

# Bulletin 2025

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## ***SEDOS***

*(Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission)  
is a forum open to Roman-Catholic Institutes of Consecrated Life,  
which commit themselves to deepening their understanding of Global Mission.  
It encourages research and disseminates information  
through its Bulletin, Website, Seminars and Workshops.*

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### **SEDOS BULLETIN 2025**

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The digital version of the articles, and English translation of most of the articles can be found on the SEDOS website: [www.sedosmission.org](http://www.sedosmission.org).

The digital version can be received by email for free on a regular basis.

Do let us know if you are interested.

# *Editorial*

## **Celebrating SEDOS@60**

### **A Journey of Mission and Reflection**



**Dear Members and Readers,**

This issue of the SEDOS Bulletin commemorates the Organization's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. On 18 December 2024, following the Annual General Assembly,

members gathered to celebrate SEDOS@60 on the UISG premises.

The first article features the Opening Address by Sr. Mary Barron, OLA, the President. She welcomed the participants, highlighting the vision of the Founders. Sr. Barron emphasized the need for ongoing reflection on mission in today's changing world, particularly within the context of the Church's synodal journey. She calls upon SEDOS to assist missionaries in discerning God's purpose in their specific contexts and to foster inter-congregational cooperation.

The second article presents the Annual General Report by Fr. John Paul Herman, SVD, the Executive Director. The Report summarises SEDOS's activities, including the Seminars on, "Mission of Hope," "Intergenerational Living," and "Mission in Conflict Zones," a workshop on AI, and cooperation with other organizations. It emphasizes the importance of member participation and outlines future plans, such as seminars on themes like, "Missionary Institutes and Synodality" and "Synodality and Interculturality."

Bro. René Stockman, FC, reflects on the celebration of Christmas. In the following article he explores the deeper meaning of Christmas beyond external symbols like light and Santa Claus, arguing that its true essence – the birth of Jesus and his message of love, hope, and peace – is often overlooked. Bro. Stockman emphasizes the importance of internalizing Jesus' message, allowing it to guide our actions and relationships. He encourages readers to become "pilgrims of hope," radiating love and peace in their daily lives and actively working for a more just and peaceful world.

James H. Kroeger, MM, author of the article "Journeying with Pope Francis," delves into Pope Francis's historic Asia-Pacific Journey from September 2-13, 2024. This 25,000-mile journey to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor Est, and Singapore showcased his role as a compassionate Shepherd to the 1.4 billion Roman Catholics worldwide. The article highlights significant themes and insights shared through Pope Francis's 21 speeches and homilies during his 12-day trip.

Fabio Teixeira, CICM, in "Pilgrimage Principles as a Cure for Post-Seminary Depression," explores the challenges newly ordained priests face, drawing parallels with "post-trail depression" experienced by long-distance hikers. He identifies key challenges such as loss of structure and purpose, loneliness, and cultural shock. To address these challenges, Fr. Teixeira suggests incorporating "pilgrimage principles" into the support system for young priests, including setting clear goals, fostering community, deepening cultural understanding, and organizing retreats and pilgrimages.

Fr. Paul B. Steffen's article examines the challenges facing Christianity in a multi-ethnic



and multicultural Europe. He highlights the significant impact of immigration on Europe's societies, leading to a diverse Christian landscape. The article discusses the challenges of secularization, declining church attendance, and the need for a new understanding of mission that embraces inclusivity and addresses the specific needs of diverse communities. Paul Steffen emphasizes the importance of inter-religious dialogue and the Church's role in addressing social issues like migration and inequality.

The Bulletin also includes Birthday Wishes from long-time co-workers like Fr. James Kroeger, MM, and Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse, MCCJ.

In its 60<sup>th</sup> year, SEDOS conducted a Survey to assess its activities. As a result of this Survey's findings, included in this Bulletin, starting from this year, only four issues of the Bulletin will be published annually, instead of six.

Sixty years ago, a group of nine Superiors General with remarkable foresight established SEDOS, an institution dedicated to serving the Church's global mission. From its humble beginnings, SEDOS has blossomed into a vibrant community of over 85 Members, that enriches our understanding of mission in a rapidly changing world.

This Anniversary is a time to celebrate the invaluable contributions of our past and present members. Their tireless efforts have

transformed SEDOS into a respected hub for research and dialogue on mission.

Inspired by the Second Vatican Council, SEDOS embodies the spirit of partnership. It brings together missionaries from diverse backgrounds to learn, support, and inspire one another. This collaborative approach, born from the vision of those early Founders, remains crucial today.

As Pope Francis reminds us, "Challenges exist to be overcome!" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 109). In a world grappling with war, hunger, and injustice, the Church's mission is confronting unprecedented challenges. Yet, with unwavering commitment and the grace of God, let us retain our missionary vigour to overcome these obstacles.

SEDOS continues to play a vital role in guiding the Church's mission. It serves as a "think tank" and a "wellspring of reflection" helping missionaries navigate complex realities while remaining faithful to their respective charism.

As we celebrate SEDOS@60, let us renew our commitment to the mission. Together, we can build a more just and compassionate world, reflecting the love and mercy of God.

Dr. John Paul Herman, SVD  
Director of SEDOS



Celebrating SEDOS@60 and Annual General Assembly 2024





Mary T Barron, OLA

## Opening Address SEDOS Annual General Assembly

*Dear Members of SEDOS,*

It is with great pleasure and a deep sense of gratitude that I welcome you all to the 2024 Annual General Assembly. This year is particularly special as we celebrate the 60th anniversary of SEDOS, a milestone that marks six decades of dedication, collaboration, and unwavering commitment to mission.



As we gather here today, to hear reports of what has been happening in SEDOS in 2024, our minds will be

drawn back to the early days of this organization. We will be reminded of the visionary leaders who founded SEDOS in the spirit of Vatican II.

Let me present them to you:

Hein Monde, SMA (1909-1985)

Léo Deschâtelets, OMI (1899—1974)

Omer Degrijse, CICM (1913-2002)

Johann Schütte, SVD (1913-1971)

Clementinus da Vlissingen, OFM-Cap. (1909-1988)

Paul Hoffer, SM (1907-1976)

Leo Volker, MAFR (1906-1970)

Joseph Van Kerckhoven, MSC (1909- 1974)

Wilfrid-Joseph Dufault, A.A. (1907- 2004)

The vision and dedication of these men brought to birth the SEDOS Organization to help the Church reflect on Mission in the contemporary World. At that moment in time, the world and the Church was experiencing unprecedented changes. Not too different from our context of today.

As our Church moves forward in a more synodal key, awakening the missionary spirit in every Christian, perhaps now more than ever, there is a call to SEDOS to deepen these reflections and dialogue to help the Church and all ‘professional’ missionaries to discern the more specific missionary calls in our day. Is there still a specific missionary call from God in or day? What does it look like? These are some of the questions we continue to face as missionaries and we thank God for SEDOS which offers us a Forum to consider them together?

The legacy of these visionary founders of SEDOS lives on in our continued efforts to foster dialogue, understanding, and action among missionary congregations worldwide. Over the past sixty years, SEDOS has grown into a vibrant and impactful organization, thanks to the dedication and hard work of its membership.

This assembly is an opportunity for us to reflect on our journey, to give thanks to God for all the graces and blessings received in the past year, to note the particular achievements of the year, and look forward to the future with hope and determination. It is particularly important to again highlight the importance of being *hope infused* missionaries, as the Church will soon officially open the Jubilee Year where we are all invited to be Pilgrims of Hope.

During our short time together this morning, we will aim to Build on Our Legacy and Shape the

Future in a meaningful way that challenges us to be alert to the signs of the times while at the same time shaping our organization to respond more effectively to our member's needs. Having heard the reports of the past year, we will engage in meaningful discussions, share insights, and develop strategies that will guide us in addressing the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. We will consider the results of the brief survey we sent to members to help us plan not only for today's Assembly but for the future activities of SEDOS.

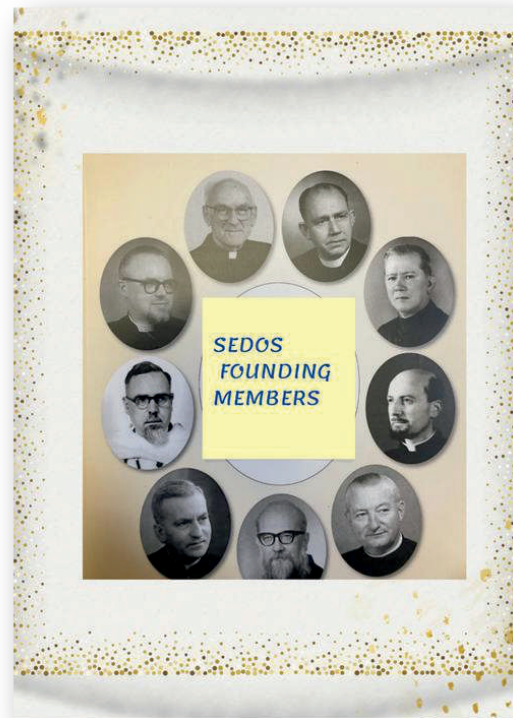
As missionaries, we are called to be beacons of hope, agents of change, and voices for justice and peace and the care of our common home. As members of SEDOS we must be proactive in promoting inter-congregational reflections and actions which help us to better discern God's call to all missionaries in or day. What events and what activities can SEDOS coordinate that might be helpful for all of us to respond to this challenge for deeper reflection and discernment?

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your dedication and commitment to our mission. SEDOS is a vibrant and dynamic organization and always portrays a very relational and welcoming quality. This makes it very attractive and helps our events to be enjoyable as well as challenging and informative. This is the synodal way; enjoying being together, getting to know each other, sharing our wisdom so that together, we continue to build on the foundation laid by our predecessors and work towards a future filled with hope, compassion, and justice.

Later today we will hear more about the other two dimensions of today's celebration: our party to celebrate SEDOS@60 and our Christmas Party. But as we begin, a word of thanks in

anticipation to all our translators who will make it possible for us to communicate seamlessly today and to our technological support here in the UISG office today – by Sr. Florence.

May our gathering today be enjoyable and fruitful!



*John Paul Herman, SVD*

## **SEDOS Annual Report 2024**



SEDOS is a forum open to Institutes of Consecrated Life dedicated to deepening their understanding of global mission. It promotes research and facilitates the sharing of information

through its Bulletin, website, public conferences, working groups, and its Annual Residential Seminar.

At present, SEDOS has 85 Member Congregations, including the Union of Superiors General (USG) and the International Union of Superiors General (UISG). This year, the Soeurs de l'Enfant Jésus (Nicolas-Barré), IJ, joined SEDOS as a new member. However, two congregations - Little Sisters of the Assumption (PSA) and Religious of Our Lady of the Missions (RNDM) - have decided to withdraw from the forum.

### **1. ACTIVITIES OF SEDOS**

#### **SEDOS Spring Seminar**

The SEDOS Spring Seminar was held on Thursday, 21 March 2024, at the UISG, Piazza di Ponte Sant'Angelo, 28, 00186, Rome. The theme for this year's seminar was "Mission of Hope: Mission Gifts from Each Continent."

The Keynote Address was delivered by Msgr. Graham Bell, Undersecretary of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, Section for Fundamental Questions of Evangelisation in the World. He spoke on the "Jubilee 2025: Pilgrims of Hope" and shared details about the programs and activities planned for the global celebration.

The second talk was given by Fr. Stan Lubungo, M.Afr., who shared his insights and experiences on the Mission of Hope, particularly from the African perspective.

The Seminar also featured four distinguished panelists representing different continents, who reflections on the Mission of Hope:

- Sr. Mikaelin Bupu, SSpS, Vice Superior General (Asia)
- Fr. Márcio Flávio Martins, CICM, General Councillor (Latin America)
- Sr. Giuliana Bolzan, OLA, (Europe)
- Sr. Virginie Habib, Secretary General, Rosary Sisters (Middle East)

50 participants attended the Seminar in person, which was highly appreciated for its Attractive approach and insightful discussions. In particular, the contributions by Msgr. Graham Bell and Sr. Giuliana Bolzan received high praise for offering profound insights on the Mission of Hope and the Jubilee Year 2025.

The lunch arrangement was also appreciated, although some food was wasted due to last-minute cancellations by a few registrants.

Overall, the Seminar was a success, providing a platform for meaningful dialogue and fostering a deeper understanding of the Mission of Hope across continents.

#### **SEDOS Autumn Seminar**

The SEDOS Autumn Seminar took place on 7 November 2024 at the UISG, in collaboration with the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM). The seminar focused on two key themes: "Intergenerational Living for Mission" and "From Synodality to Mission: The Way of the Church for Today's World."

The first session featured Sr. Judith Carmel Lynch, FMM, who shared her experiences on intergenerational living, followed by Dr. Joseph Jeyaraj Swaminathan, SDB, who explored the psychological perspective of intergenerational living.

In the afternoon, the focus shifted to synodality. Prof. Paolo Trianni delivered a talk on "Synodality and Interculturality: Cultures and Mission in the Future of the Church," while



Linda Pocher, FMA, presented on “Listening to Women: The Journey with the Pope and the Council of Cardinals.”

The seminar garnered significant interest, with over 84 participants in attendance. The first part of the event was organized by SEDOS, while the second part was managed by IACM.

### **SEDOS Residential Seminar**

The SEDOS Residential Seminar was held from May 6–10, 2024, in Ariccia, with the theme: “Prophetic Witness for Universal Communion – Mission in Conflict Zones and Healing.” The opening address was delivered by His Eminence Dieudonné Cardinal Nzapalanga, C.S.Sp.

The theme was explored from various perspectives, including Biblical, psychological, and spiritual. Insightful and thought-provoking



talks were delivered by Eric Akue, SJ, Mrs. Katharina Jelissjeva, and Mrs. Amaya Valcarcel from the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). Heartfelt testimonies were shared by Guy Theunis, MAfr., and Pier Luigi Maccalli, SMA, who recounted their personal experiences of hardship. Additionally, presentations were given by individuals actively working in these fields, including Mrs. Marie Dennis, James Kulwa Shimbala, SMA, and Sheila Kinsey, FCJM.

The seminar was attended by 40 participants who deepened their understanding of mission in conflict situations around the world. Participants expressed that the seminar was highly beneficial for missionaries, providing relevant insights and inspiration for their ministries, especially in light of the current global challenges.

### **SEDOS General Assembly and Christmas Party**

The SEDOS General Assembly and Christmas Party were held on 14 December 2023 at the SVD Generalate. Both events received very positive feedback from the participants. A total of 23 congregations attended the General Assembly, during which the election of a new executive member was conducted smoothly.

While the venue was well-suited for the Christmas Party, it proved less ideal for the Assembly as the translators faced significant challenges in communicating effectively. The Executive Members suggested that the UISG venue might be a better option for future assemblies, though it is only available during the day until 4:30 p.m.

The combination of the General Assembly and the Christmas Party was much appreciated by all participants. As a result, it was decided to continue this format in the future.

### **SEDOS Workshop**

This year, SEDOS organized a three-day online workshop on Artificial Intelligence, held on 10, 17, and 20 October 2024. The theme was: “Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Religious

Missions and Social Good.” Nearly 102 participants registered for the workshop, which aroused significant interest and enthusiasm. The Sessions were practical and insightful, covering foundational AI concepts, ethical considerations, creative AI tools, and their practical applications for religious missions and social initiatives.

### **SEDOS Cooperation with Other Institutes**

SEDOS continues to strengthen its collaborations with other Institutes to further its objectives:

- EBSCO Agency (Search Engine): The SEDOS Bulletin is now available on the EBSCO search engine, providing access to academic researchers and students.



- JPIC, Rome: SEDOS has partnered with JPIC in Rome to organise seminars.
- IACM: The Autumn Seminar was co-organized with the International Association of Catholic Missiologists.
- Society of the Divine Word (SVD): SEDOS is working with the SVD to organize a Seminar on mission as part of their 150-Year Jubilee Celebrations.
- World Council of Churches (WCC): Efforts are underway to cooperate with the WCC on publishing and sharing inputs for Seminars.

### European Catholic China Colloquium

The Director represented SEDOS at the European Catholic China Colloquium, held in Siegburg, Germany from 22–25 August 2024. The theme of the Colloquium was “Mission in China.” It proved to be an eye-opening experience, offering deeper insights into the challenges and opportunities for mission in China. Most of the Speakers were either from mainland China or actively involved in mission work there.



### Visits to SEDOS Members

The Director undertook to visit and interact with Member Houses, particularly those that extended an invitation. These included:

- Congregation of Holy Cross (CSC)
- Society of Christian Doctrine (SDC – female)
- Daughters of Sacred Heart (DSH)

## 2. ADMINISTRATION OF SEDOS

The administration of SEDOS continues to run smoothly, thanks to the dedicated work of its staff. The Director has been actively reaching out to new places and members, while also striving to enhance SEDOS’ various activities.

- Finance Department: Sr. Maria Jerly, SSpS, the Bursar, efficiently manages the banking section, receipts, and payments. All expenses are well-documented and remain within the Budget estimate, ensuring the financial stability of SEDOS.

- Secretariat: Sr. Celine, the Secretary, serves as the backbone of SEDOS. She excels in organizing seminars and workshops, handling the layout of the SEDOS Bulletin, documenting publications from member congregations, and managing all office-related tasks.

- Digital Assistance: Sr. Christina, the Digital Assistant, keeps the website up-to-date and efficiently designs logos for events and Bulletins. She also supports various on-line and digital programs. Together with the Director, she works to improve the website and other digital platforms.

- Translation Services: Ms. Philippa Wooldridge consistently delivers prompt translations of articles and other essential documents.

The biggest strength of SEDOS lies in its Executive Committee. The ten Members meet regularly to share insights and contribute to the success of seminars and activities. The

Committee is well-balanced, ensuring gender and continental representation. This year, Fr. André-Léon Simonart, M.Afr. and Sr. Geni dos Santos Camargo, SFB, completed their terms in October. SEDOS is deeply grateful to them for their dedicated service and

valuable contributions. To fill their roles, two new Members will be elected from a pool of seven nominees.

### SEDOS Bulletin

The SEDOS Bulletin is highly regarded for its well-researched content and is widely sought after by scholars and students. Through its cooperation with the EBSCO agency, the Bulletin is now accessible to research scholars and university students.

- Distribution: Each month, 210 printed copies are produced, as requested by Members. Digital copies are sent directly to registered e-mails and are available on the website.
- Editing and Publication: These processes continue as usual, maintaining the high standard expected by readers.

## Website and Social Media

The SEDOS website (<https://sedosmission.org/>) is regularly updated to ensure it remains relevant and useful. Recent improvements include:

- Daily Reflections: A Scripture passage with a short reflection is posted daily.
- Information Column: Updated regularly with new announcements.
- Facebook Page: The SEDOS Facebook page (SEDOS Roma) is well managed from the Office, extending its reach and engagement.

## Library

The SEDOS library is consistently updated with new books and publications, including contributions from Member Congregations. New books are also featured on the website, making them easily accessible to members. The combined efforts of the SEDOS staff, Executive Committee, and collaborators ensure the institute continues to grow and fulfil its mission effectively.

## 3. FINANCES

The financial situation of SEDOS remains stable and well within the set limit of €100,000. As you are aware, SEDOS relies primarily on the annual membership fees to cover most of its expenses, and all activities are planned accordingly.

This year, we successfully reduced expenses from €99,764.00 to €83,855.99. The reduction in the number of printed Bulletins has greatly lowered printing and postage costs. Additionally, compared to last year, we were able to encourage greater member participation at seminars, resulting in a smaller deficit. We continue to encourage more members to join our Seminars to further improve financial sustainability.

A few congregations have yet to pay their membership fees despite reminders, but we are hopeful that these payments will be received. Overall, our financial position is strong. We have managed to cover all the expenses for this year and are optimistic about maintaining this stability in 2025.

SEDOS ensures that financial agreements for its workers comply with State requirements:

- Religious staff are compensated through donations made to their respective congregations.
- The cleaning staff submits fiscal invoices every three months.
- Translators provide fiscal invoices for their services and are paid €250 for half a day and €400 for a full day (taxes included).
- Ms. Philippa, who assists with translations on a semi-volunteer basis, receives a monthly payment of €250.

## 4. BASIC SCHEDULE OF SEDOS IN 2025

- Spring Seminar: In collaboration with the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), 27, 28, 29 March, 2025 at Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome.
- Residential Seminar: 16–20 June 2025, at Nemi. The Theme: “Missionary Institutes and Synodality: Carism, Prophecy and Witness.”
- Autumn Seminar: 23 October 2025, at UISG.
- Annual General Assembly and Christmas Gathering: Date to be announced.

## 5. CONCLUSION

“I am pleased to say that SEDOS is performing exceptionally well, with positive feedback pouring in from various quarters regarding its activities. The commitment of SEDOS Members is evident during the seminars, where they actively engage in sharing and offering creative insights. Participants consistently find these Seminars valuable, as they encounter fresh perspectives, gain new insights, and take meaningful steps forward.

I encourage all SEDOS Members to invite more participants to the Seminars. These gatherings provide an excellent opportunity to share experiences and innovative ideas, enriching each one’s missionary journey in the context of today’s challenges.

Let us continue our fervent dedication to the missionary life, striving for even greater zeal and commitment.”

Thank you.

John Paul Herman, SVD  
Director of SEDOS, Rome

## Where did the nativity scene go?

As a child, I was always happy that at our house around December 20, the nativity scene was taken out of the closet and displayed in a traditionally fixed place on the piano with the appropriate decoration around it. Especially the moment when there was a new nativity scene for which we had saved with the stamps of “Waeslandia” that we got every time we made purchases in the neighborhood store. There were no department stores yet, and toward the end of the year we received a colorful catalog in the mail that listed the items we could obtain with the points we had saved. It ranged from a pack of bath towels to a thermos bottle and, of course, an electric train set that would then arrive at its destination by St. Nicholas. But on the penultimate page at the top left, there was also a nativity scene, how sharp my memory of it is, and it shone so much more colorful than the manger we had and where the glue pot had already had to intervene several times. It did take a lot of points, but apparently, we had been good customers in our store during the past year and qualified for the nativity scene. The old one was placed in the trash, which of course we would not do today anymore with an antique family heirloom that it was.

All this must be 65 years ago, but the nativity scene still exists, and even the original packaging was carefully preserved. I found it at my mother’s estate when we emptied her room at the retirement home. How happy I was that I now get to continue the tradition and carefully place the small statues in the stall with as much joy and devotion as I did then around Christmas. And gently sing “Silent night, holy night...” to them.

That it’s Christmas, of course, we also see in our cities where lights flicker and the familiar

melodies sound. In the Philippines, they started doing this as early as September. But even in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, it is no longer night at Christmas time and we even meet Santa Klaus and illuminated reindeer with which this man has apparently travelled from the far north to the heart of Africa. They must be warm here... But where has the nativity scene gone? It becomes a vain search for the reference to what is after all the essence of Christmas: the commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ, of God who became man in order to give a divine dimension to our human nature. Or as some Church Fathers boldly put it, “God became man so that man might become God.”



We can immediately ask ourselves what impact Christmas has on our relationship with Jesus, whether we really allow Him to be born in our hearts to dwell there and share in His love.

Because what we celebrate as a distant memory should at the same time become a renewed reality each time where we really give space for the presence of Jesus in our lives, give space to really welcome Him into our lives and at the same time have the courage to listen to Him.

Because He has something to say to us about our lives, about the way we build our lives, about the way we live with others and also about the world in which we live and in which we have a responsibility.

Jesus brings us a message of love and is himself the unique reflection of God who is love. He reminds us that God created human beings out of love and that we are called to live in this love. Are we really making room for God's love in our lives? Are we allowing God's love into our lives so that we can radiate this love into our environment? No, this must not become or



remain a theory, but this must be realized in our immediate environment, in the family or community in which we live: it is there that we must radiate this divine love. And this already begins in which we manage to wish each other a friendly good day in the early morning. It is these first moments of the day that will give colour to the rest of our day.

Jesus brings us a message of hope. At the beginning of the Holy Year which is precisely about this hope, we are called to become pilgrims of hope. Yes, constantly we face difficulties, face seemingly hopeless situations for which we search in vain for a way out. We are let down by fellow human beings, yes, even our closest friends can let us down. So, reasons enough to become hopeless and give up. But it is precisely in this darkness that Jesus sought to bring light with his coming. It is with a message that with God there are never totally hopeless situations. And these flames of hope sometimes come from very unexpected places. It is sometimes as if God sends us his angels to give us new hope. It is then people we have not met for a long time who suddenly send us a message and give us that warm feeling that we are not alone after all. We should not limit it to the so-called "Warmest Week" to be this flame of hope ourselves for someone who is really struggling. A simple gesture of compassion can really work wonders. Some can do this in a very spontaneous way, others have to put some effort into it. But we all have enough warmth to be able to share this with others.

True hope, of course, has to do with our faith that God will never abandon us. How many times did Jesus repeat that divine word, "Don't be afraid, I am there." To the extent that our faith in that loving God grows, our hope will also grow and strengthen, yes, beyond death. For if we truly believe that there is life after this life, not even death can take away our hope. Perhaps it is this that makes so many people today truly miss it and therefore so easily decide to then drop out of life when they can no longer see any perspective, so to speak, and begin to experience everything as hopeless.

In a time marked by war in so many places worldwide, Jesus also continues to bring us His

message of peace. He is therefore rightly called the Prince of Peace. But at the same time, even the prophets before Him spoke that we ourselves must be agents of this peace, by forging our swords into ploughshares. My father was a blacksmith and I have seen many ploughshares pass through his hands, which he re-sharpened with powerful hammer blows, so that they could continue their work in the fields and prepare the ground on which lush fruit might one day grow and be harvested. Perhaps he did not think then what contribution he was giving to the fertility of the earth. But this is also the case with us: we too often do not realize how we promote peace at a distance or hinder this peace by our words, by our actions, by decisions we may or may not make. It really comes down to knowing how to forge the swords we sometimes wish to wield into ploughshares in time to participate in working for peace within us, peace around us and even for peace wider than we suspect.

Where has the nativity scene gone? Consciously giving a place to the nativity scene during this Christmas season also means that we do not want to shut Christ up in our private sphere, but to give and continue to give Him full space in the public sphere, in our social involvement. That we allow Him to guide our conscience in making decisions that have to do with human dignity, that have to do with the way we treat our environment in which we become more aware of the responsibility we have received as human beings to further build God's creation according to His dream.

Let the lights flicker and the melodies resound, but let this Christmas also truly become a moment in which we may encounter the living Christ who came into the world to walk with us and give new direction to our lives. Because the Light has come into the world, why should we be afraid to let that Light shine on us? Love, hope, peace: that is what this Light wants to bring us and, at the same time, can give us the strength to become people of love, hope and peace ourselves.

May I wish to all of you a heartily and Merry  
Christmas!

*James H. Kroeger, MM*

## **Journeying with Pope Francis in Asia-Pacific**

From September 2-13, 2024, Pope Francis made an arduous trip of 25,000 miles (32,000 kilometers) to four countries located in Southeast Asia and Oceania: Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Singapore. Since becoming head of the world's estimated 1.4 billion Roman Catholics in 2013, this twelve-day pastoral visit is the longest of Francis' 45 overseas trips, both in terms of its duration and distance covered. Originally, this apostolic journey was scheduled for 2020, but had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This presentation of Francis' apostolic journey will unfold in three segments: • a panoramic summary of significant facts about each of the four countries, including some of the activities of Pope Francis, • a presentation of eight recurrent themes emerging in the pope's speeches and homilies throughout the entire apostolic journey, and • an index-bibliography of the 21 presentations made by the pope.

### **I. Panorama of Four Asia-Pacific Nations**

**Indonesia** - The pope's first destination was Jakarta, Indonesia. After a thirteen-hour flight from Rome, he arrived there on September 3 and stayed until September 6. Francis is the third pope to visit Indonesia; he was preceded by Paul VI (December 3, 1970) and John Paul II (October 9-13, 1989). While in Indonesia, Francis met with various groups, made several speeches, signed an interfaith declaration, celebrated a public Mass, and preached a moving homily.

Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim-majority country (over 200 million); it is estimated that 87 percent of the population practices Islam. However, it has a large Christian minority of some 30 million, of which about 9 million are Catholic. Clearly, Pope Francis aimed at promoting ongoing better relations between Christianity and Islam. While

the Indonesian constitution guarantees freedom of religion, following its motto which means "unity in diversity," challenges still remain. The pope visited Jakarta's largest mosque, and, together with its grand imam, issued a written declaration that religion can never be used to foment violence.

A second priority issue for Pope Francis centered on addressing climate change, a subject that the pope frequently addresses in documents and speeches. This topic is important for Indonesia, since it is the largest archipelago nation in the world, consisting of approximately 17,000 islands divided into 33 provinces; approximately 6,000 of the islands are inhabited. A clear example of the impact of this "climate change reality" is reflected in the fact that governmental authorities are planning to move the capital from Jakarta to a new site in Borneo because the current capital is quite literally sinking into the ground.

Historically, Christianity first arrived in the seventh century; however, it really only took root in the sixteenth century when some Catholic missionaries accompanying the Portuguese started their preaching. The Dutch expelled the Portuguese in 1605 and introduced Calvinist Protestantism; Catholicism was banned from the territory until 1807. Early missionaries were from various religious congregations (e.g. Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Capuchins, and Divine Word Missionaries). The year 1940 saw the ordination of the first Indonesian bishop, Jesuit Albertus Soegijapranata. Diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Indonesian Republic were established in 1955. In 1961 Pope John XXIII established the Catholic hierarchy. Bishop Justinus Darmowujono (1914-1994) became the first Indonesian cardinal.

It is noteworthy that although the majority of the population practices Islam, Indonesia is not

an Islamic state. Rather, the constitution enshrines the *Pancasila*, the five basic, foundational principles:

- faith in one supreme God, ● just and civil humanity, ● unity, ● democracy guided by wisdom, and, ● social justice. As noted earlier, “unity in diversity” guides this multi-religious and multi-ethnic country; this guideline has contributed to the historically tolerant character of Islam in Indonesia. There are some radical fringes existing; however, a significant number of moderate Muslims, political leaders, and intellectuals are genuinely open to dialogue, a commitment that the Catholic Church shares. In Indonesia today, the Catholic Church is a widely recognized institution; it is appreciated for its social, health-care, cultural and educational activities that promote respect for the ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity of the country. The Church is present in public debate and has expressed its opinion on several important social issues; it seeks to combat all forms of fundamentalism that would undermine the fabric of Indonesian society.

Several pastoral priorities of the local Church can be identified. The Indonesian bishops have made evangelization through the use of new media one of their top priorities. They are also urging the Church to become an “outgoing Church” to reach Indonesia’s diverse peoples. In addition, interreligious and ecumenical dialogue as well as the Church’s charitable apostolates are to be strengthened. In 2012 the bishops launched the Indonesian Youth Day, encouraging young people to be “agents of change for justice and peace” throughout the country. Finally, Catholic families are challenged to become agents of evangelization.

**Papua New Guinea (PNG)** - This relatively small nation has an estimated population of nearly 12 million; it consists of the PNG mainland and about 600 islands with a total land mass of 452,860 square kilometers. Pope Francis is the second pontiff to visit PNG. John Paul II visited the country twice on May 7-10, 1984 and January 16-18, 1995. His second visit in 1995 was on the occasion of the beatification of Pietro To Rot, the first blessed of Papua New

Guinea. Francis was greeted by some 20,000 people singing and dancing in the field in front of the Vanimo cathedral, where he donned a feathered headdress presented to him.

Most of the people living in PNG are Melanesian, but some are Micronesian or Polynesian. Surprisingly, PNG has over 800 known languages. The spectrum of society ranges from traditional village-based life to modern urban life. About 80-82 percent of the population derives its livelihood from farming. While Pope Francis will stay only in the largest cities of Indonesia, Timor-Leste, and Singapore, in PNG he will spend about three hours in Vanimo and Baro, towns on the northwestern shore of PNG. There are six documents of Francis’ messages during his meetings with various groups in PNG.

The initial evangelization of Papua New Guinea began in the nineteenth century. In 1844 Pope Gregory XVI created the apostolic vicariate of Melanesia. Various congregations and missionary institutes began serving the people; these included the Italian PIME missionaries and the Sacred Heart (MSC) missionaries. They were followed by several other groups of men and women. The Japanese occupation during World War II was difficult; it saw many religious men and women killed. The victims included catechist and martyr Pietro To Rot (1912-1945). Church work resumed after the war. In 1966 the ecclesiastical hierarchy was established; it comprised three Metropolitan archdioceses and eleven suffragan dioceses.

Currently about 95 percent of Papuans are Christians; the majority are Evangelical Lutherans. Catholics comprise about 32 percent of the population. Fortunately, most of the clergy and religious are now indigenous, though numerous foreign missionaries continue to make their valuable contribution. It can validly be asserted that the Catholic Church is well-established in PNG; this is due to its significant contributions in the fields of healthcare, education, and welfare assistance.

While the majority of the PNG population is Christian, Christianity is not the state religion; all religions are granted full religious freedom. The preamble to the PNG constitution pledges to uphold Christian values. In recent years, the



Catholic Church has opposed an initiative by some evangelical groups to amend the constitution and affirm the Christian identity of PNG. In the mind of the Catholic bishops, such amendments would change the identity of PNG, making it a “confessional country”; this would be in contrast with the religious-cultural diversity that has always characterized Papuan society.

Today PNG continues to be the foremost country in Melanesia. As a relatively new nation, it struggles with several challenges: economic stagnation, corruption, law and order problems. In addition, there was the nine-year secessionist movement on the island of Bougainville. This experience led to the decision to offer the various regions of the country a certain amount of political autonomy. The country has yet to capitalize on the tourist industry, though its natural beauty, its flora and fauna, are overwhelming. In addition, the local peoples are wonderfully welcoming.

Some additional social realities the country faces are: inter-tribal mistrust, clear communication due to its numerous diverse languages, and adequate transportation due to a very rugged terrain. The Church seeks to continue to be a “servant-church” in traditional areas (health, education, welfare, etc.) as well as in new apostolates: youth ministry, lay Catholic involvement in evangelization, protection of human rights, care of creation, and ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Undoubtedly, the pope’s visit brings renewed enthusiasm and dynamism to the local church of PNG!

**Timor-Leste** - This small nation (15,000 square kilometers; 5,750 square miles), home to approximately 1.3 million people, is located in the eastern half of the island of Timor, sharing a border with Nusa Tenggara Timor. Australia is the country’s southern neighbor, separated by the Timor Sea. The earliest Westerners were the Portuguese arriving in the early sixteenth century. The land was occupied at various times by the Dutch, Japanese, and Indonesians. A 1999 UN-supervised referendum resulted in independence from Indonesia, though many earlier years saw ongoing conflict which caused widespread death and destruction. In 2002, Timor-Leste was recognized internationally as

an independent state; the capital is Dili, located on the island’s northern coast. The two official languages are Tetun and Portuguese, though English and Indonesian are also spoken and considered working languages.

Pope Francis is not the first pope to visit Timor-Leste. On October 12, 1989 Pope John Paul II paid a one-day visit to this small nation. John Paul II was the first head of state to visit; this reality helped the East Timorese gain their independence in 2002. It is noteworthy that the Philippines is not the only “Christian nation” in the Orient; ninety-six percent of the current Timor-Leste population identifies as Roman Catholic. On the first day of his visit, Francis boldly addressed some “social scourges” (alcohol overuse, youth gangs, and sexual abuse of young people) that challenge both church and civil society. It is also noteworthy that during his visit Pope Francis addressed nearly half of the population, drawing about 600,000 rapturous believers in the tropical heat to the celebration of a Mass on the island’s coast.

Missionaries began the evangelization of Timor-Leste in the first half of the sixteenth century, accompanying the Portuguese who colonized the island. The Church continued its missionary endeavors, even while the country passed many difficult stages on its road to independence. This solidarity with the people during their 25-year struggle for self-determination contributed to an increase in the Catholic population. Several religious orders serving in the country are the Salesians, Jesuits, and Divine Word Missionaries, as well as various international and local women’s religious institutes. Indigenous vocations continue to be numerous.

Since the independence of Timor-Leste, the Church has continued to play an active role in society, particularly in education, healthcare, and social service. It has also intervened in debates on several social issues. Remarkably, the Church’s role in Timorese society is explicitly recognized in the 2002 Constitution; Article 11 states that: “The State recognizes and appreciates the participation of the Catholic Church in the national liberation process of Timor-Leste.” The Constitution guarantees full freedom of conscience, religion, and worship to

all religions, encouraging collaboration among various religious denominations; it prohibits any form of discrimination based on religious affiliation.

Following the declaration of independence on May 20, 2002, the Holy See and the Republic of Timor-Leste established diplomatic relations; this has resulted in close and beneficial Church-State collaboration. This relationship has been further strengthened following a Concordat signed on August 15, 2015; this document defines the terms by which the Church is free to provide its services. Areas covered include spiritual assistance in prisons, hospitals, and orphanages as well as charitable activities and the organization of a variety of educational services. The Catholic Church receives a subsidy from the State.

Currently, there are three dioceses in the country: Dili, Bacau, and Maliana, forming one ecclesiastical province, which was established in 2019. As noted earlier, Timor-Leste is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. Yet, it is also one of world's poorest nations, relying heavily on energy sources in the Timor Sea. Undoubtedly, the Church's evangelizing mission needs to continue its dedicated outreach efforts on numerous levels. This task is facilitated by several traditional societal values that focus on family, community, and religion. Pope Francis constantly urged the people: "Move forward with hope"!

**Singapore.** The final destination on Pope Francis' itinerary was the city-state of Singapore. This country consists of one thirty-mile-long island with over sixty smaller islands. Singapore's neighbors include Malaysia to the north and Indonesia to the south. Most of the country is flat; however, the middle of the island includes Bukit Timah Hill which rises to about 545 feet (166 meters); this would compare to the height of a forty-four-story building. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Singapore was known as a place to trade goods; thus, it attracted people from other countries, including China.

The combined area of Singapore is about eighteen square miles. The main island is separated from Peninsular Malaysia to the north by Johor Strait, a narrow channel that can be

crossed by road or rail; to the south Singapore is about ten miles from Indonesia. Singapore is the largest port in southeast Asia and one of the busiest in the world. It was previously a British colony and became an independent state on August 9, 1965. Today Singapore is a member of the Commonwealth, the international association consisting of the UK together with states that were previously part of the British Empire. The four official languages in Singapore are English, Malay, Tamil, and Mandarin; however, English is the *de facto* most widely used language.

Pope Francis is not the first pope to visit Singapore. On November 20, 1986, Pope John Paul II made a five-hour stopover, celebrating a public Mass, meeting government officials, and speaking to the nation's priests. Historically, the Church in Singapore is closely linked with that of neighboring Malaysia, where the first Portuguese missionaries arrived in the sixteenth century. Remarkably, Saint Francis Xavier arrived in Malacca in 1545. In 1558 the territory was set up as a suffragan diocese of the Archdiocese of Goa which was a Portuguese colony in India. When Malaysia was occupied by the Protestant Dutch, Catholicism was temporarily banned; however, it was restored when the British East India Company purchased Singapore in 1819.

The Catholic Church in Singapore traces its establishment to late 1821 when a young missionary of the Paris Foreign Mission Society (MEP), Father Laurent Imbert, arrived in Singapore. Church growth was steady but slow; approximately twenty years later Catholics numbered around 500. During the Japanese occupation (1942-1945), the Church suffered severe persecution. The Catholic community was restored after the war and the Church resumed its activities in various fields (social service, health care, and education). In 1953 there was a major reorganization of the local Church; the Diocese of Malacca, which included Singapore, was raised to archdiocesan status. Two years later in 1955, the Archdiocese of Malacca became an Ecclesiastical Province with three territories (Archdiocese of Malacca-Singapore and the two suffragan dioceses of Penang and Kuala Lumpur); Archbishop Michel Olcomendy became the metropolitan. In 1972 Singapore became a separate archdiocese

without any suffragans; it is directly subject to the Holy See.

Singapore is truly a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Buddhists comprise about 43% of the population, Christians around 20%, and Muslims about 14%. There is a small Hindu community, and many Singaporeans do not claim any particular religious affiliation. This pluralism has contributed to shaping positive relations between the state and the religions. As a secular state, Singapore's constitution guarantees full religious freedom, safeguards religious harmony, and promotes dialogue and collaboration with all religions. The peaceful coexistence among religions is favored by the high rate of mixed marriages; the Catholic Church also benefits from this situation.

The Holy See and Singapore established diplomatic relations in 1981, and on the fiftieth anniversary of independence in 2016 the then president Tony Tan Keng Yam paid an official visit to the Vatican. With nearly 400,000 Catholics, the Church in Singapore is one of the most dynamic in Southeast Asia; half of the Catholics regularly attend Sunday Mass. Many churches are often filled due to the presence of numerous migrants.

Statistical data shows that Christianity, Catholicism in particular, is the only growing religion in this city-state. The Church has 29 parishes, 3 devotional churches, 53 schools, 47 humanitarian organizations, and 2 health-care institutions. Singapore's first cardinal, William Seng Chye Goh, was installed by Pope Francis in 2022. Two meetings, one with public authorities and another interreligious gathering with young people, as well as one public Mass brought Francis' ambitious Asia-Pacific trip to a successful conclusion.

## II. Pivotal Themes and Insights from Pope Francis

During his apostolic journey in late 2024 to four very diverse countries (Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Singapore), Pope Francis continued a creative presentation of foundational gospel insights. A perusal of the documents reveals several recurrent insights from the numerous presentations made by Francis during his twelve-day sojourn. In addition, it should be noted that a specific theme

was chosen and a unique logo designed for each of the countries visited.

The bishops of **Indonesia** chose "Faith – Fraternity – Compassion" as the theme for the pope's visit. The main item of the logo design features an image of Pope Francis with his hand raised in blessing in front of the emblem of the golden *Garuda*, a sacred eagle. The logo also features a map of Indonesia with the words "an archipelago characterized by a great variety of ethnic and social groups, languages, cultures and religious beliefs."

"Pray" was the simple theme chosen by the bishops of **Papua New Guinea**. The word is written vertically alongside a cross. The logo is predominantly in the shades of yellow and orange to evoke the sunrise and sunset. The design features a bird of paradise with the colors of the national flag on its wings.

In **Timor-Leste** the papal visit centered around the theme: "Let your faith be your culture." The center of the chosen logo features a photo of Pope Francis giving his blessing "to symbolize the protection that the Timorese people will receive from God" during the pope's visit. Behind the papal photo is an image of the globe and on the top is a map of Timor-Leste.

The logo for the **Singapore** visit features the two-word theme in bright yellow letters, "Unity" and "Hope" separated by a starburst cross. The design is "inspired by the star that guided the Magi, by the Eucharist, and by the five stars of the Singapore flag." As noted by Singapore Cardinal William Goh Seng Chye, "unity" was chosen to express the hope for "communion and harmony among believers, both within the Church and in the context of society and family relations"; "hope" expresses the dream that the pope's visit will bring hope to Christians in the region, "especially for those who experience discrimination."

**Reflections of Pope Francis** - It is noteworthy that Francis devoted his first general audience after his return to Rome (September 18, 2024) to an extensive reflection on his apostolic journey. He noted that he was not the first pope "to fly towards the rising sun." "Saint Paul VI



did that.... I tried to follow his example.... I thank the Lord who allowed me to do so as an elderly pope what I would have liked to do as a young Jesuit, because I wanted to go there as a missionary.” Francis continued: “we are still too Eurocentric, or as they say, ‘western.’ But in reality, *the Church is much bigger*.... And also, if I may say so, much *more alive*, in those countries.”

Regarding Indonesia, the pope noted that there he encountered “a lively, dynamic Church ... in a country which has a very noble culture, inclined to harmonize diversity, and at the same time has the largest Muslim presence in the world.” Francis sought to emphasize “the three characteristics of the Lord: closeness, mercy and compassion.... If a Christian does not have compassion, he is of no use.” Noting that faith, fraternity, and compassion were the motto of his Indonesian visit, Francis asserted that “on the basis of these words, the Gospel enters every day into the life of the people in a concrete way.”

On his next destination, Pope Francis noted: “I discovered the beauty of an outbound missionary Church in Papua New Guinea, an archipelago stretching out towards the immensity of the Pacific Ocean.” Noting the diversity of ethnic groups that speak over 800 languages, Francis observed that this is “an ideal environment for the Holy Spirit, who loves to make the message of love resonate in the symphony of languages.... He is the master of harmony.” Listening to young people, the pope said: “In them, I saw a new future, without tribal violence, without dependency, without ideological and economic colonialism; a future of fraternity and care for the wonderful natural environment.”

Continuing his post-journey reflections during his general audience, Francis observed: “The power of the Christian message of human and social promotion is particularly evident in the history of Timor-Leste. There, the Church has shared the independence process with the entire population, always guiding it towards peace and reconciliation. It is not a matter of the ideologization of faith, no; it is faith that becomes culture and at the same time enlightens it, purifies it, elevates it.... Faith must be inculturated and cultures must be evangelized.

But above all, I was struck by the beauty of the people: a people who have endured much but are joyful, a people wise in suffering.... I would like to say, without exaggeration, that I breathed the ‘air of springtime’ there.”

Referencing Singapore, Pope Francis observed that it is “a country very different to the other three: a city-state, ultra-modern, an economic and financial hub for Asia and beyond. There, Christians are a minority, but they nonetheless form a lively Church, engaged in fostering harmony and fraternity between the various ethnicities, cultures and religions. Even in wealthy Singapore there are the ‘little ones’ who follow the Gospel and become salt and light, witnesses to a *hope greater* than what economic gains can guarantee.”

**Recurring Themes** - This presentation now turns to capturing several pivotal insights of Pope Francis during his Asia-Pacific apostolic journey. Eight items are identified and some precious “Francis insights” are briefly noted; the source of all quotes appears in the number in brackets following each citation. These narrative highlights significant topics, but it certainly does not exhaust the profound pastoral wisdom of Francis, a truly “pilgrim pope.”

**1. Valuing One’s History and Culture.** In every country Francis stressed the importance of building on the foundation of the nation’s historical and cultural heritage. In Indonesia Francis said: “I thank you for the common path you are taking. Indonesia is a great country, a mosaic of cultures, ethnicities and religious traditions, a rich diversity.... You are known for this harmony. Do not lose this gift” [3]. In PNG, after observing the multiplicity of islands, languages, and ethnic groups, Francis noted that “this points to an *extraordinary cultural and human richness*.... I imagine this enormous variety is a challenge to the Holy Spirit, who creates harmony amid differences.... Faith can become a lived culture, inspiring minds and actions and becoming a beacon of light that illuminates the path forward” [8].

While in Timor-Leste Francis asked everyone to “look back with gratitude on our preceding history, to the seed of faith sown here by missionaries.... The preaching of the faith must

be inculturated in your culture and your culture must be evangelized.... Creativity is necessary for mission” [16]. The Church in Singapore is “rich in gifts, a Church that is vibrant, growing and engaged in constructive dialogue.... [This Church is] ethnically diverse and yet united and in solidarity ... [and is] characterized by a deep respect for all people, regardless of their race, belief or whatever makes them different from ourselves” [20].

## **2. *Interreligious Dialogue and Reconciliation.***

Closely following upon an appreciation of national history and culture is the imperative to foster harmonious relations through dialogue and reconciliation. In Indonesia “the Church desires to increase interreligious dialogue. In this way, prejudices can be eliminated and a climate of mutual respect and trust can grow” [1]. Everyone should be committed to “cultivating his or her own spirituality and practicing his or her religion,” growing in “reciprocal respect and mutual love” and avoiding “rigidity, fundamentalism and extremism” [3]. The people of PNG were encouraged by Pope Francis to “be open ... to God and our brothers and sisters ... [and not shut oneself off] “from God and others through selfishness, indifference, [and] fear of taking risks, [or becoming] deaf to the word of God and the cry of our neighbor” [11].

In Timor-Leste the pope praised the people for their “assiduous efforts to achieve full reconciliation with your brothers and sisters in Indonesia” (following the struggle for independence) [14]. Francis drew upon the image of the native fragrant sandalwood, encouraging Christians to spread to everyone “the fragrance of Christ and the Gospel, a fragrance that enriches life and fills us with joy” [17]. In Singapore, the local church was praised that it has “constantly promoted interreligious dialogue and cooperation between different faith communities, in a spirit of openness and mutual respect” [19]. “Religions are seen as paths trying to reach God.... There is only one God, and religions are like languages that try to express ways to approach God.... The thing that helps a lot with dialogue is respect” [21].

**3. *Care for the Poor.*** Collaboration among people of various faiths enables diverse people

to reach out to serve other’s needs. Francis encouraged Indonesians “to work together, to move forward together in pursuit of the same goals: defense of human dignity, the fight against poverty, and the promotion of peace” [3]. The citizens of PNG need to “promote initiatives that develop natural and human resources in a sustainable and equitable manner ... that improves the wellbeing of all, excluding nobody” [8].

In Timor-Leste, the pope expanded upon Jesus’ words: Come with me. Francis asserted: “Jesus says: ‘Come with me because you took care of me when I was hungry, and you gave me food, when I was thirsty, and you gave me drink, when I was sick, and you visited me’ and so on. I call this the sacrament of the poor” [15]. In Singapore, the pope asserted: “The love that God shows us, and that he invites us to share with others ‘responds generously to the needs of the poor ... is marked by compassion for those in sorrow ... is quick to offer hospitality and is persevering in times of trial. It is always ready to forgive, to hope ... love is the very center of the Gospel” [20].

**4. *Advice for Young People.*** During his Asia-Pacific visit Pope Francis made a special effort to reach out to the youth. In Jakarta, Indonesia, Francis responded to the words of the youthful Mimi who spoke of Jesus as our beacon of hope; Francis advised everyone: “The experience of facing difficulties together, all doing our best ... enriches us and helps us to discover anew each day how important it is for us to work together” [6]. In PNG Francis noted that the Church gives importance to “forming young people and carrying out works of charity”; the Church needs to “convey the enthusiasm for mission to young people”; a proven way to achieve this goal is “by esteeming and respecting one another and putting ourselves at the service of one another” [10]. Before departing PNG Francis told the youth: “Dear young people, I did not want to leave here without meeting you, because you are the hope for the future.... Thank you for your joy, for your presence, for your dreams.... Thank you very much for your hope” [13].

In the young nation of Timor-Leste, Francis addressed some “social scourges” faced by young people (alcohol abuse, gangs, drugs, violence). He told Church people: “give young people ideals to get them out of these traps! ... We are called to do everything possible to prevent every kind of abuse and guarantee a healthy and peaceful childhood for all young people” [14]. Francis met the youth and told them: “There are two things that greatly touched my heart when I went out into your streets: the youth of this country and the smiles of its people. You are a people who know how to smile, keep it up, never forget it” [18].

In Singapore Francis held an interreligious meeting with young people. He spoke from the heart: “Young people are courageous and like to seek the truth.... A young person must be a critical thinker ... [and] be constructive in criticism.... I say to young people, ‘Take risks, go out! Do not be afraid!’ ... One of the things that has impressed me most about the young people here is your capacity for interfaith dialogue.... Interfaith dialogue among young people takes courage. The age of youth is the age of courage.... If you dialogue as young people, you will also dialogue as adults; you will dialogue as citizens and politicians.... My wish is that all of you, young people will go forward with hope, and not go backwards! Take risks”! [21].

**5. Climate Change and the Environment.** A topic clearly close to the heart of Pope Francis is the challenge of the changing climate and environmental destruction. In Jakarta Francis mentioned the need “to live our relationship with creation and with our brothers and sisters, especially the most needy, through a personal and communal lifestyle marked by respect, civility and humanity” [2]. For Francis, care of creation needs a “forward-looking commitment to implement the principles of social justice” [1]. In PNG Francis reminded the people that they live in “a magnificent land, enriched by a great variety of plants and birds”; this beautiful land is a “grandiose spectacle of nature bursting forth with life.... The Lord entrusts this richness to you as a sign and an instrument, so that you too may live united in harmony with him and with your brothers and sisters, respecting our

common home and looking after one another” [12].

In Timor-Leste Francis challenged the youth in particular concerning “the importance of taking care of our common home and cultivating family unity” [17]. The pope noted that young people need to be responsible. “One of the responsibilities is to learn to take care of the common home, and a young person has to commit himself or herself to this” [17]. While in Singapore, Francis stated: “We cannot hide the fact that today we are experiencing an environmental crisis.... [As Singaporeans] your commitment to sustainable development and the preservation of creation is an example to follow, and your search for innovative solutions to address environmental challenges can encourage other countries to do the same” [19].

**6. God’s Closeness and Compassion.** Pope Francis recalled how the Preamble to the 1945 Indonesian Constitution twice refers to Almighty God and the need for his “divine blessing” to descend upon the nation [1]. In addition, he asserted: “Compassion does not cloud the true vision of life. On the contrary, it makes us see things better, in the light of love, and we see things more clearly with the eyes of the heart”; he also spoke of Mary as “an *icon of compassion*” and as “the mother of compassion” [2]. In PNG Francis observed that we can “shut ourselves off from God and others through selfishness, indifference, [and] fear of taking risks.” However, “God responds to such distance in the complete opposite way, with the *nearness of Jesus*. Through his Son, God wishes to show ... that he is near and compassionate.... The most important thing is to *open ourselves to God and our brothers and sisters*” [11].

Speaking in Timor-Leste Francis noted that Christians are called to experience and practice the love of God. “We cannot understand the love of Jesus unless we start to practice love, sharing our lives with those who are most in need.... This is how we come to understand the love of Jesus, who gave his life for us.... [We need] to let ourselves be cared for by God, who loves us so much, to let ourselves be cared for by Our Lady, who is our Mother” [15]. The Singaporean faithful heard these papal words: “The love that God shows us, and that he invites



us to share with others, ‘responds generously to the needs of the poor ... is marked by compassion to those in sorrow ... is quick to offer hospitality and is persevering in times of trial. It is always ready to forgive, to hope’” [20].

**7. Message of Social Justice.** Another omnipresent theme of Francis’ Asia-Pacific journey focused on the Church’s social teaching. In Indonesia he spoke about a “forward-looking commitment to implement the principles of social justice.... It is my hope that everyone, in their daily lives, will be able to draw inspiration from these principles and implement them when carrying out their respective duties, since *opus justitiae pax*, peace is the work of justice” [1]. A similar message was echoed in PNG. Francis urged the Christian communities to continue their social service and charity throughout the country. This task is to be a collective endeavor in “cooperation with public institutions and with all people of good will, beginning with their brothers and sisters belonging to other Christian denominations and other religions”; these services are undertaken “for the sake of the common good and all the citizens of Papua New Guinea” [8].

In Timor-Leste Francis proposed the Church’s social teaching “as the foundation” for the “formation process” of young people. He noted: “The Church’s social doctrine is not an ideology, instead it is based on fraternity. It is a doctrine that must promote; it promotes the development of people, especially the poorest.... [It enables people] to keep a hopeful gaze toward the future” [14]. Francis praised broad efforts in Singapore which has “striven to build a society in which social justice and the common good are held in high regard. I think in particular of your commitment to improving the quality of life of citizens through public housing policies, high quality education, and an efficient healthcare system” [19]. The pope asked that continued efforts be made “to support the most vulnerable, ... the poor and the elderly, ... [and] the dignity of migrant workers” [19].

**8. Challenges for Catholics.** In each of the four countries Pope Francis visited, he presented numerous concrete challenges to which the

faithful ought to respond. In Indonesia the pope mentioned strengthening the family [1], a renewed commitment to missionary evangelization, particularly through “the mission of the catechist” [2], living in fraternity [2], translating the teachings of the Church into the *Bahasa Indonesia* language [2], fostering “mutual respect and harmonious coexistence” [3], the avoidance of “rigidity, fundamentalism and extremism” [3], and an attentive listening to the Word of God. Francis prayed for a new Pentecost in Indonesia.

During his visit to Papua New Guinea, Francis emphasized the responsible development and preservation of natural and human resources [8], the end to tribal violence [8], renewed commitment to the works of charity [8], strengthening the role of women in Church and society [8], renewed commitment to forming the next generation, especially young people [9], fostering “catechesis through images” drawn from scripture [10], growth in “communion and friendship with God and with our brothers and sisters” [11], and the promotion of the vocations of “consecrated men and women, catechists and lay missionaries” [12]. Finally, the pope asked the people “to beautify this happy land with your presence as a loving Church” [12].

During the three days Pope Francis sojourned in Timor-Leste, he sought to confirm the people in their faith and to challenge them to authentically practice it. He emphasized the growth of an evangelizing and inculturated faith [14], the strengthening of “family life, education and social customs” rooted in Gospel values [14], fostering of genuine ideals among young people [14], continued promotion of vocations for Church service as missionary disciples [16], fostering “justice against corruption” [16], the avoidance of “those ‘crocodiles’ who want to change your culture” [17], and promoting an enriching relationship between the elderly and grandparents with children and young people [18]. Concluding his visit, Francis said: “Thank you; many thanks for your charity, for your faith. Move forward with hope!” [18].

The papal visit to Singapore was the shortest of this four-country apostolic journey. Francis emphasized multiple topics: the need for a

continuing social conscience to promote justice and the common good [19], respect for the dignity of migrant workers [19], assuring freedom for all to practice their beliefs [19], strengthening family life and values [19], serving the fragile men and women in society [20], fostering an integrated society which though ethnically diverse is united in solidarity [20], avoidance of paralyzing fears [21], and respect for the disabilities of others [21]. Francis told Singaporeans: “My wish is that all of you ... will go forward with hope.... God bless you and pray for me as I do for you” [21].

**Conclusion.** Certainly, this lengthy papal journey to the Asia-Pacific region contained numerous insights; it also revealed the generous heart and insightful mind of Pope Francis. We glimpsed the approach of a genuine shepherd, guiding and enriching the flock entrusted to his care. Readers may find this presentation a bit overwhelming with its many topics and insights; however, it is important to recall that Francis presented his profound reflections over a period of twelve full days. Friends, you are invited to explore these treasures and savor the pope’s wise insights—all at your own pace. Take your own personal pilgrimage with Francis! Be assured that your efforts will be richly rewarded with abundant fruit!

### III. Documents: September 2024 Journey of Pope Francis

The published documents of the September 2-13, 2024 visit of Pope Francis to four countries in Asia are included here. The titles of twenty-one items are listed. When quotes are cited in the narrative text, the source will be given by simply employing the number of the document in this list; the full title of the document will *not* be quoted each time the document is cited. This approach will enable a clear identification of the source, without a cumbersome citation process. One should also note that the original published documents do not have numbered paragraphs. Finally, the multiple statistics and data appearing in the first section of this presentation are drawn from numerous publicly available printed and internet sources.

**Indonesia: 1.** Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps. **2.**

Meeting with Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Consecrated Persons, Seminarians and Catechists. **3.** Interreligious Meeting at the Istiqlal Mosque. **4.** Greeting in the Tunnel of Friendship. **5.** Joint Declaration of Istiqlal 2024. Meeting with Beneficiaries from Charitable Organizations. **7.** Homily at Mass in the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium, followed by words of thanksgiving at the conclusion of the Mass.

**Papua New Guinea: 8.** Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps. **9.** Visit to the Children of Street Ministry and Callan Services. **10.** Meeting with the Bishops of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, Priests, Deacons, Consecrated Persons, Seminarians and Catechists. **11.** Homily at Mass in the Sir John Guise Stadium. **12.** Meeting with the Faithful of the Diocese of Vanimo. **13.** Meeting with Young People.

**Timor-Leste: 14.** Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps. **15.** Visit to Children with Disabilities of the Irmãs Alma School. **16.** Meeting with Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Consecrated Persons, Seminarians and Catechists. **17.** Homily at Mass at the Esplanade of Taci Tolu. **18.** Meeting with Young People.

**Singapore: 19.** Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps. **20.** Homily at Mass at the Singapore Sports Hub National Stadium. **21.** Interreligious Meeting with Young People.

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## Pilgrimage Principles as a Cure for Post-Seminary Depression

After walking the Camino de Santiago from 21 June to 22 July 2024, I was left with a deep sense of renewal, but also what I started to experience was post-trail depression. Surprisingly enough, it is a very common experience among long-distance hikers. This experience gave me insights into answering my question after the great experience of walking the Camino: how can I share my pilgrimage reflections with my confreres in a way that they, too, could benefit from?

priests find fulfillment in their ministry by incorporating aspects similar to those found on pilgrim trails like the Camino de Santiago. These trails offer unique experiences of purpose, clear goals, personal identity, community, and a deepened cultural understanding. Drawing from these elements, religious leaders can help new priests adjust and flourish, making their transition smoother and renewing their sense of calling in a meaningful, sustained way.



### Characteristics of Post-Seminary Depression

#### 1. *Loss of Structure and Purpose:*

Like on the trail, where daily walking distances and destinations provide a goal and rhythm, the seminary's structured environment gives young priests clear objectives. Entering parish life, however, they often lose this sense of direction, facing varied, open-ended tasks without the same concrete, supportive framework.

### Post-seminary depression

The phenomenon of post-trail depression made me realize that a similar struggle exists for priests who emerge from the intense structure of seminary into the unstructured reality of parish life. Just as pilgrims may feel lost after the goal-oriented, purposeful days of a journey, priests can feel a void after leaving the structured life of the seminary, facing new demands without the support of close-knit community life or clear daily markers of purpose. Many newly ordained priests are unprepared for this adjustment and can feel overwhelmed, lonely, or even disconnected from their initial sense of mission. My pilgrimage experience gave me insights into ways that religious leaders could help young

#### 2. *Loneliness and Isolation:*

Just as pilgrims rely on fellow hikers for companionship and mutual understanding, seminarians grow close to their peers. Parish life, however, can feel isolating, with few people who understand the unique journey they've been through. This lack of community and shared experience can lead to profound loneliness.

#### 3. *Cultural Shock of Parish Dynamics:*

Coming off a trail means re-engaging with societal norms, which can feel excessive and strange to someone used to simplicity. Similarly, priests may feel unprepared for



navigating parish politics, administrative work, and the expectations of modern parishioners. This reality can seem disconnected from the spiritual ideals that drew them to their vocation.

better understand and engage their parish communities. This fosters a deeper sense of connection and relevance within their roles.

### **Pilgrimage principles as pathways to fulfillment**

Drawing from the Camino experience, religious leaders can help priests find lasting fulfillment in ways that echo “pilgrimage principles”:

#### *1. Establishing Clear Goals and Purpose:*

Setting clear, manageable goals gives new priests direction. Like pilgrims working toward each day’s destination, young priests can benefit from having both short- and long-term goals that provide a sense of accomplishment and progress.

#### *2. Fostering Community and Belonging:*

Just as fellow pilgrims form temporary communities on the trail, creating regular gatherings or support groups for new priests can provide essential camaraderie and emotional support. This sense of belonging can be a lifeline, reminding them that they’re part of a wider, supportive body.

#### *3. Deepening Cultural Understanding:*

Pilgrims encounter diverse cultures and people along their journey. By receiving training in community dynamics and cultural empathy, priests can



#### *4. Renewal Through Pilgrimage and Retreats:*

Incorporating periodic pilgrimages or retreats into ministry life can help priests reconnect with their calling. Much like a pilgrim’s renewed spiritual perspective, these experiences can re-energize priests, reminding them of their deeper mission.

In drawing from pilgrimage lessons, leaders can help young priests in their transition from being a seminarian to working in the parish

and to find sustained meaning in their vocation. Just as trails like the Camino enrich pilgrims through its structured and purposeful support, young priests can flourish by ensuring that they continue to feel connected, fulfilled, and at home in their calling through a similar kind of “pilgrimage principles”.



*Paul B. Steffen, SVD*

## **Europe's Changing Faith Christianity in a Multicultural World**

### **Introduction**

Up to the years of the students' rebellion in the whole Western World between 1968 to 1972, the Catholic and Protestant Mission continued to send huge numbers of missionaries to Africa, Asia, Oceania, and Latin America. Since 1972 the number of men and women from Europe and North America sent to work in non-Western countries decreased, only Poland continued to have a boon of vocation for the priesthood and religious and missionary life until the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

The division of Europe into a Western and Eastern Block however, had a big impact on the people living in the post-war years of Europe. Two different mentalities developed, not only in the society, but also in the churches of the divided East and West.

Thirty-four years later, the different ways of understanding and participating in society and in church life were still being felt, but there is also a new generation emerging who are more influenced by the use of mobile communication and social media with all its ambivalent impact on the younger generation born in the 21st century.

There is no doubt that the process of secularization was accelerated by the cyber world and by the pandemic years in the early 2020s, not only in the Western world, but worldwide.

Wars and natural disaster have pushed more people from the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean to look for security and a better life in Western countries, especially in Europe and the USA. The huge number of migrant and asylum seekers in 2015, most of them having settled in Germany, caused the rising of nationalistic parties in all Western European countries.

The liberation of countries from European colonial powers in the decades after World War II, especially United Kingdom, France, Spain, Belgium, Netherlands and Portugal, always went along with the migration of people from the former colonies to the countries who had previously colonized them. That happened, of course, in different stages according to the years of independence and therefore these countries had much earlier than other European countries, huge numbers of people originating from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America.

Another huge wave of legal immigration towards European countries was caused by the economic recovery of post-war Europe, especially in Germany, being the spearhead for this movement as its economic leadership for an industrial country in Europe.

After World War II, Germany had to integrate 12 million ethnic Germans from former East Germany and also from several Eastern and South-Eastern European countries in to its country where millions of houses were destroyed by the war. While its industrial production was in need of more workers, Germany did not receive them as in previous times from its eastern neighbours, as they were blocked by the Iron Curtain and therefore Germany had to start, in the early 1960s, to call for workers, first from Italy, Spain, Portugal and Yugoslavia, and later on in even bigger numbers from Turkey. France integrated a million Portuguese workers in those years, too.

Scandinavian countries, with their liberal laws under a Social Democratic government, accepted, during the last four decades, many Asylum seekers from all over the world, a lot of them with a Muslim background. The countries of Eastern Europe, liberated from the Soviet Union, had not had prior to 1990, much

experience with people from overseas. Communist East Germany allowed a certain number of workers from other Socialist countries, like Angola, Mozambique and Vietnam, to work in their country. However, they were isolated from its own citizens.

Since 1990, a huge number of Poles also came to work in Germany, the UK and Ireland. Women from Poland, Romania and other smaller countries in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe were in great demand to take care of elderly people and as household workers in nearly all Western European countries, as it was done before for several decades by women from the Philippines, who immigrated to countries worldwide where there was a demand for work.<sup>1</sup>

This brief overview shows the history of migration since 1945 which differs greatly among European nations and internationally. The most recent huge migration wave was/has been caused by the war which Russia started by Russia to conquer and devour the Ukrainian nation. Germany and Poland have taken one million people each, mainly women and children, the biggest/largest number of people from Ukraine, fleeing the war. As a result of these migration waves towards European countries, its population has changed enormously in the last decades. European, especially West European societies are now more intercultural, a mixture of people from various parts of the world. The low birth rate in European countries since the 1970s, has caused the shrinking of its population. This is why many jobs cannot be filled by people from the aging continent, and are therefore sought for from countries beyond Europe. The obstacles to get a work permit for jobs within the health sector or as computer programmer or as any craftsman etc., has been levelled recently by many governments throughout Europe in order to receive more skilled workers in these areas of expertise.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul B. Steffen, "Migrant Ministry: The Kairos for a Pastoral-Missionary Work". *Verbum SVD* 51:3 (2010) 313-340; Id., "The Evangelizing Power of Migrant Ministry. Towards a Theology of Migration", in: Damien Cichy (red.), *Mission of the Church and Human Migration*, Warszawa 2014, 341-351.

## **A new understanding of mission and pastoral ministry**

To comprehend the topic of this article, one must first have a look at the changes in the understanding of *pastoral*, *mission* and *evangelization*.

*It is often not sufficiently understood that the renewal of pastoral ministry and missionary activity, already underway since the 1920s, allows Vatican II and even more so post-Vatican II, practical theology to overcome the dualism which had developed between the pastoral and missionary aspects of the church's life. This artificial dichotomy of putting pastoral ministry and missionary activity into two separate categories, was practiced for centuries in the Catholic church. Historical developments in and outside the Catholic church made this separation obsolete.*<sup>2</sup>

According to the Indian Practical theologian Francis-Vincent Anthony, *pastoral* highlights the aspect of care and guidance that characterizes the work of the church, *evangelization* emphasizes the communicative dimension of this practice, and *mission* emphasizes the mandate inherent in the action of the church.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> P. B. Steffen, "Missiological Education", in: Jacob Kavunkal – Christian Tauchner (eds.), *Mission beyond Ad Gentes. A Symposium*, (Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD 104), Franz Schmitt Verlag, Siegburg 2016, 194-222; Id., "Shift of Mission Paradigm in the Church: A New Way of Learning and Relating": *Abuja Journal of Philosophy and Theology* (APT) 11 (2021) 21 – 35; Id., "Geschichte des Missionsverständnisses. Die Entwicklung des Missionsbegriffs seit dem Zweiten Vatikanum": *Forum Weltkirche* 140, 5 (2021), 12-16; Id., „Selbstverständnis, Schwerpunkte und Perspektiven der Missionswissenschaft in den beiden ersten Jahrzehnten des 21. Jahrhunderts, aufgezeigt am Beispiel der Praktisch-kontextuellen Theologie“. *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* (ZMR) 107 (2023), 41; Id., Practical Missiology or Practical Theology with Missionary Perspective? The Transformation of Missiology before and after Vatican II". *Ishvani Documentation and Mission Digest* 35 (2017) 2, 146-16.

<sup>3</sup> Francis-Vincent Anthony, "Una Pastorale in prospettiva missionaria," in: Istituto di Teologia Pastorale, *Pastorale giovanile* (Leumann, To: Elledici, 2003), 97-109; see Giovanni Colombo, "Pastorale missionaria," in Pontificia Università Urbaniana, *Dizionario di Missiologia* (Bologna: EDB, 1993), 393-397.



## The impact of the newcomers to European society and churches

This is having a tremendous impact on Christianity in Europe. There is no more only a European Christianity found in Europe, but also an Asian, African, Caribbean and Latin American one. They are found mainly in places where the new Europeans settle, like in capitals, industrial regions, and in harbour cities, like Hamburg, Marseille etc. Normally, the first generation of newcomers to Europe want to continue their religious beliefs with people coming from the same country of origin and talking the same language. Culture, Religion, language, food and inherited world views and customs bind them together and give them the strength they need to settle within a new country with a different culture, language, tradition and mentality. But when the children of the first migrant generation are growing up and receiving education in Europe, the need to relate to the traditional citizens of the countries which have become their new home, is getting more urgent. This motivates, for instance, many Filipino Catholics to attend not only the Filipino Sunday Eucharistic community, but to attend as well the Italian, German, Dutch, French, or English, etc. Sunday Mass, conducted in the national language of the county they are living in now.

Churches therefore play an outstanding role integrating the newcomers with their double strategy that allows the migrated Christians to participate in liturgies with people of the same language and ethnic background, and inviting them, at the same time, to join the local parish communities.

The Filipinos in Rome, e.g., have over 53 Sunday Liturgy communities, mainly being organized according to the regional and linguistic background, while coming from their multilingualistic and multi-ethnic home country.

The lack of ordained ministers made the European churches more receptive for ministers, pastors and priests from non-Western countries. That's why we should also mention those "ecclesial" migrants. They often serve their own ethnic communities, and even more the local Christian communities.

Evangelical and Pentecostal Christian communities of Africans, Asians, Caribbean's and Latin Americans are found in all larger towns in Europe. According to their self-image, they believe that they have a special mission to evangelise the people of Europe. That is the reason why their missiologists use for this the term: *Mission in reverse*. Nevertheless, "The terms 'reverse mission' is a contested one" says theologian Dorottya Nagy from the Protestant University of Amsterdam.<sup>4</sup> But there is a gap between their claim of outreaching to secularised Europeans and what they really are doing or are able to do as marginal minorities, and where their type of Christianity is not much spread and liked. The phenomena which happen in non-Western countries, where Evangelical and Pentecostal are very attractive and where they are steadily growing, is not found in secular Europe. This is the reason why a Protestant theologian states:

*Experience has shown that migrant congregations, contrary to their sometimes explicitly missionary claim vis-à-vis their German secularised environment, have hardly any missionary impact on their context.*<sup>5</sup>

In mainland churches, including the Lutheran, Reformed and Catholic one, this term is hardly

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<sup>4</sup> Dorottya Nagy, Mission irreversible: Reflections on secularization and reversed mission in contemporary Europe, Conference: NIM Symposium 2019: *Western secularization and reversed Christian mission*, Nijmegen Institute for Mission Studies, Radboud University Nijmegen, 4 October 2019, p. 4, in: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345978432\\_Mission\\_irreversible\\_Reflections\\_on\\_secularization\\_and\\_reversed\\_mission\\_in\\_contemporary\\_Europe](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345978432_Mission_irreversible_Reflections_on_secularization_and_reversed_mission_in_contemporary_Europe) (accessed 15.05.2023); Cf. Claudia Währisch-Oblau, "Mission in Reverse: Whose Image in the Mirror?": *Anvil a journal of theology and mission*, 18:4 (2001), 261-267; Oseias da Silva, "Reverse mission in the Western context": *HOLINESS*, 1:2 (2015) 231-244; Andreas Heuser, "Umkehrmission - Vom Abgesang eines Mythos im Treppenhaus migratorischer Ökumene": *Interkulturelle Theologie*, 42:1 (2016), 25-54; Karel A. Steenbrink, Jonah: From a prophetic mission in reverse to inter-religious dialogue: *International Review of Mission*, 91 (2002), 360, 41-51; Anthony J. Gittins, Reflections from the edge : Mission-in-reverse and missiological research: *Missiology*, 21:1(1993), 21-29.

<sup>5</sup> Ulrich Dehn, „Migration im Kontext: Motivgeschichtliche und diasporalthoretische Perspektiven“. *Interkulturelle Theologie*, 37.2/3 (2011), 155.

found. Indian or African priests working in European parishes normally do not understand their service as missionary work, but just as a pastoral ministry. They understand themselves therefore not as missionaries, but as intercultural church workers.

### **Faith lived in a secular context**

A big challenge for the Europeans is the rapid changing society and its cultures and religions. The French theologian Bernard Ugeux gives us in his analysis on European Post-Enlightenment societies an interesting insight:

*It has been said often enough: The West, whose level of development is envied by others, is experiencing an ever-increasing feeling of vulnerability. This is linked to the acceleration of societal and technological change and the ensuing ethical questions; to the increasingly complex nature of economic, political and scientific problems encountered; to the cultural and religious diversity of the West that some people find threatening to their own identity; to the deregulation of institutions such as church, state or education; to the inability of society to offer a collective project other than the valorisation of progress as understood by the mentality of the market.<sup>6</sup>*

The same author treats the critique of relevant parts of modern society on the Christian faith as represented and practiced by the churches: “Many of those who are searching for meaning often have an axe to grind with Judeo-Christianity, in particular with the institutional church. They are more open to the spiritualities or therapies proposed by the “New Age movement” or to traditions that come from the Far-East.

They also sometimes tend to be aggressive towards Christianity, criticizing it as too dogmatic, moralistic, as having disdain for both the physical and emotional life, to/too prescriptive in the way believers have to take, and too great a distance between the official discourse of the church and believers’ real lives.

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<sup>6</sup> Bernard Ugeux, “Questions which new spiritualities pose to evangelization in Europe”. *International Review of Mission*, 95, 378/379, July/October (2006), 328.

Whether or not these criticisms are justified, they have to be heard.”<sup>7</sup> Then Bernard Ugeux, previously rector of the *Université Catholique* of Toulouse, raises the question that really matters: “Why do all these people go elsewhere? Why do they feel disappointed and suspicious towards Christianity (especially when they are in the midst of difficulties)?”

The number of unchurched citizens has increased all over Europe. The highest percentage is found in the Netherlands, Czech Republic and East Germany and in all the larger cities like London, Berlin, Hamburg and Paris. The number of practicing Christians has dropped to under 15 percent, often even under 8 percent and in cities the percentage is even lower. Practicing Christians are becoming in most parts of Europe a minority, with some exceptions, like in Poland and Slovakia.

The lack of ordained, celibate-living, ministers in nearly all European countries, with some exceptions, push the bishops to create even greater Pastoral Units, combining up to 10 former parishes into one pastoral unit. Meanwhile they merge several legally erected parishes into one new parish.

The diocese of Trier decided to make out its formerly over 900 parishes into only 34 parishes.<sup>8</sup> These new parishes and their ministers have to take care of huge areas. They often even used parish ecclesiology by *communio of communities* (EG 28), even under Pope Francis, which has never been put into practise in the Catholic churches in Europe. They struggle to find solutions with little success, as Bernhard Spielberg, the Pastoral theologian of Freiburg University, has proved.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 325.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Paul B. Steffen, “The Pastoral Mission of the Churches in Europe: Towards contextualized and participative Christian communities in a secular and plural Western society”. *Word and Worship* 53.1-2 (2020), 72-100.

<sup>9</sup> Bernhard Spielberg, *Kann Kirche noch Gemeinde sein? Praxis, Probleme und Perspektiven der Kirche vor Ort*, Würzburg, Echter, 2008; cf. on Spielberg in: P. B. Steffen, *Centres of Formation and Evangelizing Ministry: Pastoral Institutes in Oceania and Africa*, (Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD - 102), F. Schmitt Verlag, Siegburg 2014, 174-175.

The French bishops wrote in November 1996 a letter to the French Catholics *Proposer la foi dans la société actuelle* (Propose faith in today's society). The letter shows how advanced the awareness and reflection, based on concrete experience and understanding of the real situation in the Catholic communities, is among the bishops.

**The letter states:**

*Faced with the temptation to resentment, which leads to seeking and denouncing those responsible for this crisis, we wish to reaffirm what the report on the proposition of faith has already expressed: we accept without hesitation to situate ourselves, as Catholics, in the cultural and institutional context of today, marked in particular by the emergence of individualism and the principle of secularism. We refuse any nostalgia for past eras when the principle of authority seemed to prevail indisputably. We do not dream of an impossible return to what was called Christendom.*<sup>10</sup>

The French Bishops wrote to French Catholics in 1996:

*To you, too, who are interested in ... the future of the Christian faith in our secular society, even if you do not share this faith, we propose this letter, desiring that it helps to facilitate real dialogue and fair discussion. Because our intention is primarily educational and pastoral, we are addressing personal freedoms, not to impose what is already acquired, but to encourage the pursuit of the process of discernment that has already been started. That is why this letter includes three approaches that seem to us inseparable from each other and in which we want to engage with all our local churches, in the diversity of groups and organizations that constitute them.*

- First of all, to face the real situation of lived faith: to understand our situation as Catholics in today's society.
- The next step is to highlight the strengths and points of the experience as they emerge from this effort of understanding: Go to the heart of the mystery of Faith.

- Finally, it is about designing projects so that the Gospel of Christ is effectively lived and proclaimed in and by the Church: To form a Church that proposes the faith.”<sup>11</sup>

The letter of the French bishops was well received by theologians, church leaders and interested Christians in all neighbouring countries since its language and contents addressed situations in a new way and animated people in most European countries to find new ways of witnessing the faith in Christ in a secular context.

The new visions of documents from the papal magisterium and from the National Bishops conferences, like the ones from Italy *Il volto missionario delle parrocchie in un mondo che cambia, Nota pastorale dell’Episcopato italiano* (The missionary face of parishes in a changing world. Pastoral Note of the Italian Episcopate) from 2004, are inspiring.

The Italian bishops were concerned about the institution of the parish in their country. Many saw the parish in a crisis. Nevertheless, parishes still play, in Italian society and in the church, a comparatively important role. If the vision of the above-mentioned document would be lived out, it would need to develop a participating church in Italy which is Kingdom and not priest centred.

The German bishops published, in 2015, the document *Gemeinsam Kirche sein* with the subtitle *Wort der deutschen Bischöfe zur Erneuerung der Pastoral* (Being Church Together. Word of the German Bishops to Renew Pastoral Ministry). The document stresses that “through baptism, every Christian is called” to live out their baptismal vocation in the Church and that “the many charisms are the richness of the Church”.<sup>12</sup>

All those documents show how serious the bishops in Europe take the challenges in church and society. They indicate new ways of living the mission to evangelise the churches in Europe and how much the bishops were ready

<sup>10</sup> Lettre aux catholiques de France : « Proposer la foi dans la société actuelle », Lourdes, 9.11.1996.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>„Gemeinsam Kirche sein“. Wort der deutschen Bischöfe zur Erneuerung der Pastoral, 1. August 2015.



to develop an adequate pastoral and practical theology, a theology of ministry, not only for ordained ministers but even more so for all members of the Church, for all God's people.

It is difficult to say how much those episcopal letters have made an impact on the life of the churches and the Christians as such. For many Christians these letters remain highly idealistic and far away from the problems they have as ordinary believers.

### **Is a paradigm change needed for the churches in Europe?**

Karl Rahner<sup>13</sup> and before him Josef Andreas Jungmann<sup>14</sup>, both have taught at the Jesuit

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<sup>13</sup> The Italian theologian R. Gibellini wrote "Rahner's genius lies in having introduced a new method in theology, where the datum of faith is not simply handed down and illustrated in its traditional content, but is put in correspondence with man's experience of himself; it is not just a matter of knowing the faith, but of understanding life. To the scholastic method, then in vogue in schools of theology, which proceeds from the top of formulations and operates by proposing doctrines, indoctrinating as it were, he prefers the anthropological method, which proceeds from the bottom and operates a correspondence between life and truth, between experience and concept. Because of this interpretation, Rahner's theology represents the most vigorous contribution within Catholic theology to what has been called the 'anthropological turn' in theology." (my translation), in: <https://www.queriniana.it/blog/la-teologia-di-karl-rahner-per-un-alleanza-tra-missione-e-ragione-29> (accessed 19.05.2023)

<sup>14</sup> Josef A. Jungmann SJ 1889-1975. Born in Austria in 1889, Jungmann spent most of his career as professor of Pastoral Theology at the University of Innsbruck, where he taught both catechetics and liturgy. His name is synonymous with the "kerygmatic renewal" in Catholic catechetics. His career and contribution blur the lines of distinction between liturgical studies and catechetics because he promoted an interest in early church practices that integrated worship and catechesis. His programmatic work on the kerygmatic renewal in catechetics was first published in 1936 under the title *Die Frohbotschaft und unsere Glaubensverkündigung* (The Good News and Our Proclamation of the Faith). Rome demanded the withdrawal of his book. After Vatican II it was translated into English. While Jungmann is well known for this work in catechetics, his name is also associated with the renewal of the Eucharistic liturgy at Vatican Council II (1962-65). His historical study of the Eucharistic liturgy, the Mass of the Roman Rite, made him a natural choice as a peritus (expert) at Vatican II and a member of the commission that had principal responsibility for the composition of the document on the renewed Catholic Eucharistic liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*,

Faculty of Innsbruck, Tyrol in Austria, put the human being and his faith experience next to the Holy Scripture and ecclesial tradition, into the centre of their theology; that's why this was called the anthropological turn in modern theology.

This anthropological turn in theology made a great impact in the way Catechetics and Religious instruction is given nowadays and how faith is lived in a secular and plural context. Looking at the literature for those fields from 1950 and 1960 and comparing the content in the books published in the last four decades, the changes are outstanding and irreversible. Christian faith has found its way into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and that faith is now mostly taught and transmitted into a deductive but primarily in to an inductive way.

David J. Bosch *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, first published in 1991 and translated into many languages, has become the missiological standard work in almost all Christian churches, especially for Christians engaged in teaching and practising the transforming power of mission.

*Bosch attempts with the aid of the idea of paradigm shifts... to demonstrate the extent to which the understanding and practice of mission have changed over almost twenty centuries of Christian missionary history. In some instances, the transformation was so profound and far-reaching that the historian has difficulty to recognize any similarities between the different missionary models. Bosch is convinced 'that this process of transformation has not yet come to an end (and will, in fact, never come to an end), and that we are ourselves, at the moment, in the midst of one of the most important shifts in the understanding and practice of the Christian mission.'*<sup>15</sup>

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promulgated by the Second Vatican Council in 1964.

<sup>15</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), xv., quoted in: P. B. Steffen, "From Maximum illud to Evangelii gaudium to Trends in Contemporary Theology and Praxis of Mission": *The Abuja Journal of Philosophy and Theology* (APT) 10 (2020), 1-23.

A paradigm shift is often seen, or still in the need to be seen, as a whole of the transmitting the faith and in the finding of new ways to witness the Good News in secular societies. This touches also all ministries and ministers of the churches. The US-American lay theologian, Edward Hahnenberg, remarks: “Ministry begins when one life touches another. It is a way of relating a relationship.” Hahnenberg offers us “a relational approach of understanding the diverse modes of service active in the church”.<sup>16</sup>

The Austrian Practical theologian Paul M. Zulehner

*points out, that behind the central issue of mission, there is the question of the Church's vision, by which Pope Francis is guided in his pontificate. It is characterised by the renouncement of a moralizing approach in favour of healing and a therapeutic approach on the part of the Church in which Pope Francis refers to a hierarchy of truth and of compassion as the guiding principles in pastoral care. Zulehner draws attention to an ecclesiological realignment, which he sees in a decentralisation of the Church and also in raising of the status of the local churches by even granting a local magisterium in the Apostolic Exhortation. With this in mind, Paul M. Zulehner remarks, that the Church must be freed of its structural, middleclass-focused self-aspiration, for “the Church will only be healed by finding its way to the people on the periphery of life.”<sup>17</sup>*

According to Pope Francis “we are not only living in a time of changes but are experiencing a true epochal shift, marked by a wide-ranging “anthropological” and “environmental crisis”. Indeed, we daily see “signs that things are now reaching a breaking point, due to the rapid pace of change and degradation; these are in large-scale evident natural disasters as well as social and even financial crises.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Edward Hahnenberg, *Ministries. A Relational Approach* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 4.

<sup>17</sup> Klaus Krämer – Klaus Vellguth, “Preface”, in *Evangelii Gaudium. Voices of the Universal Church*, (One World Theology – 7), ed. Klaus Krämer – Klaus Vellguth, (Quezon City, Claretian Publications, Philippines, 2015): X.

<sup>18</sup> “Foreword”, in: Pope Francis, *Apostolic Constitution*

For Mariano Delgado, diversity is anchored and united in Christ. “If we take the anthropology of the Council seriously, this means... the change from a deductive theology to an inductive one, “which truly shares and perceives as *locus theologicus* the joy and hope, sorrow and anguish of man today, especially of the poor and afflicted of all kinds” (GS 1). It also means the change from a teaching church to a listening, dialogical church.”<sup>19</sup>

In previous times diversity and plurality were seen as a threat to church unity:

*Because many Christians find this diversity problematic, they have taken measures for uniformity, which unfortunately is often mistaken as uninformed. However, if we admit that the principle of incarnation leads to the acceptance of diversity, in accordance to God's plan the world is and should be diverse (also religiously), then a rethinking of the role of the bearer of God's message is more than necessary. Above all, it requires a thorough transformation of missionary practice and the mentality that surrounds it.”<sup>20</sup>*

### **Integrating migrants and refugees: The new mission of the churches in Europe**

In Germany, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference published, in 2021, a joint statement with the Council of the Protestant Church in Germany in cooperation with the Council of Christian Churches in Germany *Shaping Migration in a Humane Manner*.<sup>21</sup>

In the Preface to the English translation we read: *When the Joint Statement of the churches in*

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*Veritatis Gaudium on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties*, Vatican City 2017, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Mariano Delgado, „Der Mensch als Träger der Evangelisierung“. *Verbum SVD* 60:4 (2019), 322; cf. P. B. Steffen, “The Contribution of Pastoral Institutes for an Inculturated and Contextualized Ministry”. *Asia Pacific Mission Studies* 2.2 (2020), 32-58.

<sup>20</sup> Stan Grodz, “The Sender—The Message—The Messenger”. *Verbum SVD* 60:4 (2019) 337.

<sup>21</sup> *Shaping Migration in a Humane Manner*. Joint Statement by the German Bishops’ Conference and the Council of the Protestant Church in Germany in cooperation with the Council of Christian Churches in Germany, Published by Protestant Church in Germany & Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference, Hannover – Bonn, 21.10.2021

*Germany on migration was published in October 2021, hardly anyone expected that a major war would break out in our European neighbourhood just a few months later. The Russian attack on Ukraine is bringing immeasurable suffering to the civilian population and has led to the largest, fastest-growing movement of refugees on our continent since the end of World War II. At the same time, it is upsetting the foundations of peaceful coexistence in Europe and worldwide.*<sup>22</sup>

The huge migration wave to Germany was responded by a huge wave of labour for the refugees. The churches embraced this new mission with great dedication, especially at grassroot level in parishes and neighbourhoods and families.

*Since the beginning of the war, the churches have been working vigorously to provide necessary humanitarian assistance and to facilitate a humane reception for refugees. There is a powerful commitment at all levels of church life: in congregations, parishes and dioceses, in religious orders and associations, in welfare organisations and relief agencies. Well-proven structures from previous years are being reactivated and expanded, new initiatives are emerging – often in good partnership with local authorities or civil society actors.*<sup>23</sup>

The churches' argument is obvious: "Against the background of current troubles, the churches' firm commitment to a just migration and refugee policy, to overcoming global injustice, and to a sustainable peace order is more necessary than ever."<sup>24</sup>

The Christian churches are today among the strongest advocates for the right of migrants and refugees not only in Germany, but in most European countries.

Pope Francis himself is the outstanding advocate and promoter for creating a welcoming culture for the migrants and defender of their human rights.

This is clear to be seen since the migration wave has also helped right wing parties to gain more followers in many European countries, which is often experienced as a threat to European democracies.

The joint declaration of the Christian churches in Germany argues very differently as the right-wing parties do. For the churches "Migration affects all people: those who set out voluntarily or are forced to leave their homes, as well as those who have never had the experience of living in a foreign country."<sup>25</sup>

Their main argument is:

*Shaping migration in a humane manner" – this is the guiding principle by which the churches in Germany are defining their new Joint Statement on Migration. Europe and the wider world have experienced significant changes since the churches released their first Joint Statement on Migration in 1997.*<sup>26</sup>

The Covid-19 pandemic made the engagement for people, forced to leave their countries, even more important. Therefore, the joint statement argues:

*The Covid-19 pandemic led to hitherto inconceivable restrictions on human mobility, exacerbating or at least highlighting the more challenging aspects of migration. Questions of health protection, educational equity, the promotion of families, good working conditions and adequate housing are highly relevant to all of society at present. But under the conditions of the pandemic, they have a particularly existential significance for migrants, especially for those seeking protection or for people with a precarious status.*<sup>27</sup>

In 2019, the German Bishops published the document *Evangelisierung und Globalisierung*, a thought-provoking reflection on *Evangelization and globalization*.<sup>28</sup> In this document the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> *Evangelisierung und Globalisierung*, Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, Bonn 2019. (Die deutschen Bischöfe - 106)



German Bishops intended to find answers to three questions that move them:

1. How can the gospel of Jesus Christ be “translated” and understood linguistically and culturally in today's context?
2. What are the challenges of globalization and secularization in today's contexts?
3. How can the faith community of the church develop missionary perspectives and concretise options?

**The German bishops point on/to the process of globalisation and pluralisation:**

*Globalisation is closely linked to the processes of secularisation and pluralisation that have become a defining feature of many societies, not only in the countries of the West but worldwide. These processes, which have also been partly promoted by Christianity itself, bring with them many challenges for societies as well as for religions. Secularisation and pluralisation are structural features of modern societies, through which the sole interpretative sovereignty of religion has been broken.*<sup>29</sup>

Since mission had become very unpopular among many Christians and even theologians, the German bishop's/Bishops felt the need to advocate a new understanding of mission and evangelization work at home and abroad. “The topic of the new ‘mission word’ of the German Bishops' conference ties in with the bishops' words *Time for sowing. Being a Missionary Church* (2000) and *All Nations His Salvation. The Mission of the World Church* (2004), which in turn endeavoured to sharpen the understanding of *mission* and *evangelisation* among Catholics in Germany.”<sup>30</sup>

All those episcopal documents show that the bishops did not shy away from the task to convince the faithful of the work of evangelization in our secular context and time.

**Concluding remarks**

This paper intends to show how the local churches (dioceses) in European countries like France, Italy and Germany are looking for new ways to overcome the crisis of Christians,

especially the Catholic churches on the old continent.

Europe's Mediterranean coastlands came very early into contact with the Christian faith; Central and Northern European countries, already since the fourth century, if they had been part of the Roman Empire; in other parts of Europe the Good News reached the people on the following centuries (5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century); the latest countries where the Baltic states were Christianity was embraced in the Middle Ages (13<sup>th</sup> century).

Christianity had become an integral part of the European nations and peoples. Normally, they became Christians just by transmitting the Christian faith from one generation to the next. This type of Christianity in feudal societies is called *Christendom* or *Cristianità* in Italian or *Christenheit* in German. Typical of this kind of Christianity is that the Christian faith was acquired naturally through their socialization. People were, as it can be called, Christians by birth.

Here lies in a secular and plural society the biggest problem for the European churches. The secularisation process has brought down the model of Christendom, which was in power for thousands of years.

Today's Europeans have to choose to accept the Christian faith, even if they come from Christian families; it is no longer automatically guaranteed that they will become Christians. Thus, transmission of the Christian faith, is the most challenging task of Christian communities. Only when this happens will the Christian communities have a future.

We are today in a state of social upheaval. *What is at stake is the inner cohesiveness of the Catholic Church and, indeed, of all Christian denominations. Europe's Christian milieu has largely dissolved and has given way to a vague kind of believing fellowship. The great social framework has been secularized, no longer holding on to any particular Christian belief, but becoming liberalized and focused on the individual. Church authority is no longer considered to be subject to the critical judgment*

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 6.

of believers. While the democratic-liberal state does not directly interfere with Church affairs, it does provide parameters for pluralistic thinking. The consequence of this is a steady loss of church membership, a mental alienation from church customs and regulations, an increasingly anti-church or ecclesiastically indifferent public and often frightening ignorance of the faith in the younger generations.<sup>31</sup>

To live out the pastoral mission and ministry in a time of transition and crisis depends, to a great extent, on encouraging lively Christian communities, where the baptized Christians are receiving formation and where they are nurtured to carry out their mission in the Church and in the secular and plural society around them. “The millennium-old institution of the parish, as the most common Christian communities, has undergone various stages of crisis and transformation since the time of industrialization and urbanization, especially in the churches of the Western World” in an increasingly secular, individualistic and plural society, where religion is more and more restricted to the private sphere of life.<sup>32</sup> But a crisis<sup>33</sup> is not only a threat, but also a chance to renew and allow God’s Spirit to generate the church every day again, “a Church that each day ‘begets’ the Church herself”, as Pope John Paul II wrote in 1992 in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 57. This strongly underlines the pneumatological and historical aspect of all ecclesial activity and the need for Ekklesiogenesis in human history as an act of faith and a product of faith which creates life and community.

According to Vatican II the Spirit ‘permits the church to keep the freshness of her youth. Constantly he renews her’ (LG 4.1; cf. 9.3)

<sup>31</sup>Joachim Piepke, “Arnold Janssen – An Inspiration for today”. *Verbum SVD* 59:3 (2018) 307.

<sup>32</sup> Paul B. Steffen, “Nurturing Human and Christian Communities”, in Lazar, Thanuzraj Stanislaus, SVD/vanThanh Nguyen (eds.), *SVD Missionary Discipleship in Glocal Contexts*, Siegburg 2018, 318; cf. P. Steffen, “Practical Missiology or Practical Theology with Missionary Perspective? The Transformation of Missiology before and after Vatican II”. *Ishvani Documentation and Mission Digest* 35 (2017) 2, 146-160.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001, 2-3.

On the basis of his own encounter with very different social forms of church and Christian communities, the Austrian pastoral/practical theologian Franz Weber has written a credo that expresses his belief in the future viability and hope of the Church:

*Yes, the Church is moving! Church is possible under very different cultural, social and biographical conditions, even under the most impractical circumstances, because God makes them possible, because his Spirit gives rise to church as communion, as community in the form of an experiential communio, and gives to people spiritual gifts which they use - as in New Testament time - to build communities. Church lives and will remain because she lives from the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus. She is not static, unchanging, but a historical reality, which is subject to the law of life of the wheat grain. Here external social forms must pass away again and again, so that new life can break through which brings fruit for the people. The church has not survived on its way through time because she was unchangeable but as capable of transformation.*<sup>34</sup>

Human and Christian life is first of all relational; Christian ministry is relational. The Christians and their church communities in Europe have to find new ways for such a relational life among people from different origins. They have to



<sup>34</sup> Franz Weber, „Ja, Kirche geht... Ein persönliches und pastoral-theologisches Bekenntnis zur Dynamik lokaler Kirchenentwicklung“, in: C. Hennecke et al. (eds.), *Kirche geht... Die Dynamik lokaler Kirchenentwicklung*, Würzburg 2008, 17.

create new networks of relating to each other, so that the new citizens originating from Africa, Asia, Caribbean and America can contribute to building up evangelising church communities and a society being more just, which in turn will be then a blessing for Europe.

Christianity in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Europe. Evangelisation and a new way of being church in a plural and secular context, in: *Called to be a Blessing. Christian Mission as Becoming a Blessing Today*, edited by Jose K. Guwahati, India 2023, 249-271.

Paul Ricœur can encourage us to go ahead with hope and confidence:

*If you want to change people's conduct, you need to challenge their imagination.*<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Ricœur quoted by John M. Prior, *Insights from Eco-Theology*, in Lazar, Thanuzraj Stanislaus, SVD/vanThanh Nguyen (eds.), *SVD Missionary Discipleship in Glocal Contexts*, Siegburg 2018, 176; cf. Stephen Bevans and Katalina Tahaafe-Williams in *Contextual Theologies for the Twenty-First Century*, Eugene, OR 2011, 43.



James H. Kroeger, MM

## Anniversary Greetings to SEDOS

The Maryknoll Community (Fathers, Brothers, and Sisters) extends heartfelt greetings and congratulations to the SEDOS community on the sixtieth anniversary of its foundation. These felicitations, expressed by Father Jim Kroeger, MM, are extended to all the SEDOS associates, whether in Rome or around the world. SEDOS has done a remarkable job of promoting mission renewal and engagement in the Vatican II era. Congratulations!

Maryknoll has tried to be involved and make a contribution over the six decades of the existence of SEDOS. Numerous examples could be cited. In this short message, I choose to focus on the Maryknoll-Orbis Books-SEDOS fruitful relationship. Specifically, I will cite three pivotal publications that continue to contribute to mission animation today.

Father Joseph R. Lang, MM, along with Sister Mary Mott, FMM, was the co-organizer of the 1981 SEDOS Research Seminar. Together they edited *Mission in Dialogue*, published by Orbis

Books at Maryknoll, New York, in 1982.

*Trends in Mission: Toward the Third Millennium* was co-edited by Father William Jenkinson, CSSp (SEDOS Director) and Sister Helene O’Sullivan, MM (Associate SEDOS Director). This volume was published by Orbis Books in 1991; it was reviewed in *Missiology* in 1992 (20:4), pages 527-528.

A third pivotal book in the SEDOS-Orbis collaboration is *New Trends in Mission: The Emerging Future*; it was edited by SEDOS Director Peter Baekelmans, CICM and Sister Marie Hélène Robert, OLA. It appeared from Orbis Books in 2022; an extensive review was published in the *SEDOS Bulletin* in 2023 (55:3-4), pages 37-41.

Taken together, these three books form an “encyclopedia of mission,” reaching a total of over 1,500 pages. They stand as a testimony to the “mission impact” of SEDOS in the six decades of its existence. Although many more items could be mentioned, particularly the annual SEDOS seminars, these items testify to the precious work that SEDOS continues to accomplish. Heartfelt congratulations to all in SEDOS on its sixtieth anniversary! Keep up the very fine work! Together we are serving God’s mission.



Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie, MCCJ

## Congratulatory Message

*“Alleluia! Praise God in his holy place, praise him in the heavenly vault of his power, praise him for his mighty deeds, praise him for all his greatness.*

*Praise him with fanfare of trumpet, praise him with harp and lyre,*

*praise him with tambourines and dancing,*

*praise him with strings and pipes,*

*praise him with the clamour of cymbals, praise him with triumphant cymbals,*

*Let everything that breathes praise Yahweh.*

*Alleluia!” (Psalm 150)*

Dear Sr Mary Barron OLA, President of SEDOS, and the whole Executive Committee. HAPPY 60th Birthday to SEDOS

Dear Fr. John Paul Herman SVD, Executive Director of SEDOS, greetings and thank you for inviting me to send this congratulatory message on the occasion of the 60th Birthday of SEDOS. I extend my greetings to the members of the SEDOS Team and all those who volunteer to help at and work with SEDOS.

We thank God for the past 60 years in the life of SEDOS since its foundation in the middle of the Second Vatican Council when nine missionary societies began to meet in an informal way in Rome, and since 1964, thanks be to the generosity of the SVD, SEDOS has its Office and Secretariat at the SVD College in Rome.

We thank God for all the achievements and service of SEDOS in promoting reflection on the MISSION. We all thank those who have served SEDOS in the past 60 years and through SEDOS they enriched many missionary and Religious Communities in Rome through the interaction with various Dicasteries, Institutions, Organizations and Universities and in the whole world.

Just at the gate of the Jubilee Year of 2025 in which we are called to reflect on how we are pilgrims of hope, SEDOS continues to bring new ideas and fresh enthusiasm to a tradition of reflection on the mission and service on behalf of the Missionary Church. This dedication, which has spanned six decades, continues to build on past accomplishments.

I personally am a witness of what the Comboni Missionaries in general and I in particular have personally received as a blessing and enrichment through the various activities organised by SEDOS. May God continue to bless through SEDOS, our missionary and synodal church, to continue its presence and service by announcing the Gospel, witnessing to Christ and serving humanity in our world today.



*“I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself. As John Paul II once said to the Bishops of Oceania: “All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion” (EG, n. 27).*

## SEDOS SURVEY 2024

### *Consolidated REPORT – RAPPORT Consolidé*

This report consolidates two reports received. One concerns the answers given by 25 people and the other with the answers of 12 people. / Ce rapport a mis ensemble deux rapports, celui des réponses d'un groupe de 25 et celui des réponses d'un groupe de 12 personnes.

#### **1. Do you feel sufficiently informed about SEDOS and its activities? / Vous sentez-vous suffisamment informé(e) de SEDOS et de ses activités ?**

(1) Yes / oui : 84%= 21/25 + 100%=12/12. Total : **33/37 (90%)**.

(2) Somewhat yes / un peu : 08%= 02/25 + ... . Total: **02/37 (05%)**.

(3) Not really / par vraiment : 08%= 02/25 + ... . Total: **02/37 (05%)**.

#### **2. SEDOS offers 2 one-day seminars per year (in spring and in autumn). / SEDOS organise 2 séminaires d'un jour par, au printemps et en automne.**

(1) The topics are relevant for my congregation. / Je trouve les matières pertinentes pour ma Congrégation.

80%= 20/25 + 91.7%= 11/12 Total : **31/37 (90%)**.

(2) Somewhat relevant. / Un peu.

08%= 02/25 + .... Total : **03/37 (05%)**.

(3) The topics are not really relevant. / Les matières ne sont pas vraiment pertinentes.

08%= 02/25 + 08.3%= 01/12 Total : **03/37 (05%)**

- Frequency and length of time of these seminars. Que pensez-vous de la fréquence et de la durée de ces séminaires.

i. 2 seminars/year : 52%=13/25 + 75%=09/12 Total : **22/37 (60%)**

ii. 1 seminar/year : 24%= 06/25 + 25%= 03/12

iii. 2 full days/year : 08%=02/24

iv. 2 half a day/year : .... = 01/24 + .....

v. 1 full day/year : 08%= 02/24 + ... .

vi. 1 half a day/year : ... = 01/24 + ... .

#### **4. The SEDOS Residential Seminar is held once a year (usually in May or June) with a duration of 5 days (Monday to Friday), in a venue outside Rome (Ariccia or Nemi). / Le séminaire résidentiel de SEDOS a lieu une fois par an (généralement en mai ou en juin) et dure 5 jours (du lundi au vendredi) dans un lieu situé hors de Rome (Ariccia ou Nemi).**

- Your opinion about the duration. / Votre avis à propos de sa durée.

(1) 5 days are adequate, 5 jours sont suffisants.

56%= 14/25 + 66.7%= 08/12 Total : 14 + 8 = **22/37 (60%)**

(2) To be shortened and to last 2 or 3 days. / Le séminaire résidentiel pourrait être plus court et durer 2 ou 3 jours.

44%= 11/25 + 33.3%= 04/12 Total: 11 + 4 = **15/37 (40%)**



- Your opinion about the venue. / Votre opinion à propos du lieu.

(1) Within Rome (allowing day time participation and making the fee more affordable. / C'est bien que le séminaire se tienne à Rome, ce qui permettrait une participation en journée, ce qui rendrait les frais d'inscription plus abordables.

$$64\% = 16/25 + 66\% = 08/12 \quad \text{Total : } 16 + 8 = \mathbf{24/37 (65\%)}$$

(2) Outside Rome (creating atmosphere of learning, sharing and total involvement). / C'est bien que le séminaire se tienne en dehors de Rome, créant ainsi une atmosphère d'étude, de partage et de totale participation.

$$36\% = 09/25 + 33\% = 04/12 \quad \text{Total : } 9 + 4 = \mathbf{13/37 (35\%)}$$

- Your opinion about the topics of the Residential Seminars. / Votre opinion à propos des sujets/thèmes des séminaires résidentiels.

(1) The topics are relevant for my congregation. / Les sujets/thèmes intéressent ma congrégation.

$$100\% = 25/25 + 100\% = 12/12 \quad \text{Total : } 25 + 12 = \mathbf{37/37 (100\%)}$$

(2) The topics are not relevant for my congregation. / Les sujets/thèmes n'intéressent pas ma congrégation.

**4. SEDOS Bulletin publishes the talks and reflections of the SEDOS Seminars and makes them available to all its members. Moreover it publishes other timely topics. / Le Bulletin SEDOS publie les conférences et réflexions données des séminaires de SEDOS et les met à la disposition de tous ses membres. De plus il publie d'autres sujets d'actualité. What is your opinion of the SEDOS bulletin ? / Comment trouvez-vous le bulletin de SEDOS ?**

(1) The Bulletin is well received and widely read in our congregation. / Le bulletin est bien reçu et largement lu dans notre congrégation.

$$44\% = 11/25 + 33\% = 04/12 \quad \text{Total: } 11 + 4 = \mathbf{15/37 (40\%)}$$

(2) The Bulletin is of some interest to us. / Le bulletin nous intéresse un peu.

$$44\% = 11/25 + 50\% = 06/12 \quad \text{Total: } 11 + 6 = \mathbf{17/37 (45\%)}$$

(3) Our Congregation does not make much use of the Bulletin. / Notre congrégation n'utilise pas beaucoup le bulletin.

$$12\% = 03/25 + 16.7\% = 02/12 \quad \text{Total: } 3 + 2 = \mathbf{5/37 (15\%)}$$

*SEDOS Bulletin is published six times a year. Le bulletin SEDOS paraît six fois par an.*

(1) Keep the current number of six issues per year. / Garder le nombre de six numéros par an.

$$40\% = 10/25 + 25\% = 03/12 \quad \text{Total: } 10 + 3 = \mathbf{13/37 (35\%)}$$

(2) 3 or 4 issues per year would be sufficient. / 3 ou 4 numéros par an serait suffisant.

$$60\% = 15/25 + 75\% = 09/12 \quad \text{Total : } 15 + 9 = \mathbf{24/37 (65\%)}$$

**5. The SEDOS Website [www.sedosmission.org](http://www.sedosmission.org) is a forum and source of information for the membership and everyone interested in the mission of SEDOS / Le site Web SEDOS [www.sedosmission.org](http://www.sedosmission.org) est un forum et une source d'informations pour les membres et pour tous ceux qui s'intéressent à la mission de SEDOS.**

How effective is the SEDOS Website? / Le site Web de SEDOS est-il efficace?

(1) I find the website informative and user-friendly. / Je trouve le site web informatif et convivial.

$$84\% = 21/25 + 66.7\% = 08/12 \quad \text{Total : } 21 + 8 = \mathbf{29/37 (78\%)}$$

(2) The website lacks relevant content. / Le site Web manque de contenu.

$$12\% = 03/25 + 16.7\% = 02/12 \quad \text{Total : } 3 + 2 = \mathbf{5/37 (15\%)}$$

(3) At times the website and its function are not easily accessible. Parfois, le site web et sa fonction ne sont pas facilement accessibles.

$$04\% = 01/25 + 16.7\% = 02/12 \quad \text{Total : } 1 + 2 = \mathbf{3/37 (7\%)}$$

*6. How can SEDOS fulfill its mission, serve you better, and involve your congregation more? Comment SEDOS peut-il remplir sa mission, mieux vous server et engager davantage votre congrégation ? We welcome any further comments and suggestions you would like to make. Nous accueillons avec Plaisir tous les commentaires et suggestions que vous souhaiteriez faire.*

I am not sure if the topics discussed either in the seminars or printed in the bulletin are burning issues that are specific enough, contemporary and of interest to other congregations. Maybe it is important to check if other centers or universities in Rome offer similar conferences or programs. Could we collaborate with them? Should we review our vision/mission based on the current landscape?

I appreciate the seminars but we have not benefited because the information is often communicated late. It would be better that dates are given at the start of the year for better planning and participation. Thank you.

Highlighting reflections from different contexts, opening up missionary reflection on the contemporary world, offering qualified situational analyses, and emphasizing the option for the poor and for other in their otherness (dialogue).

Consider webinars on pertinent topics for Congregational members.

So many conferences and sessions are organized in Rome by UISG and JPIC. It would be good if SEDOS coordinates with UISG/USG and JPIC Rome while organizing SEDOS two one-day seminars.

BE CAREFUL. Question about the Venue, I think it is not well made. French and English do not correspond well.

Since we are new as members of SEDOS we need to have more experience to be able to give constructive comments. However, I congratulate you for your perseverance of 60 years in this important mission.

We congratulate SEDOS with its 60 years. More years to come!

I am satisfied.

Nothing more to suggest.

Nothing to propose for now.

Thank you.

I am happy with SEDOS work.

I want to thank you for what you have done by the Committee.

I believe I had signed up with my email to receive communications from SEDOS. I have not been receiving any. The other general council members have alerted me about communications they have received. An example is this survey and upcoming Christmas gathering.

I find its mission is very much relevant to the current scenario of the World and Church. It's very active and effective.

If possible, send to me personally. Thank you for all you do.

Merci pour les formations données et le partage de certaines réflexions. Bonne préparation aux différentes célébrations.

I am new to SEDOS so it's difficult for me to make any comments.

SEDOS is in the right direction. We have sought to keep up with the changes and challenges of our time. We have a prophetic, renewed and bold perspective. We seek to follow the spirit of the Papacy of Francis. There is hope for the growth and improvement of SEDOS; SEDOS is a good source of information for the members of the Congregation.

### **Other points about seminars and the website.**

Since our Generalate is not in Rome, it will not be possible to participate in a one-day seminar.

Le site Web manque de contenu pertinent.

Je trouve le site Web informatif and convivial.

I don't use the website, life moving too quickly!

Parfois le site Web et sa fonction ne sont pas facilement accessibles.

The information shared in the Website could be updated regularly. Information on various courses and scholarship provisions could be communicated to the congregations.

*7. SEDOS welcomes contributions to the Bulletin from its members. We would be very glad to receive the names of some of your members who could contribute articles and reflections. / SEDOS accueille favorablement les contributions de ses membres au Bulletin. Nous serions très heureux de recevoir les noms de certains de vos membres qui voudraient contribuer des articles et des réflexions.*

I will communicate with the sisters and in case I give names.

I could nominate possible contributors if themes and/or topics are sent out at least six months if not one year before the deadline of submission of the article.

OK. We will ask the members.

Sr. Kathlem McGarvey; Sr. Anne Marie Kouassi; Sr. Marie Hélène Robert;

We do not have a name to share, but we will keep your request into consideration.

I will think more about this and get back to you.

Je n'ai pas d'idée pour le moment.

Fr. Peter Baekelmans, CICM ([peter.baekelmans@gmail.com](mailto:peter.baekelmans@gmail.com)) and Fr. John Mallare, CICM ([frjohnamdg@gmail.com](mailto:frjohnamdg@gmail.com)).





# SPRING SEMINAR 2025

*On the occasion of the 150 years of the Foundation of the Society of the Divine Word, an International Conference on Mission is organized in Rome. This is organized in collaboration with SEDOS*

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE  
150TH FOUNDING ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE WORD

*Missio Dei*  
IN  
TODAY'S  
WORLD

HEALING WOUNDS,  
CHALLENGED BY  
POSTMODERNITY,  
LEARNING FROM  
CULTURES,  
INSPIRED BY  
RELIGIONS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON MISSION  
27 - 29 MARCH 2025



WITNESSING TO THE LIGHT  
FROM EVERYWHERE FOR EVERYONE

PONTIFICAL GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY, ROME  
Matteo Ricci Conference Center  
Piazza della Pilotta, 4

## Theme

*Missio Dei in Today's World  
Healing Wounds, Challenged by  
Postmodernity,  
Learning from Cultures, Inspired by  
Religions*

*Date: 27, 28, 29 March, 2025 –*

*Three days from 08.45 to 12.45 hrs.*

*Place: Piazza della Pilotta 4,  
Matteo Ricci Conference Centre,  
Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome*

*- ONLY IN PRESENCE-  
no online sessions.*

*Translation in four languages*

*English,  
Italian,  
French,  
Spanish*



## **The Events of SEDOS 2025**

**SEDOS Residential Seminar  
16 – 20 June 2025**

**Theme: “MISSIONARY INSTITUTES  
AND SYNODALITY: CHARISM, PROPHECY  
AND WITNESS.”**

**Venue: Centro Ad Gentes, Via dei Laghi bis,  
52, 00074 Nemi, RM Italia**

**SEDOS AUTUMN SEMINAR  
23 October 2025**

**Theme: From Ad Gentes to Inter Gentes:  
Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of  
‘Ad Gentes: on the Mission  
Activity of the Church’**

**Venue: Uisg, Piazza di Ponte Sant’Angelo,  
28,00186 Roma**