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Bearing Witness as an Ever-Relevant Mission

Introduction

From 2013, we have been carrying out a pastoral program whose theme is: “Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ. Through faith and Baptism to bearing witness.” This program follows the path of Baptismal spirituality. It moves through an experience of faith, conversion and Baptism to the taking up of evangelization, apostolate and bearing witness to a life of faith.

Our theme for 2016 was “New life in Christ”. We recalled the historical event of Poland’s Baptism, we reminded ourselves that all people are missionaries by virtue of Baptism, as St. John Paul II had taught; we are all missionary disciples – as the present Pope Francis teaches. We are disciples of Christ, since we have received the Gospel; we are missionaries, because faith in Christ moves us to share it with others. And so, it is from our Baptism that we draw our obligation of carrying Christ to others. We are called to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth. Therefore, we are to proclaim the Gospel primarily through the testimony of our life.

The theme of the present pastoral year of 2016/2017 is “Go and proclaim.” It is the culmination of a reflection taken up by our Church communities and the crowning of our Baptismal formation. It involves all the faithful and exemplifies their mission in the contemporary world. The theme of the pastoral year emphasizes the missionary aspect of the life and mission of the Church and of all the baptized.

During this pastoral year, the words of Christ, “Go and proclaim” (Mt 10:7); “God and make disciples” (Mt 28:19), make the Church in

Poland sensitive to Christ's missionary mandate and its realization in pastoral, catechetical and evangelization work. These words of our Lord are to contribute to a change in the mentality of priests and faithful; they are to lead to pastoral and missionary conversion.

The evangelization of the world had its beginning in the words of Christ which constitute a call to proclaim the Gospel to all nations. Its purpose is the Salvation of mankind. The fulfillment of the missionary mandate enlivens the missionary spirit in the Church. Those who go forth and proclaim the Gospel bear witness to their faith while opening themselves to the action of the Holy Spirit who is the main Evangelizer.

Pope Francis calls the Church to take up "a new phase of evangelization, one marked by enthusiasm and vitality."¹ The Pope describes this new phase of evangelization as a "missionary going-forth". Its purpose is to reach the peripheries of the world, "to get on the road"². Christians are to be a community of disciples who take up new initiatives. The Pope calls for a "pastoral and missionary conversion" in order to "be in a permanent missionary state," so that "the structures of the Church may become more missionary in nature."³

All this leads us to the following questions:

In today's remarkably sophisticated world, how are we to proclaim Christ as the only Savior of the world? How are we to bring the Gospel to contemporary man? Is it enough to use the most adequate and beautiful words in order to draw others to Christ?

Blessed Paul VI expressed his conviction that "modern man listens more willingly to witnesses, than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."⁴

St. John Paul II expressed himself in the same spirit in an encyclical on the missionary activity of the Church: "People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission."⁵

Pope Benedict XVI wrote in a message for the 2013 World Youth Day: "When we forget God, we lose hope and become unable to love others. That is why it is so necessary to testify to God's presence so that others can experience it. The Salvation of humanity depends on

¹ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 17.

² B. Łysik, *Duszpasterstwo misyjne według papieża Franciszka*, „Nurt SVD” 1 (2015), pp. 19-20.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

⁴ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41.

⁵ *Redemptoris Missio*, 42.

this, as well as the Salvation of each of us. Anyone who understands this can only exclaim with St. Paul: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16).”

The Church, from its very beginning, has placed the act of bearing witness to the faith of its followers on par with proclaiming the Gospel. All those belonging to Christ, by virtue of Baptism, would become His witnesses, and *martyria* would become the natural form of sharing one’s gift of faith with others.

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Biblical grounds for Christian Witness

The initiative of saving the human race comes from the Father. It is a sign of His grace and mercy. This is attested to by the Old and New Testament. God chose and sent his messengers and prophets to the Chosen People with the mission of proclaiming to them the truth about Himself. Let us look at the calling of Moses (Ex 3:7-22), Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-10) and Isaiah (Is 6: 1-13). The One who calls and sends out is God the Father who is the initiator of this mission. The one who is sent by God receives a task to carry out and he fulfills it by words and signs. God accompanies the one whom He sends, reassuring him about His presence. Fulfilling the mission entrusted to them by God, the prophets bore witness to the Lord and, at the same time, to their God-given mission.

In the fullness of time, the Father sends His Son (Gal 4:4). St. John the Apostle stated: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

In the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, we read: “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.”⁶ This plan has its origin in the source of charity, which is “the Charity of God the Father.”⁷ The purpose of this universal divine plan is the Salvation of the human race.

Jesus Christ is the only authentic witness of God. Jesus became the paradigm of the faithful witness (cf. Rev 1:5) in the New Covenant. He has the awareness of being sent (cf. Jn 10:36). He came into the world, in order to bear witness to the truth (cf. J 18:37). He alone has seen God (Jn 1:18) and He speaks of what He has seen and heard the

⁶ *Ad Gentes*, 2.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

Father doing (cf. Jn 3:11; 5:19-20).⁸ In His teaching and disposition, Jesus exemplifies a total and perfect union with the Father and an obedience to His will. He wants to give people only that which God has revealed to Him (cf. Jn 8:28; 12:49-50). While being obedient to the Father, He is not seeking His own glory, but the glory of Him who sent Him with the Gospel into the world (cf. Jn 7:16-18). He testifies: “He who sent me is with me; He has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to Him” (Jn 8:29). Jesus bears witness to the truth which means that He reveals the mystery and wisdom of the Father who seeks to liberate man from the power of evil. This liberation takes place through the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. On the Cross, Jesus bore witness to the unlimited love of God, because “greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13).⁹

The Mission of the Church: to Proclaim and Bear Witness to the Gospel

The Church whose members we are, has a missionary nature which is rooted in the Holy Trinity. The Church is missionary by nature, because its roots have their origin in the mission of Jesus Christ and the mission of the Holy Spirit, in accord with the Salvific will of God the Father.

Through His life and teaching, Jesus Christ fulfilled this Salvific mission for which He was sent into the world by the Father. Jesus Christ handed down this mission to His disciples by sending them to proclaim and bear witness to it. When He was ascending into heaven, Christ addressed His Apostles with the words which constitute His missionary testament. He commanded them: “You shall be my witness in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The Church is missionary not only because it continues the mission of Jesus, but also because it partakes in His pastoral prophetic authority. It has been sent by Him and today it sends its faithful to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, bear witness to it and form the community of believers.¹⁰

⁸ Z. Grochowski, *Jezus jako świadek w Ewangelii wg św. Jana*, “Verbum vitae” 27 (2015), pp. 172-173.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 183.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ad Gentes*, 6.

Proclaiming the Gospel and bearing witness to it is the most important task of the Church. This task and mission was handed down to the Church by Jesus Christ Himself. Paul VI reminds us in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: “The Church exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach.”¹¹ To proclaim the Gospel means to bear witness to the Gospel.

All the Evangelists end their account of the Resurrected Lord’s meeting with His Apostles, with the missionary mandate: “Go, therefore, and teach all nations...and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:19-20; cf. Mk 16:15-18; Lk 24: 46-49; Jn 20:21-23). St. John Paul II has taught in *Redemptoris Missio*: “This is a sending forth in the Spirit, as is clearly apparent in the Gospel of John: Christ sends his own into the world, just as the Father has sent him, and to this end He gives them the Spirit. Luke, for his part, closely links the witness the apostles are to give to Christ with the working of the Spirit, who will enable them to fulfill the mandate they have received.”¹²

The Evangelists speak clearly about going out and proclaiming the Gospel. Still, Luke presents the mission of the Apostles as bearing witness: “You are witnesses of these things” (Lk 24:48); and in the Acts of the Apostles (1:8): “You shall be my witnesses to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). St. John Paul II reminded us about it: “The mission of the Church, like that of Jesus, is God’s work or, as Luke often puts it, the work of the Spirit. After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the apostles have a powerful experience which completely transforms them: the experience of Pentecost. The coming of the Holy Spirit makes them *witnesses* and *prophets* (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:17-18). It fills them with a serene courage which impels them to pass on to others their experience of Jesus and the hope which motivates them. The Spirit gives them the ability to bear witness to Jesus with boldness.”¹³ From the day of Pentecost, Christ’s missionary mandate has become a fundamental element in the life of the young community of faith. It is a community gathered for prayer, Eucharist and the meditation of the word of God (cf. Acts 2:42-47).

This enormous task seems to go beyond the disciples’ human capabilities. That is why they are reassured that they will not be left alone, but will have the Holy Spirit to accompany them. The Spirit of Christ filled His disciples and awakened in them both a desire and courage for the purpose of bearing witness to the Risen One. The Apostles with

¹¹ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14.

¹² *Redemptoris Missio*, 22.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 24.

the entire Jerusalem community have sensed the moral imperative: “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

The essence of evangelization is getting to know Jesus, the Son of God and proclaiming Him to the whole world: getting to know His face and showing it to others¹⁴. By fulfilling its mission, the Church sends those who proclaim the Gospel to make known the Good News of Salvation “to the end of the earth” (cf. Mt 28:19). Pope Francis encourages the contemporary Church to go out with its testimony of faith to the existential and geographical peripheries. He writes: “In our day Jesus’ command to “go and make disciples” echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church’s mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary “going forth”. Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey His call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel.”¹⁵

To summarize, we can state that the plan of Salvation flows from the love of God for mankind. The starting point for every mission is God the Father. He is the source of all mission. He chooses individuals and sends them out with a mission to be fulfilled, so that people may be reconciled with one another. The one who is sent fulfills the will of Him who sends by means of words and deeds. God reassures those whom He sends of His presence.

Evangelizers as Proclaimers and Witnesses of the Gospel

The mindset of “going forth” characterizes every evangelizer, i.e. every baptized, because the missionary mandate refers not only to the Apostles and their successors (bishops, priests and deacons), but to all the People of God. The contemporary Church takes into consideration the role of laymen in the Church’s missionary activity. They are the ones who evangelize and bear a witness that attracts others to Christ.¹⁶ Presently, the Church recognizes that all the baptized are evangelizers¹⁷ and they all partake in missionary activity *ad gentes*. Pope Francis makes this clear; from the beginning of his pontificate, he has been counting on a missionary reawakening in the universal

¹⁴ Cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, 16.

¹⁵ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20.

¹⁶ *Verbum Domini*, 94.

¹⁷ *Redemptoris Missio*, 71.

Church, especially within the ranks of many of its lay members. According to the Pope, every baptized person, regardless of his role in the Church and his level of education, is an active evangelizer. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he has encountered the love of God in Jesus Christ.

The Magisterium of the Church constantly takes note of the fact that there is a relationship between the transmission of the word of God and bearing witness to Christian life. This is how there is a hunger for the preached word, although by itself, it is not sufficient to reawaken interest in the proclaimed kerygma and to lead people to the faith. An evangelizer should show that the Gospel is a reality which one can live with. "This reciprocity between word and witness reflects the way in which God himself communicated through the incarnation of his Word. The word of God reaches men and women 'through an encounter with witnesses who make it present and alive.'"¹⁸

The spiritual identity of the evangelizer should include an openness to the action of the Holy Spirit and an obedience to the inspirations of Him who is both the first and the instrumental missionary of the Church.¹⁹ He is the One who enables people to bear authentic witness through various charisms (cf. Rom 12:3-13; 1 Cor 12:1-31). Christ's witness should stand out by his enthusiasm and zeal as well as virtues, among which the Apostle Paul lists confidence, courage and reliability (cf. 1 Thess 2:2; 1 Tim 3:13; Heb 3:6).

We are to engage in the new evangelization. "The pressing pastoral task of the new evangelization calls for the involvement of the entire People of God, and requires a new fervor, new methods and a new expression for the announcing and witnessing of the Gospel."²⁰ To the secularized world, St. John Paul II showed a new style of priestly ministry. He treats the evangelical radicalism of priestly life as the necessary condition for the new evangelization's effectiveness. The radical evangelism of consecrated persons and all faithful laypeople is also needed.

¹⁸ *Verbum Domini*, 97.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 21.

²⁰ *Pastores dabo Vobis*, 18.

Areas of Evangelization – Those for Whom the Proclamation of the Gospel and Bearing Witness are Intended

The missionary commission “go out and proclaim” is being realized not only through missionary activity *ad gentes* (among the nations). All of the Church’s pastoral activity is to be fulfilled in this spirit.²¹ In other words, the proclamation of the Gospel and bearing witness to it need to be carried out in two fundamental areas: *ad intra* and *ad gentes*.

The “missionary going forth”, according to Pope Francis, should include three essential areas, or three groups to whom the proclamation of the Gospel and bearing witness to it are addressed and to whom the Church turns with the Salvific message of Christ.

1. The first area of evangelization consists of the parish and ordinary pastoral activity carried out among the faithful who regularly participate in the life of the community and gather in churches on Sundays and holy days of obligation in order to be fed by the word of God and the Bread of eternal life (pastoral activity within the parish).

The parish is the place where the missionary mandate is being realized – “Go and proclaim” – the space where missionary consciousness is reawakened and where pastoral and missionary conversion take place.²² What should be done, so that the parish would be renewed and experience a missionary conversion? How should one move from passive pastoral engagement, concentrated on maintaining a “possessive state” to a pastoral activity which is clearly missionary in nature and seeks to accommodate those who are religiously indifferent or remain far off?²³

Parish renewal requires a revision of its structures. This needs to be done in a way that would transform the parish into one community made up of small communities, while its members would be missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. Priests should establish parishes as “a community of small communities” and form leaders of groups, communities and associations; group facilitators and volunteers with whom priests should then start evangelizing. Communities of the

²¹ R. Szmydki, *Idźcie i głoscie. O duszpasterskim i misyjnym nawróceniu*, Górna Grupa „Verbinum” 2017, pp. 71-75.

²² J. Górki, *Duszpasterstwo misyjne*. Wykłady gościnne na Katolickim Uniwersytecie w Cochabamba, Bolivia 2008, Katowice 2009, p. 52.

²³ B. Łysik, *Duszpasterstwo misyjne według papieża Franciszka*, „Nurt SVD”, 1 (2015), pp. 9-10.

faithful constitute a privileged tool of the new evangelization which would enable the baptized to become authentic missionary disciples of Christ. These communities are also the place where new vocations to the priesthood, the consecrated life and secular life are born. Today, if the pastor does not cooperate with laymen in the parish, his approach is only scarcely evangelizing in nature. Alone, even with the most dedicated parochial vicars, he is unable to reach 60% or 50% of the faithful who reside in the parish and who no longer practice their faith, or others who are religiously neglected and indifferent.

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It is therefore necessary to rely on the laity, and not to be afraid of entrusting them with the responsibility for various pastoral tasks and the life of the parish. One should take up an active cooperation with the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Economic Council. It is also necessary to set up a Parish House of Charity or other charitable institutions and entrust them with specific tasks. The pastor does not have to do everything by himself. It is enough for him to moderate and coordinate the activities of lay groups, but on one condition: it is the priests' task to form the laity.

The Aparecida document expresses all this in the following manner: "Parish renewal requires new attitudes in pastors and in the priests who are in its service. The first requirement is that the pastor be an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ, because only a priest who is in love with the Lord lives in constant yearning to seek out those who are separated and is not satisfied with mere administration."²⁴

We constantly need to learn how to work with the laity and have confidence in their abilities and competence. That is why the priest must be close to the faithful and be present with them among people who are religiously indifferent, neglectful of their baptismal obligation or no longer familiar with the evangelical message. The priest should have the disposition of a missionary disciple and inspire such attitude among his faithful. The greatest pastoral endeavors in the parish should be directed toward the invitation and formation of lay missionary disciples. The larger their number, the greater the fruits of evangelization.

The formation of the faithful in communities, Church movements and associations, the formation of lectors, acolytes, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, permanent deacons – all this is the main task which stands before the Church at the present moment. It needs

²⁴ V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, *Disciples and Missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that our Peoples may have Life in Him* "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 16,4). *Concluding Document*, Aparecida 2007, 201. [Henceforth, *Aparecida*].

to be remembered, that – as Vatican II teaches²⁵ – the main areas of activity and evangelization by the faith is the world of economy, culture, science, arts, politics, mass media and economic management, as well as family, education, and professional life. These are the main areas where the Church is present through lay missionary disciples. These are the “contemporary Areopagi” where the Gospel must be proclaimed and where Christ must be ushered in.

Priests will not accomplish this task on their own. But in cooperation with consecrated persons and well-formed laity one can count on remarkable fruits of evangelization. For it is the case that every layman who is adequately – both religiously and spiritually – formed emanates the Gospel toward a number of individuals. Such a person is a witness to the Gospel in his own environment.

Therefore, it is necessary to turn the parish into a mission outpost. We read in the *Aparecida* document: “All members of the parish community are responsible for the evangelization of the men and women in each setting.”²⁶ Among the parishioners, there should be an re-awakened and vitalized missionary consciousness, as well as a sense of responsibility for missionary leadership and cooperation, with the proclamation of the Gospel in one’s neighborhood and to the ends of the earth as well. Parishes should become missionary-minded. This requires both imagination and creativity, in order to reach those who have left the Church community; those who live as if God did not exist; and those who still want to know Him, but do not know how. In the process of turning the parish into a missionary outpost, the Pontifical Mission Societies constitute a great form of assistance. Agencies run by the Department of Missions of the Polish Bishops Conference are also most helpful.

2. The second area of evangelization is made up of baptized persons who do not wholeheartedly belong to the Church and do not experience the joy flowing out from the faith. They need a new conversion which would restore the joy of faith to their lives and a renewed desire to become involved in the proclamation of the Gospel.

Pope Gregory the Great said: “The faithful are leaving us and we remain silent.” Looking at the entire pontificate of John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, we are encouraged to engage in a new evangelization, so that we may remain neither silent nor indifferent in the face of those who leave the Church. Instead, we are to become fully engaged in the action of drawing to Christ those

²⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, 31.33; *Gaudium et Spes*, 43.

²⁶ *Aparecida*, 171.

who have drifted away. Evangelizers of the new evangelization are needed. “The new evangelization requires new proclaimers with a new fervor, and a new expression for the announcing and witnessing of the Gospel.”²⁷ John Paul II has shown the secularized world a new style of priestly ministry. He considered the radicalism of priestly evangelical life to be the foundation for the new evangelization’s effectiveness. The evangelical radicalness of consecrated persons and of all the faithful is also needed.

According to John Paul II, the new evangelization does not consist of proclaiming a “new Gospel.” It is indeed a proclamation of the Gospel brought to us by Christ, but it is “new in its ardor, methods and expression.”²⁸ St. John Paul II has taught that “what is needed today is a pastoral activity which is truly missionary and which does not wait passively, but sets out to look for the lost sheep.”²⁹

Well-formed lay people in communities, Church movements and associations are to go to those places which cannot be reached by the priest. This is how the proclamation of the presence of Christ in everyday life should be the Church’s program for the third millennium. In carrying out this program, one must not fear the involvement of lay people who are missionary disciples of Jesus Christ by virtue of Baptism and Confirmation.

It is necessary that priests reach those faithful who are religiously neglected and indifferent, during their pastoral visitations. This is a great opportunity for evangelization. Are we making good use of it, in order to assist those people in their return to a life of faith?

Recently, the so-called “Three Kings Procession”, as well as pilgrimages to Jasna Góra, Ostra Brama and to other shrines – have become an occasion for evangelization. This is the model of the Church which is on the road and at the same time going out to others. In order to evangelize baptized, but non-practicing individuals, we should not be waiting for them to come to us. We must go out to them, and offer them a renewal of faith. We are sent to them by Jesus Christ. A certain change in our pastoral approach is needed: not to wait for the faithful, but to go out to them, looking for contact with them; to be on the move toward the faithful. This significant approach changes our pastoral pattern. It becomes the expression of missionary and pastoral conversion.

3. The third area of new evangelization consists of those who do not know Christ or those who have always rejected Him. The Church

²⁷ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 18.

²⁸ *Veritatis Splendor*, 106.

²⁹ Ad Limina Message to the Polish Episcopal Conference, June 12, 1993.

is called to a missionary activity in the midst of those who have not been baptized. Although much time has gone by since the beginnings of the Gospel's proclamation, missionary outreach remains relevant, because more than 5 milliard people do not know Christ.

Pope Benedict XVI noted that missionary activity *ad gentes* opens up toward new dimensions: the missionary activity of the People of God is not only intended for non-Christian peoples and distant lands, but above all for social and cultural contexts and hearts.³⁰ So we cannot close in within ourselves, but we should have the awareness and responsibility for carrying Christ to the ends of the earth, where the Church is not yet present. For it is a fact that all of us are missionaries by virtue of Baptism and Confirmation. We should engage in missionary leadership and cooperation, while supporting the Pontifical Mission Societies, cooperating with the initiatives of the Works of "Ad Gentes", MIVA Poland, and the Center of Missionary Formation. We should pray for missionary vocations, so that they could be sent to the ends of the earth.

a. We send missionaries to missions *ad gentes*. Presently, there are 2012 missionaries in 97 countries, among whom there are 56 laypeople. More than 100 priests and religious sisters have engaged in pastoral activity in the East. One must also take into account the volunteers who go to mission territories for longer or shorter periods of time and to the East. Volunteering for the missions gives an opportunity to vitalize the faith and missionary spirit of volunteers and entire parishes, pastoral groups and various associations in the parish.

b. We support missionaries spiritually, we offer our sufferings, and we assist them materially as well.

Prayer for the missions is needed for the grace of faith for those who still do not know Christ. All the faithful should become engaged in spiritual and material assistance. Group leaders and missionary volunteers have a great role to play in these areas. A missionary volunteer can be a person who will never become a missionary, but can engage in missionary activity in his diocese, parish, or school, while taking part in missionary vitalization and cooperation.

It is imperative to develop the Apostolate of the sick. The sick must be encouraged to engage in missionary activity by their spiritual union with the suffering missionary Church.

³⁰ Benedict XVI, Address to the Participants of the International Conference on Occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the Conciliar Decree "Ad Gentes," March 11, 2006.

The mass media have an enormous role to play in evangelization and in bearing witness to the faith. Their role is to communicate information about the life and problems of people in Third World countries among readers, radio listeners, and TV audiences. The Church increasingly recognizes the possibility of new evangelization and missionary activity in the virtual sphere. This is an enormous field which ought to be utilized.

Papal Mission Days deserve our particular attention.³¹ They make it possible to gather funds for missionary activities on Mission Sundays and provide for the support of young Churches. Another invaluable initiative of the Pontifical Mission Societies is the spiritual adoption of seminarians from missionary countries within the “AdoMis” program. This is a helpful form of spiritual and material assistance for diocesan and religious seminarians.

The Church in Poland has numerous growing initiatives which engage children in missionary activities. The Pontifical Association of the Holy Childhood collects contributions from children who are preparing for their First Holy Communion and transfers those funds to children who prepare for their First Holy Communion in mission lands., especially in Africa. Every year, a drive is being held to collect financial contributions in order to assist children in mission lands as part of the “Koleńnicy Misyjni” project. This project involves the singing of Carols and is used for the evangelization of those who are approached by children with the message of Christ’s nativity. Such performances are also used to collect financial means for missionary activity. It is a way to develop missionary consciousness among children. This form of evangelization has survived in the most secularized countries. It has proven to be successful and is immune to secularization.

The “Ad Gentes” Works initiated by the Polish Episcopal Conference is constantly growing operation. For the past 11 years it has been supporting Polish missionaries around the world.³² Every year, this initiative has been used to subsidize evangelization works, as well as medical, educational and charitable projects in the missions. Last year, 168 projects were subsidized. The Works help establish and furnish schools and kindergartens. Under the Works’ auspices, missionary leadership sessions are conducted in parishes to encourage various forms of service on behalf of the missions.

³¹ D. Cichy, *Z wykładów o animacji misyjnej*, „Animator. Biuletyn misyjno-pastoralny” 3(2013), p. 126.

³² P. Rozynek, Zb. Sobolewski, *10 lat w służbie polskim misjonarzom*, Górna Grupa „Verbinum” 2016, pp. 136-137.

In addition, “MIVA Poland” supports Polish missionaries and sends them means of transportation, such as utility vehicles, motorcycles, bicycles and boats.³³ Thanks to the active involvement of many groups, a “St. Christopher Campaign” is being held, which increases drivers’ awareness of the need for safe driving, while at the same time promotes greater concern for the care of missionaries. Funds collected from various drives are being used to purchase means of transportation for missionaries.

Resolutions of the IV National Missionary Congress

The Church in Poland constantly increases its missionary initiatives by forming its faithful in a spirit of responsibility for the missions. One of the important events was the IV National Missionary Congress which took place in Warsaw and in all of Poland in 2015³⁴. In order to vitalize the missionary Church in Poland, the IV National Missionary Congress proposed specific actions whose purpose would be to increase involvement in missionary activities:

1. Establish a Mission Office or Department. In every archdiocese and diocese there are already episcopal delegates for the missions and directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies. Deanery representatives for missionary affairs should also be appointed. This would make it possible for information about the missions to reach all parishes, and from the parishes to the headquarters of the Pontifical Mission Societies and the Commission of the Polish Bishops’ Conference for Missionary Affairs. It would be a good way to vitalize a missionary fervor, manifested through prayerful involvement and the organization of material support.³⁵

2. Establish Missionary Works in every archdiocese and diocese whose aim would be the spiritual and material support of missionary service provided by diocesan and religious priests, sisters and laity. The purpose of the Works would be the vitalization of a spirit of prayer and the establishment of missionary cenacles in parishes, as well as the entire formation of missionary group leaders and cooperation with the Pontifical Mission Societies and the branches of the Polish

³³ J. Krasieński, „MIVA Polska i pomoc polskim misjonarzom w Brazylii,” in B. Kieźel, *Ewangelia i Afrobrazylijczycy*, Białystok 2014, p. 176-180.

³⁴ Zb. Sobolewski, J. Różański, K. Szymczycha, A. Sochal, *radość Ewangelii źródłem misyjnego zapалу. IV Krajowy Kongres Misyjny*, Warszawa 12-14 czerwca 2015, Górna Grupa „Verbinum” 2015.

³⁵ R. Szmydki, *Idźcie i goście. O duszpasterskim i misyjnym nawróceniu*, Górna Grupa „Verbinum” 2017, s. 68.

Bishops' Conference Commission for Missionary Affairs. On the First Friday of every month or on any other day, every parish should have a prayer service for the intentions of missionaries and for the purpose of collecting material offerings. These offerings constitute the Diocesan Missionary Fund.

3. Priests for the propagation of missions. Only with the cooperation of priests who have a "missionary mind and heart" – as St. John Paul II used to say – would it be possible to vitalize a missionary spirit in the Church in Poland. It is necessary to renew the missionary consciousness of diocesan and religious priests and form a missionary spirit on the seminary level. The Pontifical Missionary Union has a lot to do in this area of activity on behalf of the missions.

4. Catechists for missionary affairs. It is imperative to renew the missionary awareness among catechists. Proposals have been submitted, so that missionary issues could be emphasized in the context of permanent formation of catechists, especially at a time when catechists are being formally commissioned before the beginning of a new school year, in order to further vitalize a missionary fervor and involvement among them.

5. In various dioceses, there are retreats for priests and catechists. They should be enriched by missionary themes. In order to reawaken a missionary spirit among priests, Days for the Sanctification of the Clergy could also be utilized. Days of recollection are organized in the deaneries. Their theme this year should concentrate on the missionary activity of the Church. This should be taken into consideration by the priests and missionary delegates in the diocesan deaneries who conduct these days of recollection.

6. One of the proposed forms for the reawakening of interest in the missions and the involvement of the faithful in assisting missionaries are biblical readings intended for the May and October devotions which would center on the theme of missionary activity – prepared by the Pontifical Mission Societies. Another form of spreading interest in the missions is the utilization of missionary periodicals, missionary websites and portals.

7. Scholarly congresses and symposiums on the theme of missions and missiology. In the pastoral year of 2016/2017, there was a proposal that such congresses and symposiums should be organized in archdioceses and dioceses. Their aim would be to reawaken and vitalize a greater missionary awareness among all those who are responsible for the missionary activity of the Church and for evangelization (bishops, priests, consecrated persons, seminarians and lay faithful).

Such gatherings would make us realize that we are all disciples and missionaries by virtue of Baptism and we belong to a Church which is missionary in nature and that Christ's missionary mandate "Go and teach" is still relevant and applies to all the baptized. During symposiums and congresses it is necessary to encourage parishes, families and schools to take part in missionary vitalization and cooperation.

All agree that at the present time, what is needed is not so much teachers of the faith, but rather those who bear witness to the faith with conviction. People readily receive the word of those who proclaim the Gospel if it is supported by the proclaimer's living faith. In the midst of numerous words, proclaimed ideas and blatantly amplified ideologies, it is easy to lose one's taste for the word of God and reduce it to just another proposition for a successful life. A daily selfless and permanent manner of bearing witness to one's love leads to restless questions about the sense of life, its ultimate aim and purpose. It wakes one up from a lethargic state and allows to discover the evangelical message as the only and most important path for every human being. Thanks to one's personal act of bearing witness to the faith, this faith does not become deformed and reduced to the level of religious ideology, but turns into an invitation of meeting with the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. Jn 14,6).

The power of bearing witness to Christian life is most noticeable in mission countries, especial in those places where missionaries cannot openly speak about Christ and call others to conversion. It is then that the truth about Christ the Savior can be discovered through the missionaries' outward deeds and their clear actions on behalf of one's neighbor, their works of mercy and selfless concern for the good of others. That's how many people are influenced by the missionaries' behavior, their dedication and willingness to serve, so often at the cost of the missionaries own inconvenience. The missionaries' provokes questions and makes those who observe them think about the missionaries' driving motivation as well the authenticity of their way of life. All this leads people to discover the missionaries' religious motivation for all that they do.

The most distinctly evident way of giving witness to one's faith is martyrdom. The grace of laying one's life for Christ enables the martyr himself to remain unwavering in his faith to the end. It also constitutes a powerful incentive that leads one to reflect upon the truths of the faith which the martyr lives by, as well as the sense of his martyrdom. Such ultimate form of bearing witness becomes the seed of new adherents of Christianity. One can notice this process

in countries where Muslim fundamentalists murder Christians and destroy their churches. Martyrs are the seed from which new followers of Christ are born.

Conclusion

Christ's mandate, "Go and proclaim," requires the active involvement of the entire Church, including all priests and faithful. Christ's commission, articulated on the day of His Ascension remains most relevant. It flows from His will that the Church may go forth to all nations with the Salvific message and without any fear or anxiety. For this to take place, there has to be a missionary community which is aware of its responsibility for the proclamation of the message of evangelical love. Such community should become a community of Jesus' authentic witnesses – those who will fulfill their missionary call to holiness without fear. Bearing witness to one's faith remains the privileged and effective way to fulfill one's missionary vocation.

Showing Christ to others is the most valuable gift which we can give to others. Do not be afraid! You are not alone. The Holy Spirit is with you and He is the one who will enable you to give courageous witness to your faith in Jesus. He is the One who will reawaken in you every desire to do good, to proclaim the Gospel and to announce God's love for mankind. Enter often into the Upper Room like the Apostles, and leave your fear and intimidation behind. Right there, open yourselves up to the power of the Holy Spirit and your hearts will be filled with courage, joy, peace and love. Draw the needed strength for the proclamation of your faith and for bearing witness to the Gospel from prayer, the word of God and the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Only a man who converses with the Lord is able to tell others about God. Only a priest, a religious sister, a catechists who loves God can tirelessly speak about Him.

I wish to end with the words of the closing statement of Cardinal Fernando Filoni who addressed the participants of the IV National Missionary Congress. He referred to his final address as the opening – and not the closing – words. The Cardinal spoke of St. John Paul II as the greatest missionary of the past fifty years who left behind one of the most beautiful encyclicals, "Redemptoris Missio" ("The Mission of the Redeemer"). Filoni said that these two words are "the message and program that he is leaving us with. The Mission of Jesus Christ was directed toward the Salvation of the whole world. There is no greater or more beautiful mission than this. That is why the one who responds

to it, receives the same mission which Jesus Christ received. 'Go out and teach all nations.' This was the last address, the last testament, the last message and the last desire of Jesus."³⁶

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