

Loving our Xaverian vocation

*Behold, I will do something new!
Now it springs forth; will you not be aware of it?
(Is 43:19)*



Preparing the XVIII General Chapter

Issue n. 03 (November 2022)

Where are we?

Ad gentes, ad extra, ad vitam. Missione e cultura

*"The Missionary is the most beautiful symbol,
the most convinced and ardent apostle of this universal family spirit,
to which humanity tends..."*

(Guido M. Conforti, Departure Discourse #22, Parma 27.09.1931, cfr. Pagine Confortiane 1063)

Objective

"Our service to the Gospel is part of the wider and complex evangelizing mission of the Church and consists in a particular but essential articulation: the first proclamation" (RMX 8).

This preparation aid intends to stimulate reflection on the triad *ad gentes, ad extra, ad vitam* that summarizes our missionary commitment ("*Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature,*" Mk. 16:15) 20 years after the first edition of the RMX. Indeed, profound changes have occurred in the world, the Church, and our religious

missionary family during this period. As Pope Francis says, we are living not in an era of change but 'a change of epoch.' "This epochal change has been set in motion by the enormous qualitative, quantitative, rapid and cumulative advances occurring in the sciences and in technology, and by their instant application in different areas of nature and life" (*Evangelii gaudium* 52). The pandemic years of Covid-19 accentuated these transformations.

Probably the meaning we gave to the expressions *ad gentes, ad extra, ad vi-*



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tam two or three decades ago is no longer precisely the same as we would give today. We must accompany with our contribution of reflection and witness the effort that is being made by the Church today everywhere (cf. the magisterium of Pope Francis) to redefine itself starting from mission.

Inspirational Text

"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*" (Francesco, EG 15).

Presentation

The three elements characterizing our mission (*ad gentes*, *ad extra*, *ad vitam*) "do not exhaust the mission of the Church, but they do stress its urgent, universal and radical nature" (RMX 10).

Ad gentes

"Mission surpasses geographical frontiers, and is carried out in, from and in

favor of all the continents, to such an extent that the *ad gentes* dimension could be fulfilled everywhere" (RMX 3). Moreover, Pope Francis states, "missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church's activity" (EG 15). We are gradually becoming aware of the influence of colonial understanding on the vision of the mission. In reflection and practice, a great effort is underway to eliminate this vision. The growing presence of religious and cultural pluralism invites the Church to rethink its missionary identity and action.

Ad extra

"The *ad extra* constitutes a further qualification of the *ad gentes*. It concerns the mission principle of effectively leaving for the mission, which is clearly formulated in our Constitutions. [...] Geographical departure is not an end in itself, but oriented to the promotion of the missionary cause" (RMX 12).

Specifically for us Xaverians, the fact that *ad gentes* is found everywhere does not affect the fundamental validity of *ad extra*. However, it is necessary to probe its more profound meaning in a renewed way. The *ad extra* places us in a dimension of 'itinerancy' not only according to the geographical aspect but also in terms of greater freedom, availability, and even poverty. 'Itinerancy' means "being on the move," the ability not to be tied to a single service or area of activity in the congregation.

The *ad extra* holds a deep connection with the mystery of the incarnation (outgoing movement of God, in Christ, to the world) and the Paschal mystery (exodus experience, the passage from death to resurrection...) (Cf. RMX 12). The *ad extra* also decodes the expression "repositioning," presented a few years back in a letter by the General Direction: *Sharing in Conforti's dream. The first proclamation calls us all to a new beginning!* (*iQUADERNI de iSaveriani*, 80).

Finally, it is necessary to verify the accuracy/soundness of the interpretation of the *ad extra* in RMX 12.4.

Ad vitam

RMX 13 presents this aspect as a sign of a definitive and radical faithfulness: in terms of time (duration of our whole life) and in terms of commitment (all aspects of our life). The Constitutions clearly state that in illness, which makes us frail and helpless, in the weakness of old age, and up to the ultimate encounter with death, we are always in a state of mission. *Ad vitam* also means the "witness" of our life: mission is not our job but our life. The *ad vitam* invites us to live our life as a *gift*. We should not limit ourselves to thinking that mission is merely "doing," "planning," etc. Our mission is not reduced to missionary goals and projects, but involves our

very being. Expanding the *ad vitam* to being can help us not lose ourselves in plans to be accomplished, but in finding ourselves in the essential, which in the end is the connection, the relationship, that we weave with the people, we meet, beginning with the little ones. Simplicity and intensity.

Mission and culture

We could include this aspect in the *ad gentes* dimension. However, it is good to pause and look at our understanding of "culture." One cannot ignore the pluralism of ways in terms of views and understanding reality (cultures, religions, worldviews ...). Interculturality urges us to reflect on the encounter between these different realities and strive for a world that fosters dialogue.

Method

This preparation aid aims to foster reflection in our local communities. After personal consideration, we respond to the proposed questions in writing and send the material to the coordinators of the Preparatory Committee by **December 15¹**.

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Questions

1. Beliefs such as 'Church in a permanent state of mission,' 'missionary-disciples,' 'Church in missionary outreach,' etc. manifest the conviction that *missio ad gentes* must become the paradigm for all the Church's activity. What does this say about our missionary identity? How are we promoting the missionary and decolonial transformation of the Church foreshadowed by Pope Francis? Where is the periphery, and where is the center of gravity of our missionary endeavor? Where are the poor, the privileged recipients and central characters of the Kingdom?

2. Mission is lived in a dynamic way of exodus and gift (cf. *EG* 21) because the missionary's intimacy with Jesus is an "itinerant intimacy" (*EG* 23). How have we understood and accepted the General Direction's call for repositio-

ning? To what extent are we freeing ourselves from 'temporary pastoral service'? Are we open to "new ventures" and new ways? Or are we still locked within the already acquired spaces, paralyzed on the familiar patterns of our 'isolated consciousness'?

3. "The Church grows 'by attraction' and 'by witness' ... It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows; the mission of the Church does not consist in proselytizing. There is proselytism everywhere when you think of making the Church grow while ignoring the attraction of Christ and the work of the Spirit and focusing exclusively on a kind of know-it-all discourse!" (Pope Francis). How to resist the temptation of efficiency?

(Edited by the Preparatory Committee for the 18th General Chapter)