



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NATIONAL DIRECTORS AND COLLABORATORS
OF THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES**

Friday, 14 February 1999

Your Eminence,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

Dear National Directors,

Collaborators of the Pontifical Mission Societies!

1. I joyfully extend my cordial greetings to each of you, starting with Cardinal Jozef Tomko, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, whom I thank for his words expressing your sentiments. I greet Archbishop Charles A. Schleck, Adjunct Secretary of the Congregation and President of the Pontifical Mission Societies; the General Secretaries of the Societies and especially you, dear National Directors who personally bear the burden of missionary education and cooperation in your countries. I extend my affectionate greetings to all your collaborators, who, spurred by Gospel zeal, are devoted to proclaiming the heavenly Father's love to every person in every walk of life.

2. In welcoming you, I would like to embrace all who work, pray and suffer for the Church's evangelizing mission. They are many: from the apostolic personnel who have dedicated their whole lives to this mission and continue to be the greatest example of devotion to the Gospel cause, to people who are committed in their various living situations, perhaps in silence and anonymity, to mission promotion and cooperation.

Convey my grateful greetings to them and encourage them always to support the mission "*ad gentes*", which is essential for proclaiming the Gospel to those who still do not know Christ, the only Saviour of the human race. I am thinking especially of people who, amid difficulties of every sort, persevere faithfully wherever the Spirit has led them, sometimes even to the sacrifice of their own lives. Let us thank God for their generous witness, knowing that "*sanguis martyrum, semen christianorum*". In offering their lives without reserve, these brothers and sisters manifest God the Father's boundless and eternal love to a world that is frequently sceptical about authentic values.

3. Our meeting is taking place shortly before the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, a celebration of the salvation which the Father has offered all mankind. This prompts us spontaneously to recall once again how "the mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion. As the second millennium after Christ's coming draws to an end, an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 1), in conformity with the will of the Father who desires "all men to be saved" (1 Tm 2:4).

Your meeting, whose theme this year is: "*Missionary cooperation in the Year 2000: promotion, vocations, personnel, spiritual and material aid*", was prepared by holding appropriate Pastoral Days. During these days you have studied the Instruction on missionary cooperation *Cooperatio missionalis*, published last 1 October. This document, reaffirming the permanent validity of the mission *ad gentes*, offers some practical norms for giving better direction to the initiatives of the Pontifical Mission Societies and of other agencies, coordinated by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

4. The whole Church has "received the mandate to carry on the universal plan of salvation which springs, from all eternity, from the 'source of love', that is, from the charity of God the Father" (*Cooperatio missionalis*, n. 1). The Apostle Paul says that he worships God in his spirit, proclaiming "the Gospel of his Son" (Rom 1:9). In fact, the proclamation of the unconditional love of God for all people is a task that springs from the knowledge of its absolute salvific value. It is only by acknowledging this love and entrusting himself to it that man can live according to truth (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 19, 1). This explains why "*missionary evangelization ... is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity*" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 2). This love of the Father, revealed by and in the Son made man, spurs the Church to mission: to cooperate with her Christians receive the Holy Spirit, "the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission ... whose action is pre-eminent in the mission 'ad gentes'" (ibid., n. 21).

5. Members of the Superior Council of the Pontifical Mission Societies, you and your collaborators have a primary responsibility for missionary promotion and formation among the People of God. This is why I encourage you to continue this task with renewed commitment, as you have been doing with great generosity. This is shown by, among other things, the continuous increase in your central solidarity fund, consisting mostly of small contributions from many people - the "poor widows" of the Gospel - who offer what they themselves need. This enables the Churches which lack material resources or sufficient apostolic personnel to carry out their pastoral work.

Your task, as directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies, and your dedication are therefore indispensable. The goals asked of you consist in "informing and forming the People of God to share in the Church's universal mission, promoting vocations *ad gentes* and encouraging cooperation in the work of evangelization" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 83), with a truly universal spirit, aware that the Pontifical Mission Societies have the whole world as their horizon. Their universality is the most important and characteristic quality of the Societies, which in this way share in the

Pope's concern for all the Churches (cf. 2 Cor 11:28).

I entrust you and your service to the loving assistance of Mary, Mother of the Church and Star of evangelization. I assure you of a constant remembrance in my prayer and cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to each of you, gladly extending it to all your collaborators in the work of missionary promotion.