

“Mission as Dependence on God, and Solidarity with the Marginalized”



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SEDOS

*(Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission)
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SEDOS BULLETIN 2026

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Printing: Tipografia DON BOSCO

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*Based on the SEDOS Survey, the SEDOS Bulletin has been published quarterly, starting from 2025,
and is free of charge for SEDOS Members.*

The yearly Subscription is: €20 in Europe, and €30 Outside Europe.

For further information, advice, or change in subscription,

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Editorial

Mission as Dependence on God and Solidarity with the Marginalized

Dear Members and Readers,



Welcome to this edition of the SEDOS Bulletin, which gathers the remaining contributions and reflections from our Residential Seminar held from 4 to 8 May 2026 at Centro Ad Gentes in Nemi. Our theme—

"Mission as Dependence on

God and Solidarity with the Marginalized"—serves as a perceptive compass for the Church's calling today. Venturing to the margins is a profound theological choice rooted in the identity of Jesus Christ. Authentic mission begins when we empty ourselves of self-reliance, acknowledge our dependence on God's grace, and allow that trust to propel us into relational solidarity with those on the peripheries.

In our current era, human poverty has multiplied in complex ways. Beyond economic deprivation, contemporary poverty encompasses severe isolation, displacement, structural injustice, and an existential loss of meaning. Addressing these challenges demands a conversion of heart—shifting from static administration to a dynamic missionary communion marked by radical accompaniment, active presence, and genuine brotherhood.

This edition opens with a foundational article by Fr. Dinh Anh Nhue Nguyen, OFM, titled "*Franciscan Response to the Cry of the New Poor.*" Drawing on the witness of St. Francis of

Assisi and Papal World Mission Sunday Messages from 2022 to 2026, Anh Nhue proposes a renewed paradigm. St. Francis encountered Christ in the tangible embrace of outcasts. Prioritizing relational proximity over institutional security, the Franciscan charism offers a transformative model for modern evangelization, approaching the "new poor" as privileged places of encounter with Christ.

Extending these insights, three participant reflections offer personal and contextual resonance with the Seminar's primary theme. Sr. Kunsah Elizabeth, SUSC, in her reflection titled "*A New Way of Encountering Christ Through the Poor,*" explores the deeper theological implications of the Incarnation and Franciscan fraternity. She emphasizes that encountering Christ in those suffering from spiritual emptiness, displacement, and loneliness demands a transition from transactional charity to transformative solidarity. Sr. Kunsah stresses that authentic mission requires walking side-by-side with the marginalized, actively addressing systemic structures that perpetuate injustice, and living as a united, prayerful community whose shared life presents a credible witness to the Gospel.

Moving from theological reflection to practical pastoral application, Sr. Eugenia Mshana,



SUSC, shares her experience in “*Renewed in Mission*.” Deeply touched by the Seminar’s emphasis on synodality and pastoral challenges worldwide, Sr. Eugenia highlights how these insights directly enriched her apostolic commitment in Tanzania. Empowered by a deepened theology of the poor, she articulates a clear vision for strengthening anti-trafficking networks, expanding safe houses, and enhancing community outreach programs. Her testimony shows that missionary theology reaches its full significance when implemented in local contexts—ensuring that mission is precisely the place where divine love becomes visible to the most vulnerable.



In a similar spirit of courageous commitment, Sr. Ngwa Norah Neh, SUSC, expresses her thoughts in “*My Experience at the SEDOS Residential Seminar*.” Drawing from her work in traumatized and war-impacted communities, Sr. Ngwa addresses the serious emotional and spiritual dimensions of modern suffering. Inspired by the Seminar’s speakers and shared testimonies, she calls for a courageous ministry of presence that dares to step beyond comfortable structural boundaries and personal fear. She reminds us that to serve Christ in broken contexts, missionaries must share in the reality of those who suffer, offering hope through steady, compassionate, and enduring companionship.

Fr. Thomas Aquino N. Wele, SVD, further deepens our understanding of missionary identity in his synthesis titled “*Walking with the Marginalized*.” He reiterates that true mission can never be empowered by human effort alone,

but must spring from total daily dependence on God. Drawing from a strong missionary formation, Thomas Aquino underscores that

walking with those on society's peripheries requires profound humility, continuous conversion, and lived witness. When missionaries humble themselves to accompany others without paternalism, they become true instruments of Christ's healing love, demonstrating that solidarity is both a path of discipleship and a sign of God's Kingdom.

Finally, this issue includes the official evaluation and synthesis report of the seminar. Participants renewed their commitment to view the poor as evangelizers and active protagonists rather than passive recipients of charity, emphasizing communal discernment, networking, and psycho-spiritual support to address emerging forms of poverty.

As you read the articles and testimonies collected in this issue, our hope is that you will find rich theological nourishment and practical encouragement for your own life and ministry. May these reflections inspire us across the SEDOS network to cast off self-reliance, deepen our trust in God, and rediscover the joy of walking alongside our brothers and sisters on the margins.

Dr. John Paul Herman, SVD

Director of SEDOS



Franciscan Response to the Cry of the New Poor

A Missionary Reflection in Light of St Francis of Assisi and the Papal Messages for World Mission Sundays 2022–2026

Introduction: The Cry of the New Poor in the Contemporary World

The question of poverty remains central to the Church's missionary identity. Since the beginning of Christianity, the proclamation of the Gospel has been intimately linked with care for the poor, the marginalized, and the excluded. Yet the forms of poverty confronting the Church today differ in significant ways from those encountered in previous centuries. While economic deprivation continues to affect vast portions of humanity, contemporary societies also reveal new forms of vulnerability that challenge traditional missionary approaches.



The twenty-first century presents a striking paradox. Never before has humanity possessed such extraordinary technological capabilities, scientific knowledge, and economic resources. Communication technologies connect people across continents instantaneously. Medical advances have dramatically improved life expectancy in many parts of the world. Educational opportunities have expanded beyond anything imagined by previous generations. Yet these undeniable achievements coexist with widespread experiences of loneliness, alienation, anxiety, social fragmentation, and spiritual emptiness.

Many contemporary observers have noted that modern societies are producing new forms of poverty that cannot be measured merely in economic terms. The poor of our time include not only those who lack material necessities but also those who suffer from a lack of meaning, belonging, and hope. They include migrants uprooted from their homelands, elderly persons abandoned by family networks, young people immersed in digital connectivity yet deprived of authentic relationships, and individuals who possess material abundance but experience profound spiritual emptiness.¹

Pope Francis has repeatedly drawn attention to these realities. His pontificate has emphasized that the Church must go forth toward the existential peripheries of society, where many forms of suffering remain hidden behind the appearance of prosperity. The poor, he insists, are not merely recipients of the Church's charitable activity but privileged interlocutors who reveal essential dimensions of the Gospel itself.

Within this context, the Franciscan tradition possesses particular significance. Eight centuries after the life of St Francis of Assisi, his witness continues to offer valuable insights for contemporary missionary reflection. Francis encountered poverty not as a social problem to be solved but as a privileged place of encounter with Christ. His response combined radical evangelical simplicity, profound solidarity with the marginalized, and an unwavering commitment to proclaiming the Gospel.

The present study seeks to explore how the Franciscan tradition can contribute to a renewed missionary response to the cry of the new poor. Particular attention will be given to the missionary dimensions of Francis's life, the

¹ Francis, Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), nos. 18–30 ; Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015), nos. 48–52.

theological foundations of Franciscan mission, and the insights offered by the recent papal Messages for World Mission Sunday from 2022 to 2026. These messages, culminating in Pope Leo XIV's presentation of St Francis as a "missionary of love," provide an important framework for understanding the Church's missionary vocation in the contemporary world. The central thesis of this article is that the Franciscan charism offers a uniquely relevant missionary paradigm for addressing the multiple forms of poverty that characterize contemporary society. Through encounter, fraternity, evangelical poverty, and Christ-centered evangelization, Franciscan spirituality continues to illuminate pathways for missionary renewal in the third millennium.

2. St. Francis of Assisi: Encounter, Poverty and Mission

2.1 Conversion Through Encounter

The missionary vision of St Francis of Assisi cannot be understood apart from his experience of conversion. Unlike many founders whose spirituality emerged primarily through theological study or institutional reform, Francis's spiritual journey began through a series of transformative encounters. Among these, none was more decisive than his encounter with the lepers.

In his *Testament*, Francis identifies this experience as the turning point of his life:

*"When I was in sins, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them, and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body."*²

This brief testimony reveals a profound theological insight. Francis attributes the initiative not to himself but to God: "The Lord Himself led me among them." Mission begins not with human planning but with divine initiative. Before becoming an evangelizer, Francis had to become a disciple capable of

recognizing God's presence in those whom society rejected.

The encounter with the leper transformed not only Francis's perception of the poor but also his understanding of God. What had previously inspired fear and revulsion become a source of grace. This experience established a pattern that would characterize his entire missionary spirituality: the discovery of Christ precisely where conventional wisdom would least expect Him.

In a contemporary context, this insight remains highly relevant. The missionary encounter with the "new poor" often requires crossing social, cultural, psychological, and spiritual boundaries. Like Francis, missionaries today are called to discover Christ in places that initially appear uncomfortable, unfamiliar, or even threatening.

2.2 The Poor as a Privileged Place of Encounter with Christ

Francis's relationship with the poor was not motivated merely by compassion or philanthropy. Rather, it was rooted in a profoundly Christological vision. He recognized in the poor a special manifestation of the presence of Christ.

This perspective was shaped by his meditation on the Gospel, especially Christ's identification with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick, and the imprisoned in Matthew 25:31–46. For Francis, service to the poor was not simply a moral obligation; it was an encounter with Christ Himself.

Thomas of Celano, one of Francis's earliest biographers, repeatedly emphasizes this dimension of Francis's spirituality.³ Francis did not merely give alms to the poor. He sought their company, lived among them, and desired to share their condition. His embrace of poverty was therefore both personal and relational.

This understanding represents a significant contribution to Christian mission. The poor are not merely recipients of evangelization. They are also evangelizers. Through them, believers encounter Christ in a unique way. As Pope Francis frequently reminds the Church, the poor

² Francis of Assisi, *Testament*, 1–3, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, *The Saint*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 1999), 124.

³ Thomas of Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis*, I, 17, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, 196–97.

have much to teach us about faith, trust, hope, and dependence upon God.

2.3 Evangelical Poverty as Missionary Freedom

One of the central themes of Franciscan spirituality is evangelical poverty. Yet this concept is often misunderstood. Francis did not embrace poverty as an end in itself, nor did he idealize human suffering. Rather, he saw poverty as a privileged means of conforming oneself to Christ and becoming available for mission.

The Incarnation itself provided the model. The Son of God chose poverty, humility, and vulnerability. Francis was deeply moved by this mystery. The poverty of Bethlehem and the poverty of the Cross became for him the supreme revelation of divine love.

Bonaventure later described Francis as one who desired to imitate “the poverty and humility of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴ Such imitation was not merely ascetical; it was missionary. By renouncing possessions, Francis became free to belong entirely to God and to serve others without reservation.

This missionary dimension of poverty remains particularly important today. In many societies marked by consumerism, individualism, and the pursuit of status, evangelical poverty serves as a prophetic witness. It reminds both missionaries and those they serve that authentic human fulfillment cannot be reduced to material possessions.



⁴ Bonaventure, *The Major Legend*, VII, 1, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 2, ed. Regis J. Armstrong et al. (New York: New City Press, 2000), 562.

Moreover, evangelical poverty creates solidarity. It allows the missionary to approach the poor not from a position of superiority but from a place of shared vulnerability and fraternity.

2.4 Fraternity as the Heart of Franciscan Mission

Perhaps no concept better captures the originality of Francis’s missionary vision than fraternity.

Francis did not organize a movement primarily around preaching, social service, or ecclesiastical reform. Instead, he gathered brothers who sought to live the Gospel together. Their witness was intended to reveal a new way of relating to God, to one another, and to the world.

The Franciscan notion of fraternity extends beyond the boundaries of the religious community. Francis addressed all people as brothers and sisters because all share a common origin in God. This vision reaches its fullest expression in the *Canticle of the Creatures*, where even the elements of nature are embraced within a universal fraternity.⁵

Mission, therefore, is fundamentally relational. It seeks not merely to transmit information but to establish communion. The missionary becomes a brother or sister among brothers and sisters.

This aspect of Franciscan spirituality possesses particular relevance for contemporary forms of poverty characterized by loneliness, isolation, and social fragmentation. In a world where many experience profound relational poverty, fraternity itself becomes a form of evangelization.

2.5 Francis and the Universal Horizon of Mission

Although often remembered primarily as a saint of poverty and peace, Francis was also deeply missionary. His concern extended far beyond the confines of Italy or Christendom.

The clearest expression of this universal vision is his encounter with Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil during the Fifth Crusade. At a time when relations between Christians and Muslims were

⁵ Francis of Assisi, *Canticle of the Creatures*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, 113–14.

marked by violence and mutual suspicion, Francis crossed enemy lines to meet the Sultan. The significance of this encounter extends beyond its historical circumstances. Francis demonstrates a missionary approach characterized by dialogue, respect, humility, and witness. He sought neither political domination nor cultural superiority. Rather, he desired to bear witness to Christ through personal encounter.⁶

This episode anticipates many themes that would later become central to the Church's missionary reflection, especially those emphasized by the Second Vatican Council regarding dialogue, religious freedom, and respectful engagement with other cultures and religions.

The universal horizon of Francis's mission reminds the Church that the Gospel is destined for all peoples. Mission is not optional. It belongs to the very nature of the Church.

3. Theological Foundations of a Franciscan Mission to the Poor

3.1 Mission in the Mystery of the Triune God

Any authentic theology of mission must begin with God Himself. The Second Vatican Council teaches that the Church is missionary by her very nature because she originates from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit according to the plan of the Father (*Ad Gentes*, 2). Mission is therefore not primarily a human activity. It is participation in the life and action of the Triune God.

This theological principle resonates deeply with Franciscan spirituality. Francis understood his vocation as a response to God's initiative. The God whom he encountered was not distant or abstract but actively involved in the history of salvation through the Incarnation of Christ and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit.

The missionary disciple is thus invited to enter into the divine movement of love that flows from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit toward all humanity.

For Francis, this divine love was revealed most clearly in the humility of the Incarnation and the self-giving of the Cross. These mysteries became the foundation of his understanding of mission.

3.2 Christological Foundations of Mission

At the center of Franciscan theology stands the person of Jesus Christ.

Francis's writings reveal a profound fascination with the humanity of Christ. Unlike certain theological currents that emphasized Christ's divinity almost exclusively, Francis contemplated the poverty of Bethlehem, the humility of Jesus' earthly life, and the suffering of Calvary.

This Christological focus shaped his missionary spirituality in decisive ways. Mission meant making Christ known, loved, and followed. Yet it also meant imitating Christ's own manner of evangelization.

Christ approaches humanity through humility rather than domination. He invites rather than compels. He serves rather than seeks privilege. Francis sought to embody these same attitudes in his own missionary activity.

This Christ-centered approach remains essential for contemporary evangelization. The Church does not proclaim an ideology, a philosophy, or a moral system. She proclaims a person: Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.⁷

The poor, moreover, occupy a privileged place within this Christological vision because Christ Himself became poor and continues to identify Himself with the poor.⁸

3.3 Mission and the Kingdom of God

A further dimension of Franciscan mission is its orientation toward the Kingdom of God.

For St Francis, the Kingdom was not merely a future reality but a present experience of God's transforming reign. Wherever reconciliation, peace, justice, mercy, and fraternity flourished, the Kingdom became visible.

⁶ Francis of Assisi, *Earlier Rule*, XVI, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, 106–108.

⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), no. 44.

⁸ Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), no. 15.

This perspective prevents mission from being reduced either to social activism or to purely spiritual concerns. The Kingdom embraces the whole person and the whole of human life.

Consequently, Franciscan mission seeks both the proclamation of salvation and the transformation of human relationships. Evangelization and human promotion belong together because both serve the coming of God's Kingdom. This integral vision has been strongly reaffirmed in modern Catholic missionary teaching, particularly in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Redemptoris Missio*, and *Evangelii Gaudium*.⁹

3.4 Mission, Fraternity and Universal Brotherhood

One of the most original contributions of Franciscan spirituality to missionary theology is its understanding of fraternity. For Francis, mission was never simply about expanding the Church or increasing the number of believers. It was fundamentally about participating in God's plan to gather humanity into one family.

The roots of this vision lie in Francis's profound conviction that every human being is created and loved by God. This conviction enabled him to cross social, cultural, and religious boundaries. The encounter with the Sultan during the Fifth Crusade remains one of the most remarkable examples of this missionary openness. Francis approached the Muslim leader not as an enemy but as a fellow creature loved by God.

In many respects, Francis anticipated what modern missiology would later describe as dialogue, encounter, and witness. His example demonstrates that authentic evangelization never contradicts respect for the dignity and freedom of others. Rather, missionary proclamation and genuine fraternity mutually enrich one another.

This perspective has particular significance today. In a world increasingly characterized by polarization, nationalism, ideological conflict, and social fragmentation, the Franciscan witness of universal fraternity offers a powerful

missionary response. The missionary is called not merely to speak about reconciliation but to embody it.

3.5 The Holy Spirit and Missionary Dynamism

The missionary life of Francis was profoundly animated by the Holy Spirit. While his writings contain relatively few systematic theological reflections on the Spirit, his entire spirituality reflects a deep openness to divine inspiration. Francis constantly sought to discern God's will through prayer, contemplation, and attentive listening. His missionary activity flowed not from strategic planning alone but from spiritual discernment. He understood mission as cooperation with the work already being accomplished by the Holy Spirit in human hearts.

This insight remains highly relevant for contemporary evangelization. The Church does not bring God into situations where He is absent. Rather, she recognizes and cooperates with the action of the Spirit already at work in persons, cultures, and societies.

Such an understanding fosters humility, patience, and hope. Missionaries are not the primary protagonists of evangelization. God Himself remains the principal agent of mission.

3.6 Franciscan Mission as Participation in Divine Love

Ultimately, Franciscan mission is best understood as participation in divine love. The life of Francis reveals a man progressively transformed by his experience of God's love in Christ.

This transformation generated an outward movement toward others. Having experienced divine mercy, Francis became an instrument of mercy. Having encountered Christ, he desired that others encounter Him as well.

This missionary dynamism would later be beautifully summarized by St. Bonaventure, who described Francis as a man consumed by the desire that God's love be known and loved. According to Franciscan tradition, one of Francis's deepest sorrows was the realization that "Love is not loved."

⁹ Cf., e.g., Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), nos. 29–31.

This phrase expresses the deepest motivation of mission. Evangelization is not primarily about institutional expansion, cultural influence, or numerical growth. It is about making known the love revealed in Jesus Christ.

4. The New Poor and the Missionary Challenge of the Twenty-First Century

4.1. Understanding the Concept of the “New Poor”

Every historical period generates its own forms of poverty. While material deprivation remains, a tragic reality affecting millions of people, contemporary societies have also produced new forms of vulnerability that demand renewed missionary attention.

The term “new poor” does not imply that traditional forms of poverty have disappeared. Rather, it recognizes that poverty today frequently manifests itself in dimensions that transcend economics.

Recent papal teaching has repeatedly emphasized that poverty must be understood in an integral manner. Human beings are not merely economic subjects; they are relational, spiritual, cultural, and existential beings. Consequently, deprivation can occur in any of these dimensions.

The new poor therefore include not only those who lack material necessities but also those who suffer from broken relationships, loss of meaning, social isolation, cultural displacement, and spiritual emptiness.

Such forms of poverty are often less visible than material deprivation, yet they can be equally destructive.

4.2 Spiritual Poverty in a Secularized World

One of the most widespread forms of poverty in contemporary societies is spiritual poverty.

Many people live as though God were absent from their lives. Secularization has weakened traditional religious practices in numerous regions of the world, particularly in societies historically shaped by Christianity.

This phenomenon has generated a paradox. Material prosperity has increased for many populations, yet experiences of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and existential uncertainty have also multiplied.

Pope Benedict XVI frequently spoke of a “dictatorship of relativism” that leaves many people without stable foundations for truth and meaning.¹⁰ Pope Francis has similarly identified spiritual emptiness as one of the defining challenges of modern culture.

From a Franciscan perspective, spiritual poverty is particularly significant because it touches the deepest dimension of the human person. Human beings are created for communion with God. When that relationship is weakened or lost, other forms of suffering often emerge.

The missionary response to spiritual poverty cannot be reduced to apologetics or doctrinal instruction alone. It requires credible witnesses whose lives reveal the joy, freedom, and hope that flow from friendship with Christ.

4.3 The Poverty of Loneliness and Isolation

Another characteristic feature of contemporary society is the growing experience of loneliness. Paradoxically, technological advances have made communication easier than ever before while often making authentic relationships more difficult. Digital connectivity frequently coexists with emotional isolation.

Many elderly persons live alone without meaningful social support. Families experience increasing fragmentation. Young people often struggle to form stable and lasting relationships. In many urban environments, individuals can be surrounded by crowds yet remain profoundly alone.

Pope Francis has repeatedly described loneliness as one of the hidden forms of poverty affecting contemporary societies.¹¹

The Franciscan tradition offers an important response through its emphasis on fraternity. Francis understood that human beings flourish in relationships. His communities sought to embody mutual care, shared responsibility, and genuine communion.

In this sense, fraternity itself becomes missionary. To create spaces of belonging is already to proclaim something essential about the Gospel.

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, Homily at the Mass *Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice*, 18 April 2005.

¹¹ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, nos. 87–94.

4.4 Migrants, Refugees and the Experience of Displacement

The contemporary world is witnessing unprecedented levels of human mobility. Millions of people are displaced by war, persecution, economic hardship, environmental degradation, and political instability.

Migrants and refugees often experience multiple forms of poverty simultaneously. They may lose their homes, livelihoods, cultural identities, social networks, and sense of security. For many, migration involves profound psychological and spiritual suffering.¹²

The Franciscan tradition offers a particularly meaningful response to this reality. Francis himself embraced a life of pilgrimage and itinerancy. His spirituality recognizes the human condition as fundamentally one of journeying toward God.

Moreover, Francis's emphasis on hospitality, fraternity, and openness to strangers provides important resources for contemporary pastoral responses to migration.

The migrant is not merely a social issue to be managed but a brother or sister to be welcomed.

4.5 Young People and the Crisis of Meaning

Among the most significant manifestations of contemporary poverty is the crisis of meaning experienced by many young people. Despite unprecedented educational opportunities and technological resources, numerous young adults struggle with questions of identity, purpose, and vocation. Rates of anxiety, depression, and hopelessness have risen dramatically in many societies. This phenomenon points toward what may be called existential poverty.

Pope Francis frequently encourages young people to dream, to hope, and to discover their vocation within God's plan. His concern reflects the recognition that many contemporary youths suffer not from material deprivation but from a lack of direction and purpose.¹³

The Franciscan tradition offers a compelling response through its emphasis on vocation, discipleship, and joyful witness. Francis himself was a young man searching for meaning when he encountered Christ. His journey

demonstrates that authentic fulfillment is found not in self-centered achievement but in self-giving love.

4.6 Ecological Poverty and Integral Ecology

The ecological crisis has generated new forms of poverty that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations.

Environmental degradation, climate-related disasters, desertification, water scarcity, and biodiversity loss frequently impact the poor most severely. Entire communities face displacement or economic hardship as a result of environmental changes.

Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'* highlights the intimate connection between care for creation and care for the poor.¹⁴

This perspective resonates deeply with the Franciscan worldview. Francis's love for creation was never sentimental. Rather, it reflected his recognition that all creatures are interconnected within God's loving plan.

A Franciscan missionary response to ecological poverty therefore involves both environmental responsibility and solidarity with those most affected by ecological degradation.

4.7 The Missionary Implications of the New Poverty

The emergence of these new forms of poverty requires a renewed missionary approach.

Traditional charitable responses remain essential, particularly where material deprivation persists. However, contemporary mission must also address spiritual, relational, cultural, and existential needs.

This requires an integral vision of evangelization that unites proclamation, service, accompaniment, dialogue, and community-building.

The Franciscan tradition offers valuable resources for such an approach. Its emphasis on encounter, fraternity, simplicity, contemplation, and missionary witness speaks directly to many of the forms of poverty that characterize contemporary societies.

The new poor challenge the Church not merely to do more but to become more deeply missionary. They invite Christians to rediscover

¹² Cf. Francis, *Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees* 2023.

¹³ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* (2019), nos. 69–84.

¹⁴ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, nos. 137–162.

the Gospel as a source of hope, communion, and authentic human flourishing.

Indeed, as St. Francis discovered through his encounter with the leper, the poor are not only recipients of mission. They are often the privileged place where missionaries themselves encounter Christ and experience conversion.

5. Missionary Conversion in the World Mission Sunday Messages (2022–2026)

5.1 Missionary Renewal in a Time of Global Transformation

The annual Messages for World Mission Sunday offer an important lens through which to understand the contemporary missionary priorities of the Church. While each message responds to particular circumstances, together they form a coherent vision of missionary renewal that is particularly relevant for addressing the realities of the new poor.

The period from 2022 to 2026 has been marked by profound global challenges: the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflicts, forced migration, growing social inequalities, environmental crises, and increasing secularization in many parts of the world. Against this backdrop, the messages of Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV present mission not as an optional ecclesial activity but as the very expression of the Church's identity. A common thread runs through all these messages: the conviction that every baptized person is called to missionary discipleship and that mission begins with a personal encounter with Christ. This perspective resonates deeply with the Franciscan tradition, where mission flows from conversion, encounter, and a transformed relationship with God.

5.2 World Mission Sunday 2022: “You Shall Be My Witnesses”

The theme chosen by Pope Francis for World Mission Sunday 2022, “You shall be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8), places witness at the center of evangelization.

The Pope recalls that the Church's missionary mandate originates in the final words of the Risen Christ before the Ascension. The disciples are sent to the ends of the earth not

primarily as teachers, administrators, or organizers, but as witnesses.¹⁵

This emphasis is profoundly Franciscan. St Francis never considered himself a great theologian or strategist. The effectiveness of his mission lay above all in the authenticity of his witness. His life itself became a living proclamation of the Gospel.

The emphasis on witness is particularly important in relation to the new poor. Many contemporary men and women are skeptical of institutions, ideologies, and abstract religious discourse. What often speaks most powerfully is the credibility of lived faith.

The poor, especially those wounded by disappointment, exclusion, or spiritual emptiness, are often searching not merely for explanations but for witnesses who embody hope.

Francis of Assisi remains one of the Church's most convincing witnesses precisely because his words and actions were inseparable.

5.3 World Mission Sunday 2023: Hearts on Fire, Feet on the Move

The 2023 Message, inspired by the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35), presents mission as the fruit of an encounter with the Risen Lord.

Pope Francis highlights three moments in the Emmaus narrative: hearts burning, eyes opened, and feet set in motion. These stages correspond to a process of missionary conversion. First, the disciples experience the presence of Christ who walks beside them even in their confusion and discouragement. Their hearts begin to burn as He explains the Scriptures. Second, their eyes are opened in the breaking of the bread. Finally, they return immediately to Jerusalem to share the good news.¹⁶

This dynamic closely parallels the experience of St Francis. His missionary vocation emerged not from a predetermined plan but from an encounter that transformed his heart. Like the disciples of Emmaus, he discovered that Christ had been walking with him even when he did not fully recognize Him.

¹⁵ Francis, Message for World Mission Day 2022, “You Shall Be My Witnesses” (Acts 1:8).

¹⁶ Francis, Message for World Mission Day 2023, “Hearts on Fire, Feet on the Move.”

For the Church today, the Emmaus story offers important insights regarding the new poor. Many people live in situations of disappointment, uncertainty, and loss of meaning. The missionary response begins by walking with them, listening to their experiences, and helping them recognize the presence of Christ already active in their lives. This approach reflects a deeply Franciscan style of mission characterized by proximity, accompaniment, and patient dialogue.

5.4 World Mission Sunday 2024: “Go and Invite Everyone to the Banquet”

The theme of the 2024 Message highlights the universal character of God’s invitation.

Drawing upon the parable of the wedding banquet (Mt 22:1-14), Pope Francis emphasizes that mission consists in extending God’s invitation to all people without exception. Particularly significant is the Pope’s insistence that no one should be excluded from the Church’s missionary concern. The Gospel is destined for everyone, especially those who find themselves at the margins of society.¹⁷

This perspective has strong Franciscan resonances. Francis’s embrace of lepers, outcasts, and the poor reflected his conviction that no one falls outside God’s love.

The invitation to the banquet is especially meaningful in relation to contemporary forms of exclusion. Many of the new poor experience rejection, invisibility, or social marginalization. They may feel excluded not only from economic opportunities but also from relationships, communities, and sources of meaning.

Missionary disciples are therefore called to become instruments of God’s inclusive love.

The image of the banquet also evokes an ecclesiology of communion. The Church is not merely a structure or institution but a community gathered by God’s invitation. Mission seeks to expand this communion by welcoming all peoples into the family of God.

5.5 World Mission Sunday 2025:

Missionaries of Hope Among the Peoples

The Message for 2025 places hope at the center of missionary activity. This emphasis is

¹⁷ Francis, Message for World Mission Day 2024, “Go and Invite Everyone to the Banquet.”

particularly significant in a world marked by uncertainty, conflict, and widespread discouragement. The Church is called to be a sign and instrument of hope precisely where hope appears absent.

Pope Francis identifies hope not as optimism or wishful thinking but as confidence rooted in God’s promises and in the Resurrection of Christ.¹⁸

The theme has special relevance for the new poor. As previously noted, many contemporary forms of poverty are characterized by hopelessness. Individuals suffering from loneliness, addiction, displacement, unemployment, depression, or spiritual emptiness often struggle to envision a meaningful future.

A Franciscan reading of this theme highlights the joyful character of Christian hope. Francis’s life radiated joy even amid suffering and deprivation because his hope was rooted in God’s love.

Missionaries of hope therefore do more than offer encouragement. They bear witness to the transformative power of Christ’s Resurrection.

Their task is to help others discover that no situation is beyond the reach of God’s mercy and that every human life possesses infinite dignity and purpose.

5.6 World Mission Sunday 2026: One in Christ, United in Mission

The Message of Pope Leo XIV for World Mission Sunday 2026 represents both continuity and development within recent missionary teaching.

The theme, “One in Christ, United in Mission,” emphasizes that Christian mission flows from communion with Christ and communion among believers. The Pope recalls Jesus’ prayer in John 17, where the Lord asks the Father that His disciples may be one so that the world may believe. Mission and unity are therefore inseparable.¹⁹

This theme possesses profound significance in a world increasingly marked by division, polarization, and fragmentation. Contemporary

¹⁸ Francis, Message for World Mission Day 2025, “Missionaries of Hope Among All Peoples.”

¹⁹ Leo XIV, Message for World Mission Day 2026, “One in Christ, United in Mission.”

forms of poverty frequently include relational and social breakdown. Individuals suffer not only because they lack resources but because they lack belonging.

Against this reality, the Church is called to become a visible sign of communion.

The Franciscan tradition offers a powerful witness in this regard. Fraternity lies at the very heart of Francis's vision. His dream was not merely to create a religious order but to establish communities where the Gospel could be lived through mutual love and service.

The missionary implications are clear. Evangelization cannot be reduced to individual initiatives. It is fundamentally ecclesial. Missionaries are sent not as isolated agents but as members of a community united in Christ.

5.7 A Special Emphasis: St Francis as a "Missionary of Love"

One of the most noteworthy aspects of Pope Leo XIV's Message for World Mission Sunday 2026 is his presentation of St Francis as a "missionary of love."²⁰ This description offers a key for understanding both Francis's life and the Church's missionary vocation today.

Let's read again Pope Leo's teaching in this regard:

Mission to love – Proclaiming, living and sharing God's faithful love

If unity is the condition of mission, love is its essence. The Good News that we are sent to proclaim to the world is not an abstract ideal; it is the Gospel of God's faithful love, which became flesh in the face and life of Jesus Christ.

The mission of the disciples and the Church as a whole is to continue the mission of Christ in the Holy Spirit: a mission born of love, lived in love, and leading to love. In fact, the Lord himself, in his great prayer to the Father before his Passion, after invoking unity among his disciples, concludes: "so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn 17:26). Impelled by the love of Christ, the Apostles then went out to evangelize for Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:14). In the same way, throughout the centuries, multitudes of Christians —

martyrs, confessors and missionaries — have given their lives to make this divine love known to the world. Thus, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love, the Church's evangelizing mission will continue until the end of time.

I would like to express my special gratitude to today's *ad gentes* missionaries. Like Saint Francis Xavier, they have left their homeland, their families and all sense of security in order to proclaim the Gospel and bring Christ and his love to places that are often challenging, poor, conflict-ridden or culturally distant. Despite adversity and human limitations, they continue to give themselves joyfully, because they know that Christ himself, and his Gospel, are the greatest treasures we can offer. Through their perseverance, they demonstrate that God's love transcends all barriers. The world still needs these courageous witnesses of Christ, and ecclesial communities still need new missionary vocations. We must always keep them close to our hearts and continually pray to the Father for them. May he grant us the gift of young people and adults who are willing to leave everything behind to follow Christ on the path of evangelization even to the ends of the earth!

Filled with admiration for men and women missionaries, I make a special appeal to the whole Church to join them in the mission of evangelization through the witness of our lives in Christ, through prayer and through our contributions to the missions. As Saint Francis of Assisi said, "Love is not loved," and we look to him in a special way on the eight hundredth anniversary of his passing to heaven. Let us find inspiration in his desire to live in the love of the Lord and to transmit it to those both near and far, because, as he said, "this love Who hath loved us much is much to be loved" (Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, *The Life of Saint Francis*, chap. IX, 1; *Fonti Francescane*, 1161). This is highly significant. Why Francis? Because he unites: love of Christ, love of the Church, love of the poor, and missionary outreach. Francis demonstrates that authentic mission is not ideological expansion, but irradiating divine love. Love was the source, method, and goal of Francis's mission. His encounter with Christ awakened in him an overwhelming awareness of divine love. This

²⁰ Leo XIV, Message for World Mission Day 2026.

experience transformed his relationship with God, with other people, and with creation itself. His missionary activity flowed naturally from this transformation. Francis preached because he had encountered Love. He embraced the poor because he recognized in them the beloved children of God. He crossed cultural and religious boundaries because divine love knows no borders.

For contemporary mission, this perspective is crucial. The Church's response to the new poor must ultimately be rooted in love. Programs, structures, and strategies are important, but they remain secondary. What transforms lives is the experience of being loved by God and welcomed into a community of love. The figure of Francis therefore emerges as remarkably relevant for the Church of the third millennium. His witness demonstrates that authentic mission is not primarily about efficiency or expansion. It is about making visible the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

5.8 A Synthesis of the Five Messages

When considered together, the Messages from 2022 to 2026 reveal a coherent process of missionary renewal.

The Church is called:

- to be a witness (2022);
- to encounter Christ and walk with others (2023);
- to invite everyone without exclusion (2024);
- to become a sign of hope (2025);
- and to live communion in mission (2026).

These themes correspond remarkably well to the essential elements of Franciscan spirituality.

Witness, encounter, fraternity, hope, and love constitute not only recurring themes in recent papal teaching but also fundamental dimensions of Francis's own missionary experience.

For this reason, the Franciscan tradition offers valuable resources for the Church's response to the new poor. It provides not merely practical methods but a spiritual vision capable of addressing the deepest forms of poverty affecting contemporary humanity.

6. Toward a Franciscan Missionary Response to the New Poor

6.1 From Assistance to Encounter

The Franciscan response to the new poor begins with a fundamental shift of perspective. While material assistance remains indispensable, Franciscan mission cannot be reduced to charitable service alone. The example of St Francis teaches that the poor are not merely recipients of aid but privileged places of encounter with Christ.

This conviction challenges a tendency, sometimes present in modern societies, to approach poverty primarily through administrative, economic, or technical solutions. Such approaches are often necessary and beneficial, yet they remain incomplete if they fail to address the deeper dimensions of the human person.

Francis did not merely help lepers; he encountered them. He did not simply provide assistance; he entered into relationship. The missionary significance of this distinction is profound. The poor are not objects of mission but subjects with whom missionaries enter into communion.

Pope Francis repeatedly emphasizes the importance of a "culture of encounter." Such a culture requires listening, presence, patience, and genuine openness to others. In a world increasingly shaped by efficiency and productivity, the simple act of accompanying another person can become a powerful form of evangelization.²¹

This approach is especially important when dealing with contemporary forms of poverty such as loneliness, social exclusion, and existential despair. These wounds cannot be healed solely through material assistance. They require human presence, friendship, and communion.

6.2 Evangelical Poverty as a Prophetic Witness

A second dimension of the Franciscan response concerns the witness of evangelical poverty itself.

²¹ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), nos. 220–221.

The modern world often measures success in terms of wealth, consumption, productivity, and personal achievement. Such values frequently contribute to the spiritual and existential forms of poverty that characterize contemporary societies.

Against this background, the Franciscan embrace of simplicity possesses renewed missionary significance.

Evangelical poverty does not imply the rejection of material goods as such. Rather, it involves freedom from possessiveness and the recognition that all things are gifts received from God and intended for the common good.

This witness is urgently needed today. Many people experience exhaustion from the relentless pursuit of success and consumption. The Franciscan way proposes an alternative vision centered on gratitude, simplicity, relationships, and trust in divine providence.

Such a witness can become particularly attractive to younger generations who often question materialistic models of happiness and seek more authentic forms of life.

The missionary relevance of evangelical poverty therefore extends far beyond economic issues. It offers a countercultural testimony capable of addressing some of the deepest spiritual needs of contemporary society.

6.3 Fraternity as a Missionary Paradigm

One of the most valuable contributions of Franciscan spirituality to contemporary mission is its understanding of fraternity.

The modern world experiences an increasing fragmentation of social relationships. Political polarization, cultural conflicts, ethnic tensions, and growing individualism frequently undermine social cohesion. Many persons experience profound loneliness even within highly populated urban environments.

The Franciscan vision of fraternity offers a powerful response to these realities.

For Francis, fraternity was not merely a practical arrangement for communal life. It was a theological reality rooted in God's fatherhood and the universal dignity of all human beings. Because all are created by God and redeemed in Christ, all are called to become brothers and sisters.

This vision has significant missionary implications.

Mission is not simply about transmitting religious truths. It is about creating spaces where communion becomes possible. Christian communities are called to become signs of reconciliation and schools of fraternity.

Pope Francis's encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* further develops this insight by proposing universal fraternity as a path toward peace and social renewal.²² In many respects, the document can be read as a contemporary expression of Franciscan spirituality.

For the new poor, who often suffer from isolation and exclusion, the experience of belonging to a community may itself become a transformative encounter with the Gospel.

6.4 Integral Evangelization: Charity and Proclamation

The history of Christian mission has sometimes witnessed tensions between social service and evangelization. Some approaches have emphasized proclamation at the expense of concrete charity, while others have focused almost exclusively on humanitarian action.

The Franciscan tradition offers a more integrated vision. Francis cared for the bodily needs of the poor while simultaneously proclaiming Christ. These two dimensions were never separated in his life. Modern missionary teaching strongly reaffirms this perspective. Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* insists that evangelization includes both the proclamation of salvation and the transformation of human realities. St John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* similarly emphasizes the inseparable relationship between witness, proclamation, and human promotion.

Pope Francis continues this tradition by insisting that the Church must go forth toward the peripheries while never neglecting the centrality of Jesus Christ. The new poor require precisely this integral approach.

The hungry need food. The homeless need shelter. Migrants need protection. The lonely need companionship. But all also need hope, meaning, forgiveness, and the saving encounter with Christ. Authentic Franciscan mission seeks to respond to the whole person.

²² Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, nos. 1–8.

6.5 Missionary Presence Among the New Poor

A particularly important characteristic of Franciscan mission is presence. Francis did not remain distant from those he served. He chose to live among the poor, share their conditions, and accompany them in daily life.

This principle remains highly relevant today. The new poor often inhabit places that are not immediately visible. They may be found in urban neighborhoods, refugee camps, hospitals, prisons, universities, digital environments, or even affluent societies marked by spiritual emptiness. Missionary presence requires entering these realities with humility and compassion. Such presence is not passive. It involves attentive listening, discernment, and a willingness to recognize God's action within complex human situations.

In this sense, missionaries become companions on the journey rather than mere providers of solutions. The Emmaus paradigm highlighted by Pope Francis in the 2023 World Mission Sunday Message illustrates this approach beautifully. Like the Risen Christ, missionaries are called to walk with others, listen to their stories, illuminate their experiences through the Gospel, and help them recognize God's presence in their lives, particularly with His Word and His transforming grace through the sacraments of the Church.

6.6 Formation for Missionary Discipleship

A renewed missionary response to the new poor also requires renewed formation.

The challenges facing contemporary mission are increasingly complex. Missionaries must be capable of engaging diverse cultures, responding to new social realities, and addressing forms of poverty that often involve psychological, spiritual, and existential dimensions.

For this reason, missionary formation cannot be limited to technical skills or pastoral methods. Franciscan tradition emphasizes the integration of contemplation and action, prayer and service, theological reflection and pastoral practice.

Missionaries must first become disciples. They must cultivate a deep relationship with Christ through prayer, Scripture, the Eucharist, and the sacramental life of the Church. Without such

spiritual foundations, missionary activity risks becoming mere activism.

The Pontifical Missionary Union, founded by Blessed Paolo Manna and described by Saint Paul VI as “the soul of the Pontifical Mission Societies,”²³ has a particularly important role in this regard. Through missionary animation and formation, it contributes to the development of a missionary consciousness among clergy, religious, and laity alike.

In the context of the new poor, such formation must include not only theological and spiritual dimensions but also sensitivity to contemporary social realities.

6.7 The Eucharistic Source of Mission

At the heart of Franciscan spirituality lies a profound love for the Eucharist. Francis recognized the Eucharist as the privileged place of encounter with Christ. It was there that he contemplated the humility of God, who continues to give Himself for the life of the world.²⁴

This Eucharistic spirituality has profound missionary implications. Mission originates in communion with Christ. Before being sent, disciples must first receive. The Eucharist forms believers into a missionary people by drawing them into Christ's self-giving love. It teaches them to become bread broken for others.

In a world marked by division and fragmentation, the Eucharist also reveals the possibility of genuine communion. It gathers diverse peoples into one body and anticipates the universal fraternity toward which mission ultimately tends.

For this reason, a Franciscan response to the new poor must remain deeply Eucharistic. The service of the poor and the proclamation of the Gospel flow from the same mystery of divine love made present in the Eucharist.

Conclusion

The emergence of the new poor constitutes one of the most urgent missionary challenges facing

²³ Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Graves et Increscentes* (1966); Leo XIV, *Address to participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies*, Clementine Hall, Monday, 1st June 2026.

²⁴ Francis of Assisi, *Letter to All the Faithful*, 60–63, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, 70–71.

the Church in the twenty-first century. While material poverty continues to demand attention and action, contemporary societies also reveal widespread forms of spiritual, relational, cultural, ecological, and existential deprivation. The life and spirituality of St Francis of Assisi offer a remarkably relevant response to these realities. His encounter with the leper, his embrace of evangelical poverty, his commitment to fraternity, and his missionary passion provide enduring principles for Christian discipleship and evangelization.

The recent World Mission Sunday Messages from 2022 to 2026 further illuminate this path. Their emphasis on witness, encounter, invitation, hope, communion, and love reflects many of the central themes of Franciscan spirituality. Particularly significant is Pope Leo XIV's presentation of St Francis as a "missionary of love," a description that captures the essence of Francis's life and mission.

The Franciscan response to the new poor is therefore neither merely social nor exclusively spiritual. It seeks to unite charity and proclamation, service and contemplation, justice and evangelization. It recognizes that the deepest human need is ultimately the need for God, while also acknowledging the concrete conditions that affect human dignity and flourishing.

In every age, the poor reveal something essential about the Gospel. As Francis discovered, they are not simply those to whom the Church is sent; they are often those through whom the Church herself is evangelized and renewed.²⁵

For this reason, the cry of the new poor must be heard not only as a challenge but also as a grace. It is an invitation to missionary conversion, a call to rediscover the heart of the Gospel, and an opportunity to witness anew to the transforming love of Christ.

Eight centuries after the life of the Poverello of Assisi, his example continues to inspire the Church to go forth with humility, joy, and courage, proclaiming by word and deed that

every human person is loved by God and called to share in the fullness of life revealed in Jesus Christ. Thus, the Franciscan response to the cry of the new poor is clear: not only to share material bread, but also and above all to share the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ Himself, because the poor need not only assistance, but hope, dignity, communion, and salvation. And this is the deepest meaning of Franciscan mission: to become, like St Francis, missionaries of love.

Let's conclude then with Pope Leo's final exhortation and prayer from his Message for World Mission Day 2026:

Inspired by these testimonies, let us all commit to contributing to the great mission of evangelization — which is always a work of love — according to our own vocation and the gifts we have received. Your prayers and practical support, particularly on World Mission Day, will be a great help in bringing the Gospel of God's love to everyone, especially the poorest and those most in need. Every gift, no matter how small, becomes a meaningful act of missionary communion. I renew my heartfelt gratitude "for everything you will do to help me help missionaries throughout the world" (*Video Message for World Mission Day 2025*, 19 October 2025). To foster spiritual communion, I give you my blessing with this simple prayer:

Holy Father, make us one in Christ, rooted in his love that unites and renews. May all members of the Church be united in mission, docile to the Holy Spirit, courageous in bearing witness to the Gospel, proclaiming and daily embodying your faithful love for all creatures. Bless all missionary men and women, support them in their efforts, and watch over them in hope!

Mary, Queen of Missions, accompany our work of evangelization in every corner of the earth: make us instruments of peace, and grant that the whole world may recognize in Christ the light that saves. Amen.

(Anh Nhue OFMConv is the Secretary General of the Pontifical Missionary Union Dicastery for Evangelization, Section for the First Evangelization and New Particular Churches.)

²⁵ Francis, Message for the Fifth World Day of the Poor (2021), "The poor evangelize us."

Kunsah Elizabeth, SUSC

A New Way of Encountering Christ Through the Poor in our Everyday Life

The SEDOS Residential Programme 2026 was a *kairos* moment, filled with joy, laughter, peace, shared experiences, new learnings and personal growth. As a Holy Union Sister living and working in Cameroon, serving as part of the Area Leadership Team, I had the opportunity to participate in this seminar held at the beautiful retreat centre in Nemi, Rome.

The theme of the programme, “*Mission as Dependence on God and Solidarity with the Marginalized*,” offered deep and meaningful insights that have since shaped my understanding of mission, poverty, and the encounter with invisible face of Christ in the everyday life. The various presentations helped me to better understand who the “new poor” are in today’s world and what it means to walk with them.

Who Are the New Poor?

Drawing inspiration from the Franciscan tradition and linking to the 40th anniversary of the World Day of Peace, Father Dinh Annh Nhue N, the Secretary General of the Pontifical Missionary Union, nourished us with, The Franciscan Response to the Cry of the “New Poor”. This tradition offers a deeply human and evangelical response to the cry of the “new poor” in our contemporary world. Inspired by the life of Saint Francis of Assisi, Franciscan spirituality invites missionaries to embrace simplicity, proximity, fraternity, and minority, choosing to walk alongside those who suffer rather than above them. Saint Francis understood poverty not merely as deprivation, but as a privileged place of encounter with Christ. His famous conviction, “What a man is before God, that he is and nothing more,” reminds us that true dignity is not rooted in status, wealth, or power, but in Our Identity as beloved children of God.

The Franciscan response to the poor is therefore not paternalistic charity, but relational solidarity. It seeks to restore human dignity through presence, listening, compassion, and shared humanity. In a world marked by exclusion, loneliness, migration, ecological destruction, and spiritual emptiness, the Franciscan charism calls us to become instruments of peace and reconciliation. As Saint Francis prayed, “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,” missionaries today are invited to bring healing where there is division, hope where there is despair, and fraternity where there is indifference. This response challenges the Church to become ever more humble, welcoming, and attentive to the cry of both the poor and the Earth, recognising in them the suffering face of Christ Himself.

Today, poverty goes far beyond the lack of material resources. The “new poor” include those who are socially excluded, migrants and refugees, victims of war and violence, the



unemployed, and those living in precarious and fragile conditions. They also encompass the lonely, the elderly who are abandoned, young people without direction or hope, and those suffering from deep emotional and psychological wounds.

In many contexts, we also encounter people who are **digitally** and **spiritually poor**, those who feel disconnected from God, searching for meaning, truth, and belonging in a rapidly changing world. This form of poverty is perhaps the most hidden, yet it is profoundly real and increasingly widespread.

The new poor are often hidden in our everyday environments: in our neighbourhoods, workplaces, families, communities, and even within our own institutions. They may not always ask for help, yet their silent suffering calls for attention, compassion, and presence. They challenge us to move beyond superficial encounters and to build genuine relationships rooted in dignity and respect.

The Incarnation as Our Missionary Lens

The spirituality of the Incarnation calls us to bring Christ to others and more profoundly, to recognise Him in the face of every person we encounter, especially in the most vulnerable. This double movement, giving and receiving Christ, is at the heart of our missionary identity as Holy Union Sisters.

This spirituality requires us to listen attentively, to approach others with openness and humility, and to offer them the loving presence of Christ through our words and actions. It demands that we resist the temptation of distance, the distance of comfort, of busyness, of institutional routine and instead allow ourselves to be touched by the reality of those who suffer.

“One in Christ and United in Mission”

This missionary vision resonates profoundly with Pope Leo XIV message on the World mission Sunday 2026 on “One in Christ and United in Mission.” The Holy Father emphasises that authentic mission is born from communion with Christ and strengthened through unity among God’s people. In a fragmented and wounded world, the Church is called to witness to a spirituality of encounter, collaboration, and shared responsibility. He reminds missionaries that evangelisation is

never an individual task but a collective journey rooted in love, humility, and mutual belonging in the Body of Christ.

His message challenges consecrated men and women to move beyond borders of culture, language, and personal comfort in order to build bridges of solidarity and hope. Unity in Christ becomes the source of missionary courage, enabling the Church to respond more effectively to the cries of the poor, the displaced, the forgotten, and the spiritually searching. To be “one in Christ” is therefore not simply a theological idea; it is a lived commitment to walk together in service of humanity, witnessing to the Gospel through compassion, justice, and fraternity. In this way, mission becomes both a proclamation of faith and a concrete expression of God’s inclusive love for all people.

Encountering Christ in the poor also demands that we become more aware of the structures and systems that create inequality and exclusion. It calls us to solidarity not merely acts of charity, but a genuine commitment to justice, advocacy, and systemic transformation. As missionaries, we are invited to walk with the poor, to share in their struggles, and to be signs of hope in situations of despair.

The proclamation of Christ should always accompany every activity we undertake, ensuring that our mission remains rooted in faith and love. In this way, our daily encounters become sacred moments where Christ is both given and received. This was drawn from the deep inspiration of the four invited guests who shared experiences in the prison ministry; Sr. Paola Vizzotto, PIME, Street children ministry; Fr Massimo Vedova, FMC, JIPIC ministry and Migrant and prostitution ministry; Sr. Anicette Lantonkpode.

A Renewed Missionary Praxis: The Message of Fr. Alain

A particularly enriching dimension of the programme was the synthesis offered by Fr Alain, President of SEDOS, in his closing reflections. Drawing together the themes of *hospitalitās*, the papal documents *Dilexit Nos* and *Dilexi Te*, and the richness of the Franciscan tradition, Fr Alain offered a compelling and integrated vision for contemporary mission.

At the heart of this synthesis is a powerful insight: **Dependence on God is not passivity, but participation in Divine Love.** To depend on God is to be drawn into the very movement of love that flows from the Heart of Christ, a love that is always outward, always incarnate, always on the side of the poor and the forgotten. The convergence of these theological and spiritual traditions calls the Church, and each missionary, to a renewed way of being and acting in the world.

Fr Alain's synthesis articulated four principal orientations for this renewed missionary praxis:

A Spirituality that moves from contemplation to action. Mission is not reducible to programmes and projects. It flows from an interior life nourished by prayer and attentiveness to God. The Franciscan tradition, in particular, reminds us that true mission is born in the silence of contemplation and expressed in the tenderness of action. Missionaries who do not pray become agents of activism; missionaries who pray become instruments of transformation.

A Church that prioritises the poor and marginalised. Drawing on the spirit of *hospitalitās*, the ancient practice of welcoming the stranger as a sacred encounter and the encyclical *Dilexit Nos*, Fr Alain reminded us that the option for the poor is not optional. It is constitutive of the Gospel. A Church that is comfortable cannot truly proclaim a Christ who was born in poverty, lived among the marginalised, and died in solidarity with the condemned.

A communal approach to mission rooted in shared responsibility. Mission is never the work of isolated individuals. It is always ecclesial, always relational, always carried forward in community. The SEDOS programme itself was a living expression of this principle, bringing together missionaries from across the globe, from different congregations and cultures, to discern together what the Spirit is asking of the Church today. Shared responsibility demands that we move beyond the silos of congregational life into genuine collaboration, co-discernment, and mutual accountability.

A prophetic witness against structures of injustice. Solidarity with the poor cannot remain at the level of personal charity. It must include the courage to name, challenge, and work to dismantle the systems that produce poverty, exclusion, and dehumanisation. In the spirit of *Dilexi Te* and the Franciscan commitment to minority and marginality, Fr Alain called missionaries to a prophetic stance, to stand where the poor stand, to speak what the poor cannot say, and to embody in our lives the alternative that the Kingdom of God proposes.

Conclusion: Sacred Encounters in Everyday Life

The SEDOS Residential Programme 2026 invited each participant to see everyday life with new eyes, eyes shaped by the Incarnation, the Heart of Christ, and the tradition of those who have gone before us in faith. The “new poor” are not abstractions. They are present in our parishes, our schools, our streets, our families and our communities. They are present, perhaps, within our own hearts.

As Sisters of the Holy Union, as consecrated men and women, we are called to bring the healing and liberating love of Christ to the wounded and excluded. But we are equally called to **receive** that love from those very same people, to allow them to evangelise us, to challenge our comfort, and to deepen our faith. In this mutual giving and receiving, every encounter becomes holy. Every ordinary moment carries the weight of mission.

From contemplation to action. From charity to justice. From isolation to community. From comfort to prophecy. This is the renewed missionary praxis to which SEDOS 2026 has invited us. May we have the courage and the grace to live it.

About the Author

The author Sr. Kunsah Elizabeth is a religious of The Sisters of the Holy Union Congregation serving on the Area Leadership Team in Cameroon. She participated in the SEDOS Residential Programme 2026 held in Nemi, Rome, under the theme “*Mission as Dependence on God and Solidarity with the Marginalized.*”

Eugenia Mshana, SUSC

Renewed in Mission

My Gratitude to SEDOS

From May 4–8, 2026, I had the profound privilege of participating in the international missionary seminar hosted by SEDOS at Nemi, Rome. The program focused intensely on ongoing formation, the theology of the poor, and contemporary pastoral challenges. This transformative intellectual and spiritual journey has deeply enriched my vocation and leadership perspective as a member of the Holy Union Sisters Leadership Team in Tanzania.



Heartfelt Gratitude to SEDOS

I extend my deepest gratitude to the leadership and entire community of SEDOS for granting me the scholarship to attend this vital seminar.

- **Igniting the Fire:** The trust you placed in me has expanded my intellectual horizons and reignited the missionary fire within my heart.
- **Global Solidarity:** This scholarship provided a vital bridge allowing me to connect, share, and learn alongside 48 fellow missionaries from all corners of the world.
- **A Shared Journey:** I was deeply blessed to experience this seminar alongside my fellow Tanzanian leadership team members, Sr. Dostea and Sr. Agatha. We were also enriched by sharing this collaborative space with Sr. Emerentia, Sr. Norah, Sr. Elizabeth, and Sr. Paschalina from the Cameroon area,

bringing our collective African missionary realities to the global stage.

Core Seminar Dimensions

Our formation at Nemi focused on three dimensions that speak directly to our pastoral mission in East Africa:

- **The Theological Option for the Poor:** We reflected on how serving the marginalized is a strict Gospel imperative, not optional social work. Drawing from St. Francis of Assisi, we explored how Christ lives within the poor, calling us to uphold human dignity based on who people are, not what they possess.
- **Global Pastoral Realities:** The seminar shed light on structural social wounds that closely echo our challenges at home. We examined the harsh realities of migrant ministry (exemplified by the Sant' Egidio community), street children outreach, prison chaplaincy, and global human and organ trafficking.
- **Conversation in the Spirit:** We were trained in synodal methodologies of deep, structural listening and speaking from the heart. Led by mentors like Sr. Lieve Stragier, ICM, this framework serves as an essential tool for communal decision-making, ensuring no voice is excluded.

Moving Forward: Local Action in Tanzania

These lessons will not remain confined to my notebook. Alongside Sr. Dostea and Sr. Agatha, I am fully committed to implementing these insights practically across our local grassroots ministries:

- **Strengthening Anti-Trafficking Networks:** Grounded in the truth that makes us free, I will bring these global perspectives back to our anti-human trafficking campaigns under

the Tanzania Catholic Association of Sisters (TCAS) and Thalitha Kum Tanzania. We will expand targeted training across highly vulnerable border dioceses including Musoma, Kigoma, Mtwara, Tanga, and Same focusing on schools, mosques, churches, and universities.

- **Expanding Safe Spaces:** Our efforts will prioritize building stronger collaborations with the Ministry of Home Affairs to set up school clubs, community watch groups, and urgently needed safe houses to rescue and shelter trafficking survivors.
- **Stepping Beyond Comfort Zones:** Aligning with our **Holy Union Sisters 50-year legacy of service in Tanzania and our profound 200-year legacy of global mission in the world**, we will deepen our presence among the vulnerable. This includes expanding local urban support networks, advocating against environmental pollution threatening our villages, and strengthening community development.

I return to Tanzania with a renewed spirit, carrying the profound reminder from this seminar that “Mission is where love becomes visible.” Thank you, SEDOS, for equipping our team with the tools to continue transforming lives in our communities.

Ngwa Norah Neh, SUSC

My experience at the SEDOS Residential Seminar

The SEDOS (Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission) Residential Seminar took place at Nemi Village, Centre Ad Gentes, from Monday, 4 May 2026, to Friday, 8 May 2026. SEDOS, a forum open to Roman Catholic institutes of consecrated life, organises these annual seminars to deepen participants’ understanding of global mission. This year’s theme, “Mission as Dependence on God and Solidarity with the Marginalised,” brought together people from every corner of the world. I was honoured not only to participate but also

to share my experiences and reflections during the seminar.

Upon our arrival on Monday afternoon, Bishop Samuele Sangalli, Adjunct Secretary of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, warmly welcomed us. He spoke passionately about the Church’s need to return to its source, who is Christ. He also shared insights into his work at the Dicastery as preparations continue for the global exchange of missionaries to strengthen evangelisation.

In his presentation, he emphasised that mission lies at the heart of the Church, not merely the preservation of doctrine. According to him, the Church fulfils its mission through authentic love for the poor and for one another. He strongly highlighted the concept of the “new poor.” These include not only the materially poor, refugees, migrants, and victims of war, but also those who suffer spiritual, emotional, cultural, digital, and existential poverty despite having many opportunities in life.

He explained that the Church must develop new approaches to respond effectively to these emerging forms of poverty. Within the Church itself, he identified poverty in formation and stressed the need for missionary institutes to support younger Churches through quality formation. He further noted that the transfer of responsibility for Western churches to missionaries from other regions should be



accompanied by proper training in financial management and intercultural living. His joy, enthusiasm, and dedication to the growth of the Church deeply inspired us.

The second day focused on Franciscan spirituality. Fr. Dinh Anh Nguyen, Secretary General of the Pontifical Mission Union, reflected on the Franciscan response to the cry of the poor. He highlighted the famous cry of Saint Francis: “Love is not loved.” Christ Himself, who is love, remains unloved by many. This realisation emerged from Francis’ encounter with Christ and later with the lepers of his time.

He reminded us that mission begins with encounter. Mission is *Ad Gentes* — going beyond borders and beyond ourselves to meet others. Saint Francis recognised the face of Christ in the poor and saw them as brothers and sisters rather than objects of pity. He brought them not only material assistance but also divine consolation. Poverty, for Saint Francis, created evangelical freedom. Having nothing to rely on opened the door to creativity and complete dependence on God.

Drawing from the message of Pope Leo for the One Hundredth World Mission Day 2026, he invited us to unity in Christ and in mission. He stated, “If unity is the condition for mission, then love is its essence.” The Church today must become a living presence and not merely a structure.

The theme of the third day, “God Chooses the Poor,” explored Chapter Two of *Dilexi Te* by Pope Leo XIV. Fr. Edgardo Guzman, a Claretian Missionary Father, reflected deeply on Christ’s love for the poor and the invitation to respond to their cry. He presented Jesus as the poor Messiah who comes to humanity through the Incarnation. He explained that the preferential option for the poor does not exclude

others but instead places the poor and excluded at the centre of attention.

God chooses the poor not because they are perfect, but because His love is unconditional. His mercy reveals the depth of that love. Living among the poor therefore becomes a mutual experience of giving and receiving. While we respond to their needs and bring Christ to them, they teach us simplicity and renew our capacity to love Jesus more deeply.

The fourth day focused on “The Church for the Poor” and challenged us to move from intentions to concrete action. Four guest speakers shared their missionary experiences, convictions, and commitment to encountering Christ in the poor and in those living on the margins of society.

Sr. Anicette Lantonkpode, OLA, shared her ministry among trafficked girls and women. Many leave their homelands in search of a better future only to end up exposed to violence, drugs, and sexual exploitation. Together with her team, she reaches out to them where they are. Rather than forcing change, they accompany the women in their daily struggles. Trust gradually develops as the women witness the sisters risking their lives to support them. Through prayer, emotional support, and practical assistance, they help restore hope and dignity.

Sr. Paola Vizzotto, PIME, spoke about her long-standing prison ministry, especially among female prisoners. With remarkable compassion and commitment, she listens to them, accompanies them, restores their dignity, and advocates for them. What began as a personal conviction has grown into a powerful ministry of presence among people often forgotten by society.

Fr. Massimo Vedova, FMC, works with street children in Italy. He challenged us with a thought-provoking question: “After all the studies and degrees obtained in the Church, what next?” According to him, years of formation lose meaning if they do not lead us to encounter Christ in the poor. He stressed the importance of offering hope and standing beside those living on the margins. Through his



ministry, he has become a father figure to many children living on the streets.

Fr. Vincent Anes, CMF, shared his missionary work among indigenous communities in India. Although cultural traditions sometimes limit the public expression of Christian faith, the people's love for Jesus remains profound. Without opposing their culture or focusing solely on formal baptisms, he simply introduced people to Christ. Many came to know, love, and witness to Jesus in their own context.

The seminar provided a valuable opportunity to revisit familiar ideas while discovering new and meaningful ways of responding to the needs of the Church today. One of the most important lessons I learned was a deeper understanding of poverty in the modern Church. Poverty is no longer limited to material deprivation or marginalisation. Even those who appear materially comfortable may experience profound forms of poverty.

I realised that the Church has always been, and continues to be, a poor Church. In one way or another, we are all poor and in need of one another. Since there is no salvation without our neighbour, our relationship with others becomes central to Christian life and mission.

Those who lack material necessities need food, shelter, and clothing, while those with material wealth may suffer emotional, spiritual, or relational poverty. Our mission therefore begins when we move beyond ourselves, overcome selfishness, and respond to the needs of others. The Church continues to grow as a global family, reaching out to her members and

rediscovering her true mission: bringing Christ to His people.

As someone serving in a country marked by war and political instability, this seminar has strengthened my commitment to the many people I encounter daily: the hungry, the traumatised, those separated from their families, the disappointed, and young people struggling to find their place in society and in school communities. I feel called to move beyond fear, inadequacy, and insecurity in order to reach out more generously to those around me. Today, it is authentic presence, more than structures, that builds the Church.

God is present wherever human suffering is hidden. For this reason, I recognise the importance of collaboration and networking with others in order to reach a greater number of God's beloved poor.

Throughout these days together, I was reminded that the visions, miracles, and testimonies of faith in the Church and in our personal lives often remain hidden in memory. We therefore need moments of silence and reflection to revisit the past and recognize God actively at work in our lives and in His Church.

Participating in the SEDOS Residential Seminar 2026 was a truly transformative experience. I return renewed, inspired, and ready to respond more fully to the needs of the Church revealed in the cry of the poor and those living on the margins. Ultimately, mission does not belong to us; it belongs to God. He calls us, guides us, and remains at the centre of every mission. Through Christ, we encounter and serve His people.

I sincerely thank SEDOS for making this enriching experience possible.

I conclude by asking God to abundantly bless the entire SEDOS team for their wisdom, dedication, and generosity in organising this seminar. May God continue to reward your efforts. I encourage everyone who has the opportunity to participate in future SEDOS seminars not to miss this valuable experience of deepening their understanding of the Church's global mission and their active role within it.



Thomas Aquino N. Wele, SVD

“Walking with the Marginalized Mission in the Spirit of St. Francis”

Introduction

The Residential Seminar organized by SEDOS at Centro Ad Gentes from 4–8 May 2026 provided a meaningful opportunity for prayer, dialogue, theological reflection, and missionary encounter. As a student and participant, I consider this seminar a grace-filled experience that enabled me to engage deeply in the contemporary mission of the Church through discussion, sharing, and communal discernment. The theme, “Mission as Dependence on God and Solidarity with the Marginalized,” offered profound insights into the nature of Christian mission in today’s world and invited all participants to reflect critically on the Church’s prophetic vocation among the poor and excluded.

Throughout the seminar, the various presentations and testimonies of missionaries, religious sisters, and pastoral workers revealed the many dimensions of missionary discipleship grounded in faith, compassion, and service. The encounter with participants from different congregations and apostolic ministries became for me a journey of listening and learning. It opened new perspectives on the meaning of mission, particularly through concrete experiences among prisoners, street children,

migrants, victims of prostitution, and communities affected by injustice and social exclusion. These testimonies demonstrated that mission is not merely an activity of the Church but a participation in God’s loving presence among those who suffer at the margins of society.

The Church continually reminds Christians that closeness to the poor is not simply an expression of humanitarian concern but an essential dimension of encountering Christ Himself. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te*, Pope Leo XIV emphasizes that love for the poor is a privileged place of encounter with the Lord of history, who continues to speak through them (cf. *Dilexi te*, no. 5). This teaching became a source of personal reflection and spiritual challenge during the seminar. It encouraged me, as a religious missionary, to renew my commitment to walk humbly with the poor and marginalized, to listen attentively to their realities, and to proclaim the joy of the Gospel through presence, solidarity, and compassionate service.

The central theme of the seminar also led me to reflect more deeply on the words of “mission” and “marginalized” in the light of the spirituality and charism of St. Francis of Assisi, whose life was profoundly rooted in humility, poverty, and fraternity with the least. The witness shared during the seminar strongly resonated with the Franciscan understanding of mission as a journey of communion with the poor. In a special way, the fourth day of the seminar highlighted inspiring testimonies from priests and religious sisters who have dedicated their lives to ministries among prisoners, migrants, vulnerable women, street children, and victims of social injustice. Their witness revealed that the reality of poverty is not peripheral to the Christian faith but lies at its very heart.



This vision was further illuminated by the reflection of Fr. Dinh Anh Nhue Nguyen, who explained how Francis of Assisi transformed his privileged and wealthy upbringing into radical solidarity with the poor. St. Francis did not regard the poor merely as recipients of charity, but as brothers and sisters and living images of Christ. His spirituality teaches that authentic service to the poor must arise from genuine love, humility, and detachment from self-interest. To encounter the poor, therefore, is to encounter Christ crucified and to rediscover the Gospel in its simplicity and truth.

Inspired by the rich experiences and reflections of these five days, I have chosen to write this paper under the title “Walking with the Marginalized: Mission in the Spirit of St. Francis.” This reflection seeks to explore the theological and pastoral implications of Christian mission among the poor and excluded. In particular, the paper will address three fundamental questions. First, what does “walking with the marginalized” teach us about dependence on God and authentic Christian discipleship? Second, how does the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi inspire the Church’s mission among the marginalized today? Third, in what ways can the Church truly become a “Church for the poor”? These questions emerge from the insights shared by the speakers, the group discussions, moments of prayer, and the personal encounters experienced throughout the seminar. Through this reflection, I hope to deepen an understanding of mission as a call to solidarity, humility, and faithful witness in communion with the poor, following the example of Christ and the spirit of St. Francis.

Walking with the Marginalized: Dependence on God and Authentic Christian Discipleship

On the first day of the seminar, Most Rev. Samuele Sangalli began his keynote address with the words from the Prologue of the Gospel of John: “All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be” (Jn 1:3). Reflecting on this passage, Sangalli explained that from the earliest centuries of Christianity, the Church, especially through the Fathers of the Council of Nicaea (325 AD), affirmed the Good News that God Himself, in the person of the Son, entered human history and became

united in solidarity with every human condition. Through participation in the life and mysteries of the Church, humanity is invited to share in the divine life itself.¹

Grounded in Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church Fathers, Christians are called to participate in and continue the mission of Jesus Christ. The mission of the Church is therefore not autonomous or self-generated; rather, it depends entirely on God. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “The mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit is brought to completion in the Church, which is the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.”² The Church exists as the sacramental continuation of Christ’s salvific presence in the world. She is entrusted with proclaiming the words of Christ and mediating the saving grace of His death and resurrection so that people of every age may encounter salvation.

This understanding reminds Christians that the Church’s mission is fundamentally participatory: believers share in Christ’s own mission of service, compassion, and reconciliation. In the words of St. Paul, the Church is called to “have the same attitude that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). Such an attitude demands that Christians move beyond comfort and security toward the existential peripheries of society, accompanying the poor and marginalized just as Christ Himself did.

The seminar participants repeatedly emphasized that walking with the poor and marginalized is not merely an act of charity directed toward passive recipients. Rather, this encounter becomes a privileged place of learning and conversion for the Church herself. The poor are not only receivers of the Church’s mission; they are also bearers of the Gospel and teachers of authentic discipleship. Through listening to their experiences, struggles, faith, and resilience, the Church comes to a deeper understanding of the demands of the Gospel. In this way, accompaniment of the marginalized reveals the Church’s dependence on God, since true

¹Cf. St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54: “For the Son of God became man so that we might become God.” See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), no. 460.

²*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 737.

mission cannot be carried out through human strength alone but requires humility, openness, and continual conversion.

In this context, Archbishop Samuele Sangalli strongly emphasized the urgent need for proper formation within the Church. He observed that the diminishing presence of Western missionaries has left many seminaries and religious institutes struggling to ensure qualified formation, especially for consecrated persons who embody the Church's merciful closeness to the poor. Their vocation becomes a living echo of God's love for those on the margins of society. This concern resonates with the words of St. Paul to the Galatians: "My little children, for whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19). Christian formation, therefore, is not merely academic or institutional; it is fundamentally Christocentric. Seminarians, religious, and all missionary disciples are called to be conformed to Christ, who came "not to be served but to serve" (Mk 10:45).

This challenge invites the Church to renew seriously her commitment to missionary formation today. Those responsible for seminaries and formation houses are entrusted not simply with preparing future ministers intellectually, but with shaping disciples who embody the compassion, humility, and sacrificial love of Christ. Authentic missionary discipleship demands men and women capable of accompanying the poor with integrity, solidarity, and spiritual maturity.

The seminar also highlighted the diverse contexts in which the Church carries out her evangelizing mission. Many participants shared experiences of mission through schools, hospitals, social outreach programs, and other apostolic works. Such ministries seek to manifest the image of a servant Church with a preferential option for the poor.³ At the same time, participants recognized the emergence of new forms of poverty and marginalization in contemporary society—social exclusion,

migration, loneliness, unemployment, and spiritual emptiness—which challenge the Church to respond creatively and prophetically. For this reason, authentic Christian discipleship requires greater cooperation, deeper formation, and renewed missionary zeal. In his welcoming address, Fr. Alain Mayama, CSSp, identified three essential attitudes necessary for missionaries today: docility, reliability, and fidelity.

First, docility refers to humility before God. Since mission belongs ultimately to God, missionaries are called to recognize their dependence on divine grace rather than relying solely on personal abilities. Fr. Mayama stressed the importance of prayer, *Lectio Divina*, and the Eucharist as indispensable foundations for missionary life. Walking with the marginalized teaches missionaries that they themselves are spiritually poor and dependent upon God's sustaining grace.

Second, reliability and credibility concern the integrity and consistency of the missionary witness. Missionaries are called to reveal the compassionate and loving face of Christ through concrete actions. Service to the poor cannot be reduced to words or programs alone; it requires authentic witness. Credibility emerges when missionaries embody the Gospel values they proclaim.

Third, fidelity refers to the enduring commitment to God's mission. Service to the poor is not optional but belongs to the very heart of the Church's identity and vocation. Fidelity means continually saying "yes" to Christ's call, even amid difficulties and uncertainties. Such perseverance becomes possible only through a deep and abiding relationship with Christ Himself.

Ultimately, the witness of missionaries who dedicate themselves to the poor and marginalized continues to reveal the authentic face of Jesus Christ and the true nature of the Church. Despite the many challenges confronting the Church today, there remains hope that through ongoing formation, spiritual renewal, and faithful accompaniment of the marginalized, the Church will continue to

³Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 198: "The Church has made an option for the poor which is understood as a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity."

embody Christ's mission in the world. Formation and education for missionaries, seminarians, and religious men and women must therefore be given renewed attention so that future disciples may offer outstanding service rooted in communion with God and expressed through loving service to the poor.

The Spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi and the Church's Mission among the Marginalized Today

On the second day of the seminar, Fr. Dinh Anh Nhue Nguyen, OFMConv, delivered a presentation entitled "The Franciscan Response to the Cry of the New Poor." In his talk, he reflected on the life and missionary vocation of St. Francis of Assisi as a model for the Church's mission among the poor and marginalized in the contemporary world. He emphasized that Francis transformed his life from that of a wealthy merchant's son into a radical witness of evangelical poverty, humility, and service. Following his profound spiritual conversion, Francis publicly renounced his father's wealth and social status in 1206 by stripping himself in the public square, symbolically embracing what he called "Lady Poverty."⁴ This decisive act marked the beginning of a life wholly centered on the imitation of Christ.

The spirituality of St. Francis was rooted in a missionary approach characterized by humility, peaceful presence, fraternity, and solidarity with the poor. Rather than seeking power or privilege, Francis instructed his followers to live among the poor, work with their hands for daily sustenance, and proclaim the Gospel primarily through the witness of their lives. Preaching, for Francis, was inseparable from concrete acts of love and service. His spirituality reflected a deep conviction that every human person possesses inherent dignity as a child of God. Moreover, his love for creation, beautifully expressed in the *Canticum of the Sun*, revealed his belief in the interconnectedness of all creation as gifts from God and signs of universal fraternity.⁵

Fr. Nguyen further explained that Franciscan poverty is not merely material deprivation but a spiritual imitation of Christ's humility and self-emptying (*kenosis*). Poverty, humility, and *kenosis* are inseparable dimensions of the Christian vocation because they mirror the mystery of the Incarnation, in which God humbled Himself in becoming human.⁶ In this perspective, the practice of poverty becomes an expression of love for God and neighbor. It involves willingly renouncing privileges and attachments to become more available to others, especially the poor and forgotten. Thus, the witness of St. Francis challenges Christians today to embrace solidarity with those who suffer injustice, discrimination, and marginalization.

The missionary example of St. Francis continues to inspire the Church's commitment to the poor in the modern world. His life demonstrates that authentic evangelization requires closeness to those who suffer and active participation in their struggles for justice, peace, and human dignity. In this regard, Pope Francis, in his Message for World Mission Day 2025, called the faithful to walk in the footsteps of Christ and become "signs and messengers of hope" in every circumstance of life.⁷ All the baptized, as missionary disciples, are called to make the hope of Christ visible in every corner of the world through lives of charity, compassion, and service.

A significant aspect of Fr. Nguyen's reflection was the centrality of the Eucharist in missionary spirituality. He stressed that the Eucharist is the source of inspiration and strength for Christian mission because it unites missionaries with Christ Himself. The mission of the Church is not merely a human undertaking but participation in the mission of Jesus Christ. Communion with the Lord through the Eucharist, prayer, and contemplation gives missionaries the courage and credibility to proclaim the Gospel authentically. St. Francis himself recognized in the Eucharist the virtues

⁴St. Bonaventure, *Legenda Maior of St. Francis*, II, 4.

⁵St. Francis of Assisi, *Canticum of the Creatures* (*Canticum of the Sun*).

⁶See Phil. 2:5–11 on Christ's *kenosis* and humility. Cf. *History of Religious Life St. Francis of Assisi and the Witness to Evangelical Poverty* - Part 1 by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

⁷Pope Francis, *Message for World Mission Day 2025*.

of Christ's humility, obedience, simplicity, and poverty. As a contemplative deeply transformed by his encounter with Christ in the Eucharist, Francis became capable of proclaiming the Gospel with conviction and joy. Likewise, Pope Leo XIV, in his Message for World Mission Day 2026, emphasized that being "one in Christ" requires Christians to keep their gaze fixed on the Lord so that Christ becomes the center of all relationships, words, and actions.⁸

The Church today remains aware of the many challenges faced by the poor and marginalized. Nevertheless, she continues her mission as a sign and sacrament of unity among peoples through dialogue, reconciliation, solidarity, and compassionate service. Faced with the "cry of the poor," Christians are called not only to help in offering assistance but also to become "artisans of hope" who help restore dignity to wounded humanity. Pope Francis repeatedly emphasized that missionary disciples must respond creatively and courageously to the sufferings of the world by embodying the hope of the Gospel. Similarly, Pope Leo XIV affirmed that the entire Church shares responsibility for evangelization through prayer, witness of life, and active participation in missionary work.

In the final part of his presentation, Fr. Nguyen addressed the emergence of a "new missionary age" shaped by social communication and digital media. In the contemporary world, social media has become an important avenue for evangelization and human outreach. The Church is therefore challenged to proclaim Christ not only through traditional missionary activities but also through responsible and meaningful engagement in digital spaces. Modern means of communication can become instruments for spreading the Gospel, defending human dignity, and reaching those who seek meaning, hope, and spiritual guidance. As many participants in the seminar observed, the Church must increasingly enter this new missionary frontier to accompany people in today's rapidly changing society.

In conclusion, the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi continues to inspire the Church's mission among the marginalized by calling Christians to live the Gospel through humility, solidarity, and compassionate service. To follow Christ authentically requires proximity to the poor and attentiveness to their cries. St. Francis embodied this radical availability through concrete acts of friendship, service, and proclamation of the Gospel. He used his hands, feet, and voice to communicate God's love and peace to others. In the present age, Christians are likewise called to use not only personal witness but also modern means of social communication to proclaim the Gospel and invite others to conversion, reconciliation, and love. Through such witness, the Church continues the Franciscan mission of bringing hope, peace, and human dignity to a wounded world.

A Church for the Poor: Missionary Witnessing and Christian Accompaniment

On the fourth day of our seminar, we reflected on *Dilexi te* through the theme, "A Church for the Poor." For me, the session became another meaningful and inspiring journey of theological reflection and missionary awareness. The seminar featured four panelists engaged in different apostolic ministries and missionary contexts. Listening to their experiences was both challenging and enriching, especially in seeing how they imitate Jesus Christ in caring for the poor, the marginalized, and the abandoned. I deeply admire their dedication and commitment in proclaiming the joy of the Gospel and in bringing people closer to the Lord Jesus Christ through concrete acts of charity and accompaniment.

The first speaker was Sr. Anicette Lantonkpode, OLA, who ministers to migrants and women involved in prostitution. She shared the many difficulties she encounters in accompanying these women and helping them rediscover their dignity and purpose in life. There are moments, she explained, when she needs to meet them even late at night to respond to their situations personally. Her ministry also exposes her to the dangers connected with human trafficking and organized crime. Nevertheless, she emphasized the importance of collaboration with parishes and dioceses in organizing programs that

⁸Pope Leo XIV, *Message for World Mission Day 2026*.

include spiritual formation, skills training, and pastoral care for these women. Her testimony reveals that a Church for the poor is a Church of accompaniment, healing, and compassionate guidance. It reflects Pope Francis' vision of a Church that "goes forth" to the peripheries of society to restore human dignity and hope.⁹

The second speaker was Fr. Vincent Anes, CMF, who is engaged in the ministry of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) in India. The widespread poverty in his context has inspired him to dedicate his mission to orphans and street children. In sharing his experiences, he highlighted the deep emotional and spiritual wounds suffered by children who grow up without parental care and security. Many of these children question the presence of God amid their loneliness and suffering. Their cries become the cries of Christ Himself, inviting the Church to become more attentive, compassionate, and creative in responding to their needs. Fr. Vincent stressed the importance of education, moral formation, and creating a safe and nurturing environment for these children. In this context, a Church for the poor becomes a Church of parental care, educational support, and hope for the future.¹⁰

The third speaker was Sr. Paola Vizzoto, PIME, who ministers to prisoners. I was deeply moved by her witness because, despite being in her eighties, she continues to serve with missionary zeal and compassion. She reminded us that Christians are not called to judge prisoners but to visit and accompany them with mercy and understanding. Her ministry emphasizes the healing power of presence, listening, and respect for human dignity. She explained that missionaries are called to communicate love and hope even in places marked by suffering, guilt, and rejection. In this situation, a Church for the poor is a Church of spiritual accompaniment, reconciliation, and restorative justice.¹¹

The fourth speaker was Fr. Massimo Vedova, FMC, who works with street children in Italy.

He presented the growing socio-economic challenges in Europe, particularly the reality of children abandoned by both families and society. According to him, the mission is not only to provide food and shelter but also to educate children morally and spiritually so that they may discern what is good and right. He emphasized the need for the Church to collaborate with governments and social institutions in addressing the increasing number of vulnerable children on the streets. Furthermore, he challenged Christians to leave their comfort zones, encounter these children personally, and dedicate time to listening, teaching, and guiding them toward a better future. Here, a Church for the poor is understood as a Church that provides protection, education, psychological support, and spiritual care.

The testimonies and experiences shared during the session clearly reveal the missionary nature of the Church. Religious sisters, priests, and missionaries work within complex social realities while remaining faithful to the Gospel message. Their ministries embody witnessing to Christ, promoting the values of the Kingdom of God, defending human dignity, fostering dialogue, and sharing the experience of God's love with others. Through these apostolic works, the Church continues her mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ and bringing people closer to Him.

We truly appreciate the countless religious sisters, brothers, and priests who dedicate their lives to missionary service amidst the many struggles and problems of society. Their witness reflects a radical commitment to the evangelical counsels, a spirit of generosity, and a profound availability for mission. They continue to make an immense contribution to the Church's evangelizing mission by embodying what it truly means to become a Church for the poor.

At the same time, the seminar reminded us that every Christian has a responsibility to respond to social problems and human suffering. The mission of the Church is not limited to ordained ministers or religious missionaries alone but belongs to the entire People of God. In all apostolic activities, Christ must remain at the center so that those whom we serve may encounter Him and experience salvation. This

⁹Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), nos. 20–24.

¹⁰Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), nos. 238–245.

¹¹Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), nos. 263–270.

recalls the missionary command of Jesus to His disciples: “You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

I realize that there can be no authentic mission without credible witnessing. Pope Paul VI, in his *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi*, described witnessing as “the test of truth” and “the touchstone of evangelization.”¹² A Church for the poor therefore calls both individuals and communities to become Christ-like not only in words but also in actions. The Church is called to stand beside the poor and marginalized who struggle against conditions that keep them excluded from the fullness of life. Consequently, solidarity with the poor, participation in their struggle for justice, educational and financial assistance, and the awakening of social conscience are all concrete expressions of the integral salvation offered by God through Jesus Christ.¹³

Ultimately, becoming a Church for the poor means becoming a Church that listens, accompanies, heals, educates, and serves with humility and compassion. The witness of these missionaries reminds us that evangelization is inseparable from charity, justice, and human dignity. In encountering the poor, the Church encounters Christ Himself, who continues to identify with “the least of these” (Mt 25:40). Therefore, the mission of the Church remains a living witness of God’s love revealed in Jesus Christ for all humanity.

Your conclusion already has a strong message and clear missionary spirit. I polished and reorganized it to make it more academic, coherent, and fitting as the final part of a paper while preserving your original ideas and content.

Conclusion

The five-day Residential Seminar on Mission was both intensive and enriching. It provided a meaningful opportunity for listening, discussion, and the sharing of valuable insights and perspectives on mission. More importantly, it became a wonderful encounter among people who have committed themselves to missionary

work, especially in serving the poor and marginalized, following the missionary example of Jesus Christ who came “not to be served but to serve.”

This seminar strengthened our awareness that the Church today is called to stand with the poor because the Church herself is poor and for the poor. In this spirit, we are inspired by the life and mission of St. Francis of Assisi, who dedicated himself wholeheartedly to the service of the poor. As one Church, we renew our commitment to work together in unity and communion, promoting the Gospel and defending human dignity through all our missionary activities, especially in caring for those who are most in need.

Furthermore, the seminar emphasized the importance of missionary formation and ongoing formation in preparing faithful and effective workers for the mission. Missionary formation should not remain merely theoretical or academic; rather, it must also include exposure to real missionary experiences, direct encounters with the poor, and active participation in evangelization. Mission calls every missionary to move beyond comfort zones and to encounter Christ in the lives of the poor and marginalized.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the organizers, SEDOS, for accepting my scholarship application and for giving me the opportunity to participate in this Residential Seminar. The experience has been both inspiring and formative for my personal and missionary life.

Finally, mission is inseparable from the missionary. The missionary must become a living witness of the mission he proclaims. Just as Jesus Christ identified Himself completely with His mission, so too every missionary is called to embody the Gospel through word, witness, and service. When the missionary is continually renewed by Jesus Christ and faithfully lives out the mission, then the mission itself gains credibility and becomes a true sign of God’s presence in the world.

¹²Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), no. 41.

¹³Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), no. 1.

EVALUATION AND REPORT

Seminar Evaluation

1. *Quelles idées emportez-vous avec vous lors de ce Séminaire ?*

Dieu n'est pas resté indifférent à nos misères depuis la Création, il est descendu et continue à descendre vers l'humanité blessée et de manière préférencielle vers les pauvres qui sont sacrement par excellence de sa présence. Par conséquence, notre mission aujourd'hui ne peut passer outre les visages de la pauvreté.

Dieu choisit les pauvres. Il ne les abandonne pas. Ne pas ignorer le pauvre.

Le séminaire nous a rappelé notre mission avec l'option écclesiale pour les pauvres. La collaboration et le travail en réseau pour la même mission; la fideleté à la mission qui nous a été confiée. Etre évangéliste avec le pauvre et pour le pauvre. Nous sommes appelés à discerner les nouvelles formes de la pauvreté et nous y engager.

nos charismes peuvent s'ouvrir davantage à d'autres appels pour s'enrichir des dons et grâces de Dieu.

Appels à évaluer et discerner nos insertions ministérielles - la formation des membres de nos congregations.

2. *Avez-vous trouvé des informations précieuses pour votre ministère ?*

La mission auprès de pauvres demande de nous une relation profonde (dans la prière) avec Jésus, une proximité réelle (toucher la réalité)

Cette mission demande de *la passion*, de l'humilité, savoir nous laisser évangélisés, transformés. Par discernement de nouvelles pauvretés, travailler en synergie.

La spiritualité franciscaine est une réponse concrète à la mission.

Avoir le souci de former et accompagner des personnes consacrées à l'oeuvre.

Les témoignages nous ont ouvert les horizons; être la voix des sans voix à travers les réseaux sociaux par la technologie.

Savoir utiliser les médias pour évangéliser.

Oui, j'ai trouvé des informations très intéressantes: la spiritualité franciscaine est une réponse concrète de la présence de Dieu – le PMU encourage la formation et l'accompagnement des personnes consacrées à l'oeuvre de Dieu.

3. *Avez-vous des suggestions pour améliorer le séminaire ?*

L'unique suggestion pour les travaux de réflexion, ou la matière à donner (textes, considérer les langues qui sont parlées par les participants (Exemple: le guide de *Lectio Divina* et autres: que chaque groupe puisse l'avoir dans sa langue de travail).

Que les groupes de travail ne soient pas dans des lieux de passage pour une meilleure concentration.

Pour les groupes, si possible ne pas mettre deux soeurs de la même congregation dans le même groupe. – être flexible par rapport aux intervenants. – le temps de petit groupe – le thème était bien.

Merci pour l'organisation, nous avons assez de temps pour les partages qui nous ont permis de nous écouter et nous enrichir mutuellement.

Seminar Evaluation by Spanish Groups

1. *¿Qué ideas te llevas de este seminario?*

Me llevo mis baterías cargadas de amor a Dios y a la misión. Mi doy cuenta que la cercanía de Dios revitaliza. La convivencia que hemos tenido me hace beber de nuestro propio pozo. Crecemos como iglesia en nuestra diversidad. Más que ideas me llevo dos experiencias muy importantes:

Experiencia espiritual que fortalece mi dependencia de Dios Fuente y origen de la misión,

Me recargado más energía misionera que me impulsa a renovar mi pasión por Cristo – mi pasión por la misión – mi pasión por el pueblo de Dios.

Continuar descubriendo que Dios me sigue llamado al servicio de los vulnerables de los más pobres con en medio de la mision que me ho pedido. Difusion del motodo sinodal de servicio.

Las experiencia de cada una de los participantes de este encuentro.

Más que ideas, me llevo las experiencia del compartir con hermanas y hermanos de diferentes culturas que estamos remando unidas al Señor y que dependemos de su amor.

2. ¿Encontró algunas ideas valiosas para su ministerio?

Una cercanía más autentica con los pobres. Una dependencia muy profunda de Dios que me lleva a un compromiso más autentico con la mision.

Muchisimas, reforzar mi opción por los pobres para q'ellos unidos puedan salir adel ante y tratar de ver la vida desde su óptica. Difundir el método sinodal, trabajar en redes. El compatir en la confianza desde el corazón. Seguir el camino propuesto por el Papa Francesco de una Iglesia pobre en salida.

Si, me ha permitido reportar la opción que he hecha o nivel personal y congregacional, esto ha sido influenciado a tienes vér de la presencia de Dios.

Si, el de caminar con los más necesitados y usar el método que el P. Vicent nos a compartido: a) Jerusalén a Emaús, b) Jesusalén a Jerico c) Jerusalén a Damasco.

3 ¿Tiene alguna sugerencia para mejorar el seminario?

No tengo sugerencias sino solo agradecimiento por este seminario tan rico y concreto.

Me encantaron las liturgias, sobre todo que los sacerdotes se sentiran con el pueblo, es la vez la misa no nos separó.

Pedirles a todos los ponentes que presenten un buen *power point*. Probar el sonido de los *power point* antes de presentarlos, porque fue una lástima que no se pudieron traducir las intervenciones de los pobres.

Presentar al inicio del Seminario Residencial un pequeño video (3 minutos) que explique el origen y objetivos de SEDOS porque al final de seminario muchos de los participantes no saben

que es SEDOS y que significan las siglas: SEDOS.

El día cultural se realce en un segundo día, en que se permitira una mayor interacción.

Yo conosco bien a SEDOS y creo que es necesario e importante que se nos presente porque hoy hermanas y hermanos de otros paises que sólo han venida a participar al Seminario.

Seminar Evaluation by English Groups

1. What ideas are you taking with you from this Seminar?

Looking positively at the poor. Being ready to prepare Sisters for mission. Open the door to new ministries in our community.

God's grace is enough for the mission – remember to put God at the centre.

I am taking with me the importance of cooperation, listening to the needs of people, and strengthening our mission of service to the poor and vulnerable.

Who are the new poor of our time. We are all missionaries; we shall be credible witnesses. Presence, listening, walking with the poor and accompanying them is essential and come before action.

The poor are the face of God, a place of my mission and salvation of the world. Mission is dependent on God, so I commit to strengthen my spirituality, anchoring my life and ministry on the Source who is God in order to proclaim the Gospel. Alone I am weak; to be effective I have to network, discern and respond together.

The poor are not objects of charity. They need respectful listening and connecting, treating with dignity. Need to be sensitive and perceive the new forms of poverty arising around us, and connect with that and share. Helping the poor is not only charity, but also helps us to receive from them and grow in mutual relationship.

With dependence on God and in solidarity with one another mission is very possible; have success. Embrace the unknown face of God through the culture of encounter. The poor are our spiritual teachers, evangelizers.

New Poor (identifying, naming).

Knowledge that the poor are everywhere in the world, and issues of human trafficking need networking, cooperation to reach a positive result. We should continue to be a Risk-Taker. Trust in God.

Love is the heart of Mission. Contemplation of Love and union with Love enable us to see Jesus' presence in others, especially the poor. In them, we see the unknown face of God. This calls us to communion with them.

A missionary is first called to trust in God's providence and guidance. Listening is an essential part of mission today. The Poor are not only recipients of mission, but also teachers who reveal God's presence. Mission today also calls for co-operation and intercultural openness among missionaries and local communities.

The Poor are not objects of charity, but the Living Presence of Christ. As a disciple of Christ Poverty is a choice I must make. Choice of new Poor needs Discernment, Networking, Spirituality, Sacrifice.

The idea of bringing Christ to the new Poor. We are all poor and all have something to offer. Dare, go out, break down the barriers and reach out.

Our Church has needs; love and liberation. People hunger for physical, spiritual, psychological food. New form of poverty is emerging. We participate in God's mission of loving and liberating God's people. To be effective, mission formation and education are needed.

Our responsibility to the poor. God chooses the poor to give them human dignity. We are called to build a just, egalitarian society.

Global and local way of influencing the world. The strength we have as religious for a cooperative effort for a better world.

2. Did you find some valuable insights for your ministry?

I got much input that will help me grow in my religious life.

Create new mission for the poor. I feel proud of being Catholic and that the Catholic mission deals with those in need.

To be more passionate about what I do. To be sensitive to the new needs around me...

Yes, I learned the importance of supporting our sisters who are directly involved in the ministry to the poor and promoting team-work on mission as well as strengthening communication within communities.

I can't fix every problem or change the situation of the poor, but I can be there for them and that makes a difference.

Networking and partnership are the way to the future in ministry. Service to the poor is mutually beneficial. Dare and trust, take up the risk and persevere because love is greater; God's grace is sufficient. Discernment is very necessary: observe, discern and act — in order to respond appropriately to the needs of the poor.

Yes: *option for poor*, needs to make a shift as option to receive from the poor. The whole movement towards the poor to be evolved from the deeper experience of Divine Love and intimacy, as well as from the desire to reflect the same to others.

Yes. Pay more attention to the New Poor in my ministry. Practice *Conversation in the Spirit*. Incarnate Christ concretely to the poor. Share with passion and joy what I experience in my ministry.

Courage to dare to reach out. Deeper discernment on new ministries.

Working in co-operation, networking with others. Support the members who are in the field of helping the poor and vulnerable.

The importance of supporting our sisters who are in direct ministry to the poor. If we truly

trust and depend on God, we will be ready to take more risks to be in solidarity with the poor.

Co-operation with others offers more opportunities.

Yes, very much. The Seminar reminds one that mission work should always protect human dignity, promote compassion and accompaniment. I also learnt that for mission to be effective today, it requires both spiritual depth and practical solidarity with people who

suffer. The sharing of experiences enriched my perspective and encouraged me to approach the ministry with sensitivity and openness.

As a Leader, I shall put on the lens to see Christ in my sisters as the New Poor in their vulnerability. I feel a strong desire to encourage my sisters to apply the *Dilexi te* in their different ministries. Organise formative sessions for my sisters on *Dilexi te*. Encourage Sisters to apply their new inspirations the better to serve the mission of the Congregation.

Yes. At the heart of ministry is the proclamation of the Kingdom. Networking is very important. Need to cooperate and network with others – who share the vision. Discern the signs of the times for ministry.

It is important to break down the boundaries; do away with fear; stand steadfast in the Lord to respond appropriately to the needs of our time.

Yes, I am called to be with the new poor. My ministry to centre around prayer – community support.

Yes, getting to know committed men and women in different parts of the world. Maintenance v. mission needs to be carefully handled as prophets of today.

3. Do you have any suggestions for improvement of the Seminar?

Please add more days. May this Seminar be accessible on-line for those who are far away. Consecrated people as agents of peace in our world. Concrete actions.

The Seminar was very enriching. More time for group sharing and practical examples from different ministries – (from different countries and practical workshops that could help participants apply the ideas in their daily ministry) – would make it better.

The testimonies on Thursday were very interesting, inspiring and touched me deeply. But I felt that we didn't have enough time to reflect and ask questions. I really wish we had had more time for that. Our small group met in the hallway. Amid the intense sharing, there was a lot of noise with people walking around, which was distracting.

Thank you for all your work and efforts! It was a great joy for me to be there. I learned a lot and gained a lot during these past few days.

Everything was quite well organized and executed: I liked that there was only one talk per day and more time for one-to-one sharing, reflection and time in the groups. Continue to deepen our experience and deepening skills in the method of *Conversations in the Spirit* as well as *Lectio Divina*.

The theme and Presenters were excellent/relevant. I would suggest, if possible, more testimonies like those we had and also for example have a poor person walk us through a typical day in his/her life. This will be powerful. Testimonies are ever inspiring! What can we do to attract more participants?

Translation arrangements and all the facilities were very good. Material could be circulated after the talks.

Yes. Could the Speakers at the Conferences speak slower? Make copies of the talks available before the Speaker leaves the Hall.

Peace building for empowering the Poor. Enabling the Poor to stand and walk.

While it is good to hear the theological underpinning of SEDOS' themes, the powerful witness of others, such as those on our panel, inspired our passion and desire. More time for the latter would be appreciated.

For the NEMI Dining-room, could they provide sharp knives for the fruit?

I am grateful to the organizers, especially SEDOS, for planning this meaningful Seminar. I thank the Speakers and facilitators, and also all the participants for creating a welcoming and enriching atmosphere. The Seminar was spiritually and pastorally inspiring, and it strengthened my understanding of mission rooted in dependence on God and solidarity with the Poor.

Rooms could be heated when we come in the Spring. Thanks for everything. It was very enriching.

I suggest two Sessions per day for more insight. When it is cold, the house should be heated at least for those who are not used to the cold.

Seminar was good. The theme and topics were appropriate according to the Church's need

today. Accommodation and food were good. I do not have any particular suggestion.

In a ministry/mission not self-sufficiency but self-sacrifice is asked for: going beyond, crossing boundaries of likes and dislikes, change of mind-set. Ultimately a paradigm shifts in our way of doing and being on mission.

This has been an inspiring time. Everything went well. Thanks.

I liked the methodology, socialization, place, silence, ... etc.

As religious we could still be motivated to live something differently. We are the prophetic force of the Church. Both personal, inner change and passion could be enhanced for mission with some progressive thinkers of today. Thank you very much.

Mission as Dependence on God and Solidarity with the Marginalized

A Report on the 2026 SEDOS Residential Seminar

From May 4th to May 8th, 2026, the Centro Ad Gentes in Nemi, Italy, hosted a highly acclaimed five-day Residential Seminar organized by SEDOS. Centered on the theme, “Mission as Dependence on God and Solidarity with the Marginalized,” the event drew 50 participants representing 22 missionary congregations globally. Throughout the week, presentations and workshops converged on a profound paradigm shift: moving away from treating the poor as passive recipients of charity toward embracing them as protagonists, teachers, and the very face of God. True mission demands community brotherhood, spiritual vulnerability, and a Spirit-driven presence that walks alongside those on the margins to restore shared human dignity.

The seminar opened by reframing missiology from humanly engineered projects to divine participation. In his Welcome Address, SEDOS President Fr. Alain Mayama, CSSp, introduced *hospitālitas*—a mutual, transformative welcome where the missionary becomes simultaneously guest and host. By embracing docility, reliability, and fidelity, missionaries are challenged to transcend paternalistic assistance in favor of a shared life with the vulnerable, ensuring evangelization remains inseparable from social justice and Trinitarian love.

Archbishop Samuele Sangalli, Adjunct Secretary of the Dicastery for Evangelization, delivered the Keynote Address, titled “Missione come Dipendenza da Dio e Solidarietà con gli

Emarginati.” Grounding his reflection in Nicene theology and Pope Leo XIV’s Encyclical *Dilexite*, he explored mission as a reflection of God’s own *kenosis* (self-emptying). From this framework, Archbishop Sangalli outlined three urgent priorities: strengthening seminaries in resource-poor young Churches through quality formation, moving toward financial self-sustainability via economic stewardship, and providing psycho-spiritual support to build conflict resilience for pastoral workers enduring trauma in war-torn regions.

To enact this shift, speakers highlighted tools and charisms necessary to re-center missionary identity. Sr. Lieve Stragier, ICM, provided a roadmap for communal governance through “Conversation in the Spirit.” This prayerful discernment methodology utilizes successive rounds of personal reflection, empathetic listening, and dialogue to cultivate Spirit-led decision-making for synodal governance.

Addressing modern material, digital, or existential isolation, Fr. Dinh Anh Nhue Nguyen, OFMConv., Secretary General of the Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU), highlighted how the Franciscan charism demands conversion through direct encounter. Grounded in papal messages from 2022 to 2026, this approach rejects mere philanthropy, calling all baptized Christians to offer presence, fraternity, and simplicity, delivering both material relief and the ultimate hope of Christ.

Fr. Edgardo A. Guzman, CMF, theologian and Professor at Claretianum, analyzed the marginalized through a Latin American lens. Drawing insights from *Dilexi te* alongside liberation theologians Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jon Sobrino, he argued that the option for the poor is a deeply theological response to a God who shares in human vulnerability. Christ embodied this by establishing His “chair of redemption” among the marginalized. Grounded in early Christian practice and Roman street ministries, Fr. Guzman challenged the Church to reject the mere “spiritualization” of poverty and allow itself to be evangelized by the vulnerable.

Theoretical frameworks transitioned into concrete realities through moving missionary testimonies. Sr. Anicette Lantonkpôde, OLA, coordinator of the Migrant and Prostitution Ministry in France, detailed her harrowing yet hopeful work accompanying migrant women and trafficking victims forced into prostitution in Genoa, Italy. Her ministry restores dignity through material aid, legal advocacy, language training, and consistent pastoral presence, proving social liberation is born of radical trust in God.

Fr. Vincent Anes, CMF, representing the JPIC Ministry in India, highlighted his journey using the classic “See-Judge-Act” methodology to confront severe societal issues—from female infanticide to mental health neglect and environmental injustice. Guided by the Gospels and *Dilexit Nos*, he advocated for a rhythm balancing contemplative prayer with prophetic, structural action.

Sr. Paola Vizzotto, PIME, serving in Prison Ministry in Italy, brought participants inside Rome's Rebibbia Femminile prison. Exposing how overcrowding and neglect cause facilities to function as “social dumping grounds,” she called for a “Church that enters,” championing non-judgmental listening and restorative justice. Supplementing these accounts, Fr. Massimo Vedova, FMC, from the Street Children Ministry in Italy, shared firsthand experiences working with street youth, underscoring the vital need for specialized, compassionate street ministries in modern urban centers.

A synthesis of multilingual discussions revealed a unified vision regarding the “New Poor.” The English-speaking groups focused on mission as an incarnational, prayer-grounded encounter where deep listening dissolves the boundaries between server and served into a shared “we.” The French-speaking groups centered on missionary credibility, asserting that fraternity must first be lived authentically within religious communities while rejecting a manager-mindset focused purely on funding. Meanwhile, the Spanish-speaking groups focused on a conversion away from pastoral triumphalism, championing the poor as a living sacrament of Jesus and the true protagonists of evangelization who must be rowed alongside in the same synodal boat.

The seminar concluded with reflections from Fr. Alain Mayama, CSSp. In his Synthesis, he reinforced the call to *hospitālītās* and a boundary-breaking reciprocity where the poor become our teachers. In his Closing Address, Fr. Mayama reminded the assembly that because God sustains all mission, the Church must remain in total dependence on Him. He noted that the “Church of the poor” is a living, often anonymous reality demanding solid psycho-spiritual formation, collaborative networking, and deep contemplative prayer to sustain humble service amid structural suffering.

Ultimately, the 2026 seminar invited a profound rediscovery of the spiritual heart of the apostolate. Mission is a radical act of trust and an acknowledgement of our fundamental dependence on God’s grace. From this posture of humility, the global Church is called into authentic solidarity with those at the peripheries. By shifting from “doing for” to “being with,” missionaries align their lives with the Gospel’s preferential option for the poor, discovering how surrendering institutional self-sufficiency empowers them to become true witnesses of hope, dignity, and justice.

Dr. John Paul Herman, SVD

Director of SEDOS



SEDOS

Servizio di Documentazione e Studi sulla Missione Globale
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SEDOS AUTUMN SEMINAR 2026

8:30 a.m., on Tuesday, 20 October 2026, held at UISG, Rome

Programme:

Theme: *“Mission as Communion: One in Christ – United in Mission”*

Morning

8:30 – 9:00 – Arrival and Registration

9:00 – 9:30 – Opening Prayer: **Sr. Clarisse Soubeiga, OLA**

Welcome: **Fr. Alain Mayama, CSSp**

First Session – **Moderator: Sr. Oyidu Okwori, SHCJ**

9:30 – 10:30 – First Talk by **Sr. Roxanne Schares, SSND** – *“Communion and Collaboration in Mission for Consecrated Life.”*

10:30 – 11:00 – Tea Break

11:00 – 12:00 – Second Talk: **Fr. Markus Solo, SVD** –
“Interreligious Dialogue.”

Afternoon

12:30 – **Fr. Edward Flynn, CSSp** – *“The Prevention of Obstetric Fistula.”*

13:00 – 14:00 – Lunch

Second Session – **Moderator: Fr. Márcio Flávio Martin, CICM**

14:00 – 16:00 – Panel Discussion

- **Fr. John Mallare, CICM** (Interreligious Dialogue)
- **Sr. Shalini Mulackal, PBVM**, (Inter-congregational Cooperation).
- **Bro. Alberto Parise, MCCJ** (Peace and Solidarity)

16:00 – Concluding Remarks: **Fr. Raymond Mwangala, OMI**



SEDOS

AUTUMN SEMINAR 2026

Date: Tuesday, October 20, 2026

Location: UISG Hall, Rome

Theme: “Mission as Communion: One in Christ
– United in Mission”

PRESENTATIONS

- First Talk : “Communion and Collaboration in Mission for Consecrated Life” by Sr. Roxanne Schares, SSND
- Second Talk: “Interreligious Dialogue” by Fr. Markus Solo, SVD
- Panel Discussion

Interreligious Dialogue: Fr. John Mallare CICM

Inter-congregational Collaboration: Sr. Shalini M, PBVM

Peace and Solidarity: Bro. Alberto Parise, MCCJ

SAVE THE DATES: UPCOMING SEDOS EVENTS

- Annual General Assembly (AGA): Nov 12, 2026 – UISG
- Christmas Gathering:
Dec 10, 2026 (5:00–7:00 PM) – SVD Generalate
- Spring Seminar: Mar 11, 2027 – UISG
- Residential Seminar: May 31 – June 4, 2027 – Nemi