**XIX PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples

Theme:

**Ecclesial Awareness and *Missio ad gentes:***

**The Service of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples**

at 50 Years since the Conciliar Document *Ad Gentes.*

**Rome, 30 November - 2 December 2015**

**Preamble**

1. **The Missionary Nature of the Church**

The missionary nature of the Church is founded on the fact that the Church, inasmuch as it is the People of God, is the sign and instrument of salvation[[1]](#footnote-1), and has received from the Risen One the mandate to announce the Gospel and to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (cf.*Mk* 16: 15-20). The missionary nature of the Church is Trinitarian[[2]](#footnote-2) and has, as her primary and central reference, Jesus the Good Shepherd, the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Gate of the Flock, and the Light.

1. **The Church, the Body of Christ, and Her Mission of Love**

Every Christian has a share in the universal missionary responsibility *ad gentes*, while ordinarily remaining within the particular context of his or her proper origin, as a member of the same Body of Christ, and sharing in the various gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Christian, who is moved by the charity of Christ[[3]](#footnote-3), according to the measure of his or her participation in the life of the Church, senses deep within a fire that comes from Christ, which lives and loves in the individual. This fire of charity becomes the impulse of the Mission of Christ entrusted to the Church.

1. **Evangelization e *plantatio Ecclesiae***

The proper end of missionary activity is the evangelization of all nations and the *plantatio Ecclesiae* where the Word of God has not yet been sown and established roots.[[4]](#footnote-4) In other words, the Church, as the sign and instrument of salvation, is fully alive when carrying out the missionary precept of the Lord to proclaim the Gospel “*into the whole world… and to every creature*” (*Mk*. 16:15). At the same time, the Church is born from the proclamation of the Gospel and the *plantatio* gives shape to the Community of believers.

1. **The People of God and the Unity of Humanity**

The Church, as the People of God to which all human beings are ordered[[5]](#footnote-5), in a true and profound sense, shares in their lives, their joys and hopes, their sorrows and anguish. Through the power of the Holy Spirit within the Church, Christ unites humanity to Himself and, in a marvelous way, to the Father. The Church sees herself essentially in the fulfillment of the Mission entrusted to her by the Lord, which includes the spiritual, moral, and human development of every man, woman, and child. At the same time, she contributes to the well-being of all people, mending divisions, and elevating human dignity to the measure by which Christ reconciled it to the Father.

**Ecclesial Awareness and the *Missio ad Gentes***

**The Service of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples**

at 50 Years since the Conciliar Document *Ad Gentes*

**Young Churches**

1. The ecclesial realities within the mission territories under the competence of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (CEP) are delineated in various ways: *Missio sui iuris*, Apostolic Prefectures, Apostolic Vicariates, Dioceses, and Archdioceses. In these realities, the life of the People of God is formed and matures in every aspect of human life (family, work, choice of life, service, education, communication, etc.) and of the life of faith (charity, liturgy, vocations, etc.).
2. In the fifty years since the Conciliar Decree *Ad Gentes*, the missionary activity of the Church is undergoing a marked transformation. At that time, the world population was around three billion persons, of whom two billion did not know Christ;[[6]](#footnote-6) today it is seven billion, of whom four and a half billion do not know Christ. Compared to fifty years ago, the number of “missionaries” originating in the West has greatly diminished. On the other hand, “missionary” vocations from Asia, Africa, and Latin America are on the rise. In fact, in the majority of cases, the clergy has become indigenous and the Gospel speaks all languages. What is more, an adequate liturgical sensibility and a more uniform catechetical instruction have been promoted; new experiences of Consecrated Life have come forth; formation of laity, clergy, and religious have increased; and the inculturation of the Faith has been given greater attention.
3. *Ad Gentes* n. 19 uses the term “*Ecclesiae novellae* “– young Churches – to describe these ecclesial realities and their growing vitality, notwithstanding their lack of priests, as well as human and material resources. The missionary activity of the whole Church makes this assistance available with an eye to the development of local Churches. On the other hand, such missionary activity does hesitate to supply aid to Churches of ancient origin that find themselves in decline or weakness.[[7]](#footnote-7) In fact, there is only one Ecclesial Mystery (*unicum mysterium Ecclesiae)*  actualized and manifested in the whole Church..

**Ecclesial Awareness**

1. Ecclesial awareness is formed in the Church through prayer, reflection, witness, and preaching. It is the fruit of a collective experience of encountering the Risen Christ, seen both individually and communally.
2. The Particular Church, which should reflect as perfectly as possible the Universal Church, **is fully aware of also being sent** to those who do not believe in Christ, but who coexist in the same area, in order to be the sign that makes Christ present for them[[8]](#footnote-8) through the witness of the individual faithful and that of the entire community. Although God, through ways known only to Himself, can bring people, who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel, to that faith «without [which] it is impossible to please Him» (*Heb*. 11:6), it is nevertheless the inescapable responsibility and inviolable right of the Church to spread the Gospel. Thus, her missionary activity forever fully retains its validity and necessity.[[9]](#footnote-9)
3. Such ecclesial awareness finds its origin in the experience of the first Apostles, who, having lived with Jesus and received the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, proclaimed Christ as the Savior with courage and enthusiasm. “There is no salvation through anyone else” (*Acts* 4:12). The Holy Spirit, through Whom the Father raised Christ from the dead, enlivens the same experience among the faithful (cf. *John* 14:26). The Risen Christ still lives and loves in their midst. “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete” (*John* 15:11). The faithful are well aware of this, and thus, they find great joy in proclaiming the Christ. “The seventy-two returned rejoicing” (*Luke* 10:17) “Woe to me if I do not preach it [the Gospel]” (*1 Cor.* 9:16).

***Missio ad Gentes***

1. The pilgrim Church is missionary by its very nature, inasmuch as it draws its origin from the mission of the Son and of the Spirit, according to the universal salvific will of God the Father, Who desires that all be saved.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The Church was publicly manifested to the crowd at Pentecost; she then began, through her preaching, the diffusion of the Gospel among the nations.[[11]](#footnote-11) From this moment, *missio ad gentes* and evangelization became interchangeable.

Concretely speaking, the *missio ad gentes* usually signifies the special initiatives of those sent by the Church to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world and to plant the Church herself into the midst of all peoples and groups that do not yet believe in Christ.[[12]](#footnote-12)

**The Service of the CEP**

1. “The Good Shepherd, the Lord Christ Jesus, conferred on the Bishops, the Successors of the Apostles, and in a singular way on the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter, the mission of making disciples in all the nations and of preaching Gospel to every creature. And so the Church was established, the People of God; and the task of the shepherds or pastors of this people was indeed to be that service ‘which is called very expressively in Sacred Scripture a *diakonia* or ministry’.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

“For the Roman Curia came into existence for this purpose…rendering more effective that function of Pastor of the Church which Christ gave to Peter and his successors, a function that has been growing and expanding from day to day.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

“The functions of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (CEP) is to direct and coordinate throughout the world the actual work of spreading the Gospel as well as missionary cooperation..”[[15]](#footnote-15)

**Immediate Objectives of the Plenary Assembly**

1. During this Plenary Assembly, we would like, above all, to reflect upon the relationship between ecclesial awareness and *missio ad gentes* within the young Churches, particularly in the sense provided by *Ad Gentes*. This is why two reports will be presented that bear upon this single reflection. The first will present a panoramic vision of “Ecclesial Awareness for the Mission” in various young Churches, while the other will deal with the “Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*.” This reflection will be corroborated by a type of self-evaluation made by the young Churches on the two aforementioned subjects. Such reflection or evaluation, should help the Plenary Assembly to determine the orientation by which the CEP might be able offer the most appropriate service to the young Churches.

**Questionnaire**

*This Questionnaire may be filled out in paper form as follows, or online at the following website -* [*http://www.vatican.va/roman\_curia/congregations/cevang/index.htm*](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cevang/index.htm) *- and sent to this address:* *segreteria@propagandafide.va*

**Ecclesial Awareness**

Name of the Church, canonical status (Archdiocese/Diocese/Vicariate/ Apostolic Prefecture / *Missio sui iuris*) ……………….…………………………, (country) …………………………………….., date of foundation …………………….

What are the underlying animating concepts pertaining to missionary activity that you see in *Ad Gentes*? In what ways does *Ad Gentes* guide the structure or works of evangelization in your particular Circumscription?

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Distinguish between the following concepts and the capacity to carry them out in your local situation. “Capacity” indicates aptitude, motivation, enthusiasm, a spirit of initiative and of flexibility, a sense of belonging, a planning mentality, organizational or leadership ability, sensitivity to problems and solutions, adaptability to work under pressure, the adversity quotient (ability to deal with difficulties), relational competence as part of a team, etc.

The **Questionnaire** raises issues related to **missionary awareness** with which every young Church carries out missionary activity *ad gentes*.

The questions below are designed to reveal a current and accurate picture of your missionary Church. (Please be concrete and realistic.)

1. List the underlying animating concepts you see in *Ad Gentes* (please provide a descriptive response).

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*Please circle the number (0 to 5) that best responds to the following as found in your Circumscription (0 none, 1 poor, 2 unsatisfactory, 3 satisfactory, 4 good, 5 excellent):*

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| 2. The capacity to maintain the primacy of God manifest in Christ (guaranteeing the unity of mankind).  |

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| 3. The capacity to animate/increase enthusiasm for making Christ known (i.e. the first proclamation). |

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| 4. The courage to bear witness. |

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| 5. The capacity to make an option for the poor and needy. |

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| 6. The capacity for dialogue (ecumenical, inter-religious, between faith and culture). |

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| 7. The capacity to make the Church visible within society through witness, solidarity, and works. |

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| 8. The capacity to live within a society (whether pluralistic, secular, or totalitarian - case by case) a sense of authentic community: fraternal, in dialogue, and communicative (“little flock”). |

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| 9. The capacity di create/maintain a good rapport between Church and State. |

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| 10. The capacity to plan and put into action the formation of the mission (including that for forming missionaries for other Churches, *fidei donum,* etc.). |

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| 11. The capacity to manifest collegiality among the Bishops and their communion with the Pope. |

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| 12. The capacity to form indigenous clergy while avoiding ethnocentricity. |

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| 13. The capacity to cultivate a sense of duty toward spreading the Gospel, above all among the clergy. |

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| 14. The capacity to promote and collaborate with the Pontifical Mission Societies. |

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| 15. The sense of belonging to one’s particular Church (Archdiocese /Diocese / Vicariate/ etc.) |

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16. Other aspects:

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***Missio ad Gentes***

What are the missionary activities *ad gentes* in your Circumscription: structures, programs, results. Internal factors: strengths and weaknesses. External factors: opportunities and dangers.

**1. Strengths** (positive elements from within one’s proper Church that foster *missio ad gentes*):

* 1. What are the missionary structures present and active in your Circumscription (examples: commissions, secretariats, Episcopal representatives or similar bodies that plan and coordinate the activities of evangelization)?

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* 1. Which activities sustain an openness and a love for Jesus Christ among the people? Who are the active subjects of these activities: priests, religious men and women, catechists, laity, collaborators from other religions or non-believers?

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* 1. What are the most effective activities for evangelization that prompt people to enter the catechumenate and to seek Baptism? Who are the subjects carrying out these activities: priests, religious men and women, catechists, lay faithful, ecclesial groups and movements?

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* 1. What are the places and entities in which the activities of evangelization are carried out (examples: the parish, counseling centers, schools, youth centers, radio stations, hospitals, assistance agencies, other)?

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* 1. What “media” are employed in the service of local evangelization (examples: publications, books, leaflets, audio-visual subsidies, internet, etc.)?

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* 1. What are the Christian witnesses that the Church concretely has offered to society to foster evangelization: martyrs, saints, inspiring figures both ecclesiastic and lay, etc.?

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* 1. Which Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life of Pontifical and Diocesan Right, as well as Public Associations of the Faithful, have been erected in your Circumscription: please give name(s) and date(s) of Foundation(s)?

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* 1. Other:

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1. **Weaknesses** (internal elements that weaken or impede the *missio ad gentes):*
	1. What are the driving attitudes, ideas or ideologies within your Circumscription that weaken evangelization?

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* 1. What are the realities or subjects that avert or diminish interest or desire for engaging in evangelization?

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* 1. Other

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1. **Opportunities** (external factors that foster an effective evangelization):
	1. Factors on the state level (examples: laws, political situations, governing institutions, etc.).

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* 1. Factors within society (examples: certain entities, groups, non-government organizations - either local or international, etc.).

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* 1. Factors within the culture (examples: customs, attitudes, mega-trends, etc.).

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* 1. Other external factors.

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1. **Dangers** (external factors that threaten evangelization and in what way):
	1. Factors on the state level (examples: laws, current political situation, etc.).

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* 1. Factors within society (examples: certain entities, groups, associations, etc.).

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* 1. Factors within the culture (examples: customs, attitudes, mega-trends, etc.).

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* 1. Others:

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**Service of the CEP and of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS).**

What is the relationship between your Ecclesiastical Circumscription and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples? What is its relationship with the PMS?

For the following points, please give any suggestions, positive or negative:

1. Provision – appointment of Bishops (examples: the moments of discernment, prayer, reflection, collaboration, and communion within your Circumscription from the viewpoint of charity, with due discretion and sensitivity; expressions of love, trust, and gratitude in accepting the Will of the Lord as sanctioned by the Holy Father, etc.).

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1. Creation of new Ecclesiastical Circumscriptions (examples: discernment of pastoral needs and expectations regarding a new Pastor of the Circumscription being created, the clergy, vocations, finances, reciprocal relationships, possibility of growth, etc.)

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1. Inter-Diocesan Seminaries (for example: Is there a body that looks after the Inter-Diocesan Seminary? How does it function? Other questions about the appointment of the rector, subsidies, scholarships, etc.)

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1. The naming and role of the National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies (missionary animation, awareness & concern for the Church in need, collaboration with various institutions in the service of the Missionary Societies, etc.)

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1. Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (relationship between your Circumscription and Religious communities; creation of Institutes of Diocesan Right, subsidies for candidates in initial formation, grants for various projects).

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1. Formation (ongoing formation of clergy and laity, academic updating for professors, scholarships, etc.).

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1. Visits *ad Limina Apostolorum*

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1. Financial reports.

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1. Others:

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1. Cf. *Lumen Gentium* (*LG*)*,* 7: “[The Son of God (…) By communicating His Spirit, Christ made His brothers called together from all nations, mystically the components of His own Body.”.

*LG,* 1: “the Church is in Christ like a sacrament, or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and the Unity of the whole human race”.

*LG,* 9 refers to the Church as “an instrument for the redemption of all (…) as the Church that for each and all it may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity.”;

*LG,* 48, “Christ (…) has established His Body which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation”. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. *Ad Gentes* (*AG*)*,* 2: “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the dergee of God the Father”; *LG,* 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. *2 Cor* 5:14: “*Caritas Christi urget nos*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *AG,* 6: “The proper purpose of this missionary activity is evangelization, and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups where it has not yet taken root.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. *LG,* 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *AG,* 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. *AG,* 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. *AG,* 20; 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. *AG,* 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Cf. *AG,* 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Cf. *AG,* 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Cf. *AG,* 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Pastor Bonus* (*PB*)*,* 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *PB,* 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *PB, art.* 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)