

Catholics called to find new ways to embrace Gospel's missionary call

It's time Catholics rediscover their individual mission, say Catholic leaders locally and globally as the Church marks World Mission Sunday and the closing of a month dedicated to that commitment.

Pope Francis has declared October an Extraordinary Missions Month in an effort to foster greater awareness of that commitment to embrace the Gospel message and to fearlessly proclaim it.



Experts say Pope Francis, who marked the sixth anniversary of his pontificate on March 13, has changed the Church. Catholic News Service

It also comes on the 100th anniversary of Pope Benedict XV's apostolic letter on the topic.

It's a monthlong focus both around the world and in the Edmonton Archdiocese, starting with the question: "How do you find your mission?" On a local scale, that search that can start at home.

"I think it's a critical question that the pope is putting to everybody. His call is for each of us to acknowledge and own what it is to be baptized," Archbishop Richard Smith said.

"We don't need to be going off to faraway countries. There's enough missionary work in our families, in the workplace and in our neighbourhoods to keep us busy for a lifetime. Where are we seeing people in those various contexts that are somehow in need?"

That need is not just financial, but a message of hope or an expression of Christian love, Archbishop Smith noted, adding there are many Catholics within our families and communities who have drifted away from the Church for whatever

reason – and the mission is to them as well.

“Part of being a missionary is to have that God-given courage to go them and say, ‘You know, would you like to come back?’ Might the Lord be calling us to reach out to them as missionaries?”

On a world scale, that missionary commitment continues through the Pontifical Missions Societies – the umbrella group of four societies that help continue the Church’s mission by supporting young churches; building schools, hospitals and dioceses; serving children and training seminarians.



Archbishop Giampietro Dal Toso

“The Holy Father has been very preoccupied with missions since the beginning of his pontificate,” says Archbishop Giampietro Dal Toso, head of the Pontifical Missions Societies.

“And he is pushing the whole Church in missionary conversion that means the whole Church learns more and more to spread the Gospel, to go out to people, to serve the Gospel. The Missionary Month should help rediscover this mission she has.”

Archbishop Dal Toso was the keynote speaker at the fall meeting of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops last month in Cornwall, Ont. In an interview with Grandin Media, he talked about Pontifical Missions Societies in an effort to make Canadians more aware of the projects they support.

The Pontifical Missions Societies are supported in most dioceses by a special collection on World Mission Sunday, which falls on October 20 this year. In the Archdiocese of Edmonton they are supported by the Together We Serve annual appeal.

The Pontifical Missions Societies include the Holy Childhood Association, a charity which sees children praying for and raising money to help their peers in mission countries. The late Father Michael Troy was instrumental in getting that started. In 2018, children at 12 parishes and 10 schools across the Archdiocese contributed a total of \$64,746.82 to Holy Childhood.

Another \$89,523 was forwarded to Pontifical Missions Societies through the

Together We Serve annual appeal.

But Dal Toso is quick to note that Pontifical Missions Societies are not just “a collector of money.” They support some of the world’s poorest countries through more than 6,000 projects.

Familias Misioneras, a growing missionary initiative in Paraguay, is particularly close to his heart.

“From a very small beginning, we [now] have 5,000 families who go around Paraguay doing mission, proclaiming the Gospel, helping local communities develop a missionary zeal. And now, in the last year, this initiative is going to be spread in other countries in Latin America,” Dal Toso said.

“This is a very concrete gesture that, for me, is an example how our Pontifical Missions Societies can help the local church to evangelize. Our task is not just to collect money ... it is also important to the local church in evangelizing.”

Today, the biggest challenge for Pontifical Missions Societies is to adapt to what to what Archbishop Dal Toso describes as a new dynamic, a “new model of mission,” that’s moving away from the hemispheric idea of the rich North helping the impoverished South.

“I would say the new model is a circulating model: north, south, east and west. That means, for me, that every local church can help another local church in order to evangelize, in order to share personnel, in order to share finances, to share projects, that we may learn from another in order to realize our task to evangelize.”

Archbishop Smith noted that churches in the developing world are in some ways far more advanced than those in industrialized countries.

“Where secularization has had significant inroads in the First World, commitment to what it is to be Church, commitment to what it is to be a follower of Jesus Christ, isn’t as widespread as it used to be,” he said. “In that sense, the First World has become missionary territory.”

Archbishop Dal Toso cited Canada in particular as a clear example of that new model of mission, starting with missionary priests who are invited from Africa, India and Latin America to serve churches in Edmonton and across the country.

“They come with a missionary zeal and a missionary spirit,” Smith said.

That circular model of mission is also seen in southern dioceses that have started twinning relationships in Canada’s North. The Archdiocese of Edmonton, along with four others, has been twinned with the Mackenzie-Fort Smith Diocese in the Northwest Territories since 2016.

“I was very, very surprised, positively surprised, by the help several dioceses in Canada are giving to the dioceses in the North,” Dal Toso said. “The advantage of this model is that everyone can contribute in his own way. We see that very clearly here in Canada.”

The twinning covenant is an agreement to share the gifts of each region with the other. In Canada, a number of northern and southern dioceses have entered into these relationships, initiated most recently by a change in Church funding for the North.



Parishioners stream out of their brand new church after celebrating the first official Mass consecrating the new \$1.3-million building on Sunday, Sept. 17, 2017. Grandin Media

The Mackenzie-Fort Smith Diocese is another beneficiary of the Together We Serve appeal, receiving \$134,000 in 2018. The annual contributions have helped with projects such as building the new Sacred Heart Church in Fort Simpson, N.W.T.

What the future of that twinning will look like is still being determined.

Bishop Jon Hansen said that while the Archdiocese of Edmonton is helping financially and with human resources – an Edmonton priest served in Mackenzie-Fort Smith for a while – the twinning is intended to go beyond that.

“It’s the reciprocity that’s going to be important going forward. It’s not just about a charity.”

That could include visits to learn about life, culture and Church in the North as well as Indigenous spirituality. One example is the church in Paulatuk on the Arctic coast, which has hosted a group from Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Sherwood Park.

As the Extraordinary Missions Month winds down, Bishop Hansen adds that mission can be lived by example.

"It's got to be more than a one-hour relationship on Sunday," he said. "It comes directly from how we live our lives. It should be attractive to those around us. That is a missionary call in and of itself."