiative with members of parishes, ecclesial associations, and movements, as well as the religious communities in the respective dioceses. A letter with similar contents was addressed to Superiors General, male and female, of institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. We asked the General Secretaries of the International Unions of Superiors General (UISG and USG),

to forward copies of the letter to religious men and women and members of Societies of Apostolic Life. We also discussed with them future cooperation in view of this event. In particular, we considered the possibility of reflecting together on the theme “Proclamation, Sacrament and Witness in the *missio ad gentes*”. The reflection should be theological, but originating from the faith experience. It will consist in sharing one’s own mission experience with the seriousness and commitment of theological and spiritual reflection. Jesus Christ and the Church, as shown in Scripture, in the Sacraments, in fraternal communion, in charity and in dialogue with the world, with its cultures and its religions, represent the heart of that which we are called to communicate.

On 12 December 2017, a contact was made to ensure the PMS National Directors would be informed about Cardinal Filoni’s letter. Besides, our National Directors were asked to cooperate ever more closely: sharing reflection on the role, renewal and service of the PMS in the Church today. On 15 December 2017, we hosted a meeting with a number of women lecturing theology at Universities in Rome, to see how to work together for the preparation and implementation of EMM OCT2019.

The central role of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Mission Societies in this preparatory stage demands collegial activity in which the National PMS Directors represent an important element of mediation and encounter with the local Churches. The commitment to prepare and raise awareness of each ecclesial reality, avoiding useless centralization, will serve to stimulate and encourage the creativity of the Christians in their respective Churches. This will ensure that whatever is achieved, produced and indicated by us in Rome is proposed as an incentive so that the local needs of mission contextualize every activity of EMM OCT2019 for the benefit of Gospel announcement, celebration of the Sacraments and Christian witness. The service of the Rome offices, offers coordination, proposals and initiatives so that, sensitizing the local realities, the latter may be ever more open to the challenges of missionary work and universality of the Catholic Church. The preparation of a common text on missionary animation for EMM OCT2019 is already underway with input of human resources and ideas from all over the world. We will issue a text, hard copy and digital, following the themes of the four dimensions given by Pope Francis. This book will serve as the fundamental guide material, the ‘basis’, to encourage local ecclesial creativity.

The Scripture texts of the Liturgy of daily Holy Mass in the days corresponding to the month of October 2019 are for meditation and study. We look forward to receiving missionary spiritual comments from all over the world. Editors of liturgical booklets of high-circulation and widely distributed, consulted, appear willing to dedicate their respective monthly editions of October 2019 to EMM OCT2019. We are also in contact with Catholics of various ethnic and ecclesial backgrounds to put forward figures of

saints and martyrs, canonized and not, sons and daughters of the Catholic Church everywhere in the world.

Besides the International Congress organized by the Urbaniana, we are also examining the idea and opportunity of formative, missionary, academic events, or concerning pastoral experience, to plan at the continental level: two in Africa (French-speaking and English-speaking) two in Asia (one in India (Fr. Frank Elias) and perhaps another one in the 'Asian Pacific' region. The fifth American Mission Congress (CAM) to be held in July 2018 in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, will also be an occasion to prepare for EMM OCT2019. Regarding Europe, we think it is opportune that the local European Churches, with human and economic resources, together with the PMS National Directorates contrive their own forms of theological reflection and missionary formation regarding the *missio ad gentes*.

As far as missionary charitable activity is concerned, we have asked the PMS Fundraising Committee and some National Directorates to contribute with a reflection on the subject of fundraising, *missio ad gentes* and the local Churches. All funds, without exclusion, collected during October 2019 will be offered to the Pope for the costs of evangelization. I would like to reaffirm that the contribution of the experience of our National Directors is of the utmost value. Rethinking the ecclesiological nature and role of the PMS, in view of its re-launching during EMM OCT2019, means rethinking also this financial aspect, which pertains to the PMS since their foundation. Material support for the mission of announcing the Gospel has always represented a practical extension of the faith and the prayers of great numbers of Christians for the *missio ad gentes*. The building of churches and chapels for worship, classrooms for catechesis and Christian formation, together with other activities such as translating into the local languages the Scriptures, liturgical texts, documents of papal teaching, all need concrete gestures of Christian proximity for the missions. The formation of catechists, pastoral agents and committed lay Catholics in secular fields, besides the formation of seminarians, novices, men and women, has always marked PMS mission animation from the outset. Therefore, the task of rethinking the financial dimension of the PMS, and rooting this in the mission of announcing the Gospel and building up the Church, will be of great benefit for everyone.

Vatican City, March 6, 2018