

# Propaganda Fide: Promoting the Church's mission to the ends of the earth

The Dicasteries of the Holy See told from the inside: history, objectives and "mission statement," how the structures that support the Pope's ministry work. The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples is featured in this interview with the Prefect, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle.

**By Amedeo Lomonaco - Vatican City**

The history of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples goes back four centuries and responds to the timeless mandate to reach out to what Pope Francis calls the human and existential "peripheries." The Congregation's work encompasses the world, where mission "ad gentes" requires vocations, labor, intelligence, and structures. The work of the dicastery headed by **Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle**, is supported by a budget of 25 million euros (official figure for 2021) and is at the same time detailed and complex. He gives us background and details about its activities, projects, and objectives.



Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples - Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle

The Conciliar Decree *Ad Gentes* affirms that the Church "is by its nature missionary" and that the work of evangelization is a "fundamental duty of the people of God." What kind of responsibility and commitment does this mean for the dicastery responsible for "the propagation of the faith" in mission territories?

The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (C.E.P.) has as its specific purpose missionary activity; that is, the evangelization of peoples and the establishment of churches within the newly evangelized peoples.

From the beginning (1622) when the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* was founded, up to today, the popes have maintained unchanged the initial idea of having "a center of outreach, direction and coordination" [*Redemptories' Mission*, 75] for missionary action, in which the *Mission and Gentes* was the unifying criterion of competence. This vision has been maintained, albeit with some modifications, even in the various reforms of the Roman Curia (cfr. *Pastor Bonus*, art. 85 e RM 75).

The C.E.P. also has the task of assisting the Bishop of Rome in promoting missionary cooperation, so that it may become ever more evident and effective that the whole Church by its very nature is missionary and that the entire People of God may become aware of its missionary commitment, collaborating in it with prayer, with the witness of its life and with financial support. In this perspective, the activities of the C.E.P. are especially services to the young churches.

The C.E.P. has territorial competence. It takes on in its territories various responsibilities that are assumed by individual Roman Dicasteries. Its competencies concern the establishment (erection, modification, suppression) and provision of particular churches (the appointment of bishops and their equivalents), as well as the exercise of the episcopal office in the mission territories. The Dicastery also deals with matters concerning the formation of diocesan clergy (especially in seminaries and the appointment of rectors), the ministry of priests, religious and consecrated life, the apostolate of catechists and the life of the lay faithful. The competencies of the Dicastery have been expanded through some "special faculties" concerning the discipline of the clergy and consecrated life in Church mission areas.



The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples - Dicastery entrance hall

The goal of missionary activity is evangelization and the "plantatio Ecclesiae" (AG 6). The mission of Christ the Redeemer, entrusted to the Church, is still far from its completion. The territorial structures of the Church (Archdioceses, Dioceses, Military Ordinariates, Apostolic Vicariates, Apostolic Prefectures, Missions "sui iuris", Apostolic Administrations) have the purpose of responding to the needs and requirements of an effective operation of the provision of pastoral services. It is the responsibility of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples to provide for its territories to carry out this task in implementing the plans for the creation of Ecclesiastical Circumscriptions. The Dicastery also helps the Pope to ensure the presence of the Ordinary of each Ecclesiastical Circumscription. Currently, the number of Ecclesiastical Circumscriptions (Archdioceses, Dioceses, Military Ordinariates, Apostolic Vicariates, Apostolic Prefectures, Missions "sui iuris", Apostolic Administrations) dependent on the Dicastery is 1,119. The local churches entrusted to the Congregation are located in Africa (516), Asia (484), America (76) and Oceania (46), (cf. Statistics 2020, Fides Agency).

The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, within the limits of its competence, contributes to the common effort of the universal Church in the formation of future priests. It seeks to encourage clerical, religious and lay missionary vocations and provides for the adequate distribution of missionaries. In the territories subject to the Church, it also covers the formation of

secular clergy, of religious and consecrated life, and of catechists. It promotes the creation of seminaries and supervises their operation. It also has responsibility to study and approve the Ratio Nationalis elaborated by the individual episcopal conferences of its territories.

Today, according to data from the Pontifical Society of St. Peter the Apostle, there are 800 seminaries, divided into 222 major seminaries with a total of 23,138 major seminarians (68% in Africa, 28% in Asia, 3% in America, and 1% in Oceania), accompanied by about 1,749 formators; 120 propaedeutic seminaries, with 6,003 propaedeutic seminarians (88% in Africa, 12% in Asia, 1% in America, and 0% in Oceania), accompanied by about 411 formators; 439 minor seminaries with a total of 50,239 minor seminarians (75% in Africa, 20% in Asia, 3% in America, and 2% in Asia). In total there are 76,367 seminarians, accompanied by 2,160 formators.



The Cgregation for the Evangelization of Peoples - a meeting presided over by Card. Tagle

In addition to Seminaries, the C.E.P. has pontifical colleges in Rome for the formation of clergy suited to its mission in the world: the Pontifical Urbaniana College (1627) for the formation of seminarians, the Pontifical College of St. Peter the Apostle (1946) and the Pontifical College of St. Paul the Apostle (1965) for the formation of priests from mission countries, St. Joseph's College, at the Urbaniana University that housed catechists in the past, now provides accommodations for priests (rectors, formators and seminary teachers) who participate in the

semester-long refresher programs at the Pontifical Urbaniana University. The Mater Ecclesiae College at Castelgandolfo is reserved for women religious.

The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples has jurisdiction over the institutes of consecrated life established in mission territories or working there, as well as societies of apostolic life created to support the missions. The Congregation has this competence over all that refers to them as missionaries, whether individually or in community.

The Congregation provides formation of catechists in the same way as it does for the clergy and promotes the apostolate of the laity and, in general, all that concerns the Christian life of the laity as such.

**Seen from a more "lay" perspective, the reality of the Congregation often evokes the image of a powerful administrative machine headed by a prefect who, not by chance, is defined in the media as "the red pope". Can you give us some information about the personnel and structure of the Dicastery?**

The human resources of the Congregation, in addition to the Cardinal Prefect, the Secretary, the Assistant Secretary and the Undersecretary, are made up of three Office Managers, including two for the Secretariat, one for the Administration, two managers, respectively for the Historical Archives and the Modern Archives, and 60 employees (25 in the Secretariat, 20 in the Administration, 8 in the Historical Archives, two in the Modern Archives and five auxiliary personnel).

### **Secretarial Section**

The Secretarial Section is composed of 22 Officials who are priests from various countries in Africa (Ghana, DR Congo, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania), Europe (Italy, Malta, Poland), Asia (India, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Korea, China), and America (United States). There are also four women religious, two consecrated laypeople, and six lay employees serving in various areas.



Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples - inside the Dicastery

The work is distributed according to geographical areas and language abilities. Each day the Congregation receives various reports from the apostolic nuncios, episcopal conferences, dioceses, and various agencies. They describe the situation regarding Church-State relations, evangelization, pastoral care, inculturation, formation, administration, profile of churches, provisions for bishops, and special situations. All the issues are studied with reports prepared by our officials. Some are dealt with, depending on their nature or urgency, by the daily meeting of Superiors, by the Juridical Commission, *collatis consiliis* (when necessary) with the Secretariat of State, by the weekly meeting, by ordinary meetings (with members of the Dicastery present in Rome, Cardinals and Bishops, to discuss provisions or other matters concerning the missionary Church), by the periodic plenary assemblies and, finally, in the private audiences of the Prefect with the Holy Father.

### **Administrative Section**

The management of the patrimony is carried out by the Administrative Office of the Congregation directed by a Head of Office. The Administrative Office is composed of lay collaborators who work in the accounting, real estate, rental, technical and legal sectors.

### **Archives Section**

The Historical Archives, consisting of around 11 million documents in 14,000 volumes, includes authentic historical treasures dating from 1622 to 1965. It is staffed by eight people. The Modern Archives keeps the files of the last 50 years.



Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples - the archives

### **Consultants and Advisory Bodies**

In addition, the C.E.P. employs various Consultors, Study Commissions, and collaborates with the institutes of consecrated life through the aforementioned Council called the "Council of 18".

## **Offices dependent on the C.E.P. at the service of the missions**

### **The Pontifical Urbaniana University**

The University has four faculties: Philosophy, Theology, Canon Law and Missiology. The Higher Institute of Spirituality and Mission Catechesis is tied to the Faculty of Missiology, as well as the Specialized Institute of the History of Evangelization. The Urbaniana University has launched the "Affiliated Net" project, which allows various institutes, especially major seminaries in various countries, to be affiliated (with the possibility of obtaining academic degrees from the same), aggregated, sponsored, and linked to each other through a telematic network. Today, 104 institutes (in Philosophy, Theology, Canon Law and Missiology) from over 40 countries are affiliated.

In addition, in 1975 the Center for Chinese Studies was established, dedicated to academic research on historical, socio-cultural and religious aspects of China, and the Cardinal Newman Study Center, dedicated to the University's distinguished alumnus. The Urbaniana University Press (UUP) is also at the service of today's mission of the Congregation and, as the university press of the Pontifical Urbaniana University, it operates in a globalized world, both intercultural and interreligious.

### **Domus Urbaniana Foundation (2005) and Urban College (1627)**

The Domus Urbaniana Foundation is autonomous, with its own legal, canonical and civil personality, based in Vatican City. The purpose of the Foundation is to offer hospitality to clerics who are sent to Rome from mission territories for an appropriate period of university formation. In effect, the Foundation takes care of the campus of the Urban College, and of the service personnel. The choice of the educational team is up to the C.E.P.

The Urban College was founded in 1627 and moved to the Janiculum in 1927. Today, it serves as a Major Seminary, hosting and training about 160 seminarians from about thirty dioceses.



The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples- the Chapel



### **Domus Missionalis Foundation (2005) and four Colleges**

The President, appointed by the Prefect, oversees the four Colleges: the Pontifical College of St. Peter the Apostle (1946) and the Pontifical College of St. Paul the Apostle (1965). Also included are Mater Ecclesiae College (1970), transferred to Castel Gandolfo, and St. Joseph College for priests-professors who participate in the refresher programs every six months.

### **The International Center for Missionary Animation (CIAM)**

The International Center for Missionary Animation Blessed P. P. Manna located on the Janiculum Hill, represents a house of missionary formation at the service of the four Pontifical Mission Societies and the C.E.P. It promotes numerous training courses for priests, religious and laity, and for members of the national and diocesan directorates of the Pontifical Missionary Societies.

### **Fides Agency**

Among the top press agencies in the world, Fides aims to make the missions known through the media in order to encourage missionary animation and stimulate cooperation in missionary work through vocational promotion, spiritual, and material aid.



The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples - a meeting

**The breadth of the Dicastery's areas of competence is also associated with the vastness of its material patrimony - especially real estate - on which a certain sensationalistic journalism is sometimes concentrated. Can you clarify the terms of this relationship and the criteria for managing the assets owned by the Congregation?**

### **DESTINATION OF THE C.E.P.'S ASSETS**

The Congregation generates the financial means to achieve its institutional goals exclusively from the management of its patrimony (movable and immovable property).

The administrative autonomy of the Dicastery goes back to the very foundation of the Congregation in 1622 and is regulated by the Apostolic Constitution Pastor Bonus of the Roman Curia, which states in art. 92: “Through a special office, the Congregation administers its own funds and other resources destined for the missions, with full accountability to the Prefecture for the Economic Affairs of the Holy See.”

Administrative autonomy began when Gregory XV instituted Propaganda Fide and made it independent from other offices of the Roman Curia by providing it with financial resources to guarantee its perpetuity. This reflected a twofold reason: one of a moral character; the other of a practical order. In fact, according to a principle of justice, valid for all time, the goods and contributions offered to the missions must serve solely and exclusively the purpose established by the will of the donor. Respect for this will obliges the recipient in conscience and determines the destination of the contributions. Therefore, the autonomous administration guarantees that the funds destined for the missions are used exclusively for that purpose. This intuition of the founder that is already found in the papal bull "Inscrutabili divinae Providentiae arcano" was confirmed by the Second Vatican Council, and has continued uninterrupted by all popes.

The institutional goal to which all the work of the Dicastery is directed, as well as that of the Administration: to manage with professionalism and rigor the patrimony that is the fruit of the generosity of those who have donated their goods to promote missionary activity throughout the world.

# 2021 BUDGET APOSTOLIC MISSION



ENTITIES (COMPARABLE BASIS)

M€	Entities' Budget (*)	2019 Actual	Variance B2021 vs C2019
Ordinary operating income	190,6	242,3	(51,7)
External donations	52,0	55,8	(3,8)
Related entities' contributions	37,0	43,4	(6,4)
Real Estate Management	75,0	98,8	(23,8)
Commercial	17,1	33,1	(16,0)
Services	9,5	11,2	(1,7)
Ordinary operating expenses	284,9	310,4	(25,5)
Personnel costs	139,5	137,0	2,5
Administrative and general costs	115,5	140,0	(24,4)
Donations and contributions granted	23,0	24,6	(1,6)
Depreciation	6,8	8,8	(2,0)
<b>Operating result</b>	<b>(94,3)</b>	<b>(68,1)</b>	<b>(26,2)</b>
Financial revenue	22,5	64,6	(42,1)
Financial expenses	8,2	7,6	0,6
<b>Financial result</b>	<b>14,3</b>	<b>57,0</b>	<b>(42,7)</b>
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>(80,0)</b>	<b>(11,1)</b>	<b>(68,9)</b>

(\*) exclude: "Fondo Obolo" and "Fondi Iniziative"

**A CULTURAL CHANGE IS A LONG-TERM PROCESS, THAT TAKES YEARS TO BE UNDERSTOOD AND IMPLEMENTED. BUT THE 2021 BUDGET HAS DEFINITELY BEEN A HEALTHY EXERCISE OF PRIORITIZATION.**

*For comparison purposes, and given that 2020 actual figures are still in the finalization process, 2019 will be used as the reference point.*

2021 Holy See Mission Budget

The Congregation must give due account of this management to the Secretariat for the Economy. Since the financial statements of the Congregation are part of the consolidated financial statements of the Holy See, the Secretariat for the Economy, through the Office of the Auditor General, proceeds to carry out the routine checks, in compliance with auditing principles, and then reports to the Council for the Economy.

The management of real estate assets, therefore, serves to promote missionary activity throughout the world and to guarantee the functioning of the Pontifical Urbaniana University and the colleges associated with it. Each year the University is attended by students from all over the world, some of whom reside in the Colleges that are part of the Congregation.

The financial resources made available by the Congregation allow students, both residents and non-residents, to continue with their studies.

## MANAGEMENT OF PROPERTIES

Two fundamental elements constitute the general criteria for the management of the Congregation's real estate assets:

1. First of all, the principle that property and contributions offered to the missions must serve solely and exclusively for the purpose set by the wishes of the donor. Respect for these wishes

obliges in conscience the recipients of the donation and determines their destination. The autonomous administration ensures that the funds given to the missions are used exclusively for that purpose.

This principle is codified in Canon 1300, where it states that the wills of the faithful who donate or leave their possessions for pious causes, whether by an act between living persons or by an act valid in the event of death, once legitimately accepted, must be scrupulously fulfilled, including with regard to the manner of administration and disbursement of the goods.

In substance, the donor's intention is to use the goods for the missions and not generically for the charitable works of the Holy See.

2. Secondly, the administration of the Dicastery's immovable and movable patrimony is managed by precise protocols, approved by the Secretariat for the Economy, which establish all the phases of the rental and technical-maintenance management of the properties; the same protocol is followed for movable investments.



The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples - one of the rooms

**Who manages the real estate patrimony**

The management of the patrimony is carried out by the Administrative Office of the Congregation, originally directed by the Pro-Secretary for the Economy and subsequently by the Delegate and, in his absence, by the Head of the Administrative Office who reports directly to the Cardinal Prefect.

The Administrative Office is composed of lay collaborators, employees of the Congregation, who work in accounting, real estate, leasing, technical, agricultural, and legal areas.

The ordinary administration of the real estate assets consists in the technical and rental management, the maintenance and income generation of the assets.

This task is carried out by a team consisting of two employees in the rental sector, three in the technical sector, one for the legal part, one for condominium management. This staff follows the directives of the Prefect under the supervision of the Head of Office. The contribution of the accounting sector and the Cashier's Office are instrumental but fundamental activities for property management and administrative and fiscal obligations. It is obvious that property management is an activity that involves the entire administrative office; that it is carried out under the supervision and coordination of the Head of Office who oversees the execution of procedures and cross-checks between the various sectors.

### **How the real estate patrimony is managed**

The leasing of real estate is regulated by a "Protocol" approved by the Cardinal Prefect that establishes all the phases of the leasing and technical/maintenance management of the properties. This management is based on the search for fair profitability and the maintenance and enhancement of the patrimony. These primary objectives can be reconsidered when there are objective situations that make them secondary.

### **“Le Tenute” Agricultural Company**

With regard to the management of the agricultural estates of Coazzo and Tor Tignosa, in the municipalities of Rome and Pomezia, following the positive conclusion of the authorization process, on April 29, 2014, the agricultural company "Le Tenute Srl" was established, with a single shareholder, wholly owned by the Congregation. In this way, the Congregation has equipped itself

with the most suitable legal instrument to directly manage current and future activities and be in the position to facilitate access to public contributions and other possible facilities.

The management of the farm allows the use of the most suitable instrument for carrying out a commercial activity, to be able to access benefits in the field of agriculture, and to have a subject legally distinct from the Congregation.



At work in the archives

**The collection for the missions and the fundraising entrusted to the Pontifical Missionary Works are traditional initiatives that make it possible to count on new resources. The faithful who contribute to them have the right to know how their donations are used. What instruments do you have to guarantee transparency and ethical management in view of the "costs" of evangelization?**

The Pontifical Mission Societies are a worldwide network of prayer, sacrifice and charity at the service of the Holy Father in his care for the proclamation of the Gospel and for helping the young churches in territories dependent on the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. They have as their charism and purpose the missionary animation of all the people of God, the awareness of the duty to participate in the activity of evangelization, as well as the realization of missionary cooperation at the universal level. They involve all sectors of the Church and all age groups: adults,

young people, seminarians, clergy and religious. Their importance derives from the fact that they operate as a large network that is international, national (they are works placed under the responsibility of episcopal conferences), diocesan and parish. They are Pontifical Works because they are the instrument of the Pope to promote the missions.

The first “work”, that of the Propagation of the Faith was founded by the Venerable Pauline Marie Jaricot, a French laywoman born July 22, 1799. She is in the process of being beatified because a miracle through her intercession was approved by the Holy See last May. The Holy Childhood promotes children/youth who help their peers discover and live their faith in Christ by praying daily for all the children of the world. Then there is the Society of St. Peter the Apostle which supports the formation of clergy, religious, seminarians and novices in mission territories. The Missionary Union takes care of the permanent apostolic formation of priests, religious and lay people. The work of the Pontifical Mission Societies begins with prayer and missionary animation carried out by the National Directors in 120 countries and areas of the world and continues with formation in mission outreach.

The offerings are the fruit of prayer, animation, and formation. They help the missionaries and the young churches to realize the necessities for evangelization. Support given to the apostolic service is above all assured through prayer and sacrifice. Material charity is intended to help the particular church in mission territories to carry out its task of evangelization and responds to the responsibility of cooperation to which every baptized person is called. It is not a question of giving money to build or organize something. Rather, the offerings that are given are a symbol of the participation of the universal Church in the apostolic project of a particular Church. It is a reality of the local Church and the universal Church working in harmony. In fact, the members of a particular Church in mission territories also participate in prayers and offerings for the mission. In this sense, every Catholic participates in every project carried out in the mission territories. The Pontifical Mission Societies promote and foster missionary work everywhere in the world, especially in the mission areas dependent on the C.E.P. The offerings are only the last step and a part of the "missionary budget" promoted by the Societies.

The universal solidarity fund gives financial assistance to the local churches in mission territories, the eastern churches, and Latin America, so that they can carry out their pastoral and evangelization activities.

The distribution of offerings and some projects carried out thanks to the sacrifice of donors are published on the website: [www.ppoomm.va](http://www.ppoomm.va). Obviously, each national office publishes on its local site its own activities and pastoral projects that are funded. In addition, the bishops send to the headquarters of the Pontifical Mission Societies and International Secretariats (PP.OO.MM) in Rome reports on the projects carried out, documented with photos and videos. These reports are also sent to the national directors who, in turn, bring them to the attention of benefactors. Anyone who participates in the life and outreach of the works through prayer and offerings can see the fruits of their sacrifices.

It should be noted that there are five Roman colleges supported by the offerings of the Pontifical Works of Propaganda Fide (POPF) where hundreds of priests and nuns, coming from mission countries, come to Rome to pursue higher studies, close to the See of St. Peter. Thanks to the support of the Pontifical Mission Societies, every year the Congregation offers around 500 scholarships for seminarians, priests and religious from mission territories and young Churches that depend on the Dicastery.

It is a profound and firm commitment to the work of formation that responds to the expectations and needs of local churches in Africa, Asia, Oceania, and Latin America. In addition, about one hundred emeritus bishops in mission territories receive annual assistance from the PP.OO.MM.

In conclusion, through the activity of the PP.OO.MM., the Dicastery fosters and encourages missionary animation and formation so that the missionary spirit is strengthened in the local churches and in the universal Church.





Cardinal Tagle inside the Dicastery

**If "mission" is the focal point of the Congregation's work, even more so must it be in the management of the economic resources that support its apostolic service. In this sense, can the "mission statement" of the Dicastery - which combines accounting data and pastoral objectives - become a virtuous example for all other Vatican entities?**

The C.E.P. covers its financial needs through the management of its movable and immovable property. Availing itself also of the contribution of the Pontifical Mission Societies, the Dicastery supports the pastoral activities of the local churches through ordinary annual or extraordinary subsidies destined for the realization of specific projects.

The formation of clergy, seminarians, religious (if any) of diocesan right and catechists is an important sector in which the Dicastery is involved. In addition to the maintenance of the Congregation, the Dicastery's movable and immovable patrimony is used primarily to finance the Pontifical Urbaniana University, which is the only exclusively missionary university in the world. Through the University, the Dicastery promotes research in mission theology, spirituality, and pastoral work (Pastor Bonus art. 86).

The Congregation makes available and financially supports a network of colleges in Rome and Castel Gandolfo that operate at the service of the mission activity of young churches, assisting also with their human, spiritual, cultural, and theological qualifications.

Today the network includes the Pontifical Urbaniana College "de Propaganda Fide" for seminarians (with about 160 places); the Pontifical College of St. Peter the Apostle for priests (180 places); the Pontifical College of St. Paul the Apostle for priests (190 places); and the Pontifical College Mater Ecclesiae for women religious, in Castel Gandolfo (120 places). Finally, there is the Saint Joseph Missionary College (for about 25 places), which promotes throughout the year in collaboration with the Pontifical Urbaniana University semi-annual refresher courses for formators (rectors and vice rectors) and permanent professors at institutes and seminaries in mission territories.

The International Center for Missionary Animation (CIAM) organizes seminars, conferences, and spiritual retreats for those involved in mission activity. The scholarship granted to Seminarians, Priests or Sisters studying in Rome covers the costs of food, lodging, tuition, and insurance for a period of three to five years.



Inside the Dicastery

Seminaries in the territories dependent on the Dicastery, including 104 Institutes affiliated with the Urbaniana University, receive pedagogical support through the University's faculty, and economic support through the Pontifical Society of St. Peter the Apostle (POSPA), which provides the ordinary subsidy for their operation. For example, for the 2019-2020 academic year, POSPA offered an ordinary subsidy to 781 seminaries, with a total of 79,380 seminarians, covering about 67% of ordinary expenses. And financial aid was given to 1,200 novitiates with a total of 7,845 novices, including 2,801 young men and 5,044 young women.

The support of the Dicastery also includes the formation of catechists and committed lay people. An ordinary subsidy is granted annually to dioceses for catechists, while a study grant is given to those who continue catechetical training in the various institutes in mission territories.

In the field of mission cooperation, the Dicastery, through the Pontifical Mission Societies, oversees many projects for the Church and for worship, as well as numerous educational, health and many other development projects. According to 2020 data, there are about 29,287 kindergartens, 60,099 elementary school and 26,634 secondary schools. In the field of health care, there are about 2,675 hospitals, 7,985 dispensaries and 526 leprosariums.

The last Plenary Session of the Congregation held November 30-December 3, 2015, on the theme: "Ecclesial Conscience and *Missio Ad Gentes*. The Service of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples to the Young Churches 50 years after the Conciliar Document *Ad Gentes*," marked an opportunity to focus on the fruits of mission. The growth and vitality of the young churches, which have achieved greater ecclesial and missionary awareness, was noted. Most of them have become self-sufficient at the pastoral and governmental levels, while at the economic level there are valid initiatives for self-financing of pastoral needs. A notable development has come about in recent years. The number of baptized has increased in many parts of the mission territories (cf. Statistics "Fides" 2020), especially in Africa and Asia. At present, almost all the bishops and priests are autochthonous. Priestly, religious, and lay vocations are multiplying. Numerous young men and women are entering missionary congregations. The young churches, with their problems and defects, but with their resources of priestly and religious vocations and

enthusiastic adherence to the Gospel, have become missionary protagonists for the old churches, especially in Europe, with an exchange of persons and works from one continent to another. The churches that have sprung up in mission territories are helping to give new vigor to western communities by assuming pastoral responsibilities in parishes, religious institutes, and movements.

Furthermore, the Plenary Assembly revealed that the Pontifical Mission Societies are a beautiful pastoral opportunity, which awakens in the faithful a sense of mission and revives in them a sense of faith. The Pontifical Mission outreach is discovering its role in the service of the local churches for mission formation. For example, in several countries the outreach of the Holy Childhood has become an instrument of ordinary pastoral care for children. The Pontifical Missionary Union is doing a great job of theological reflection on themes regarding mission. The Pontifical Society of St. Peter the Apostle is helping seminaries in various countries in the drafting of a ratio nationalis for the formation of clergy, as provided for in the Ratio Fundamentalis published by the Congregation for the Clergy in December 2016.

The current dynamism and growth of the young churches has led to a certain change regarding their relationship with the C.E.P. While it continues its traditional role (cf. AG 29 and Pastor Bonus, 85), and continues to ensure the link and communion with the Holy See, the service of the C.E.P. consists more and more in accompanying and supporting the local churches, which have the diocesan bishops and local episcopal conferences as the first responsible persons who define their pastoral orientations and objectives.

**It was precisely to the Pontifical Mission Societies that the Pope recently addressed a message recalling the centrality of the action of the Spirit in the work of evangelization and warning against the temptations of functionalism, elitism and self-referentiality. What are the challenges and priorities that await you in order to respond concretely to the Pope's requests?**

Missionary animation is a primary task that the C.E.P. must carry out through the Pontifical Mission Societies to awaken a consciousness for mission. Missionary formation must occupy a

central place in diocesan or parish pastoral work so that mission may be a true paradigm of the life and action of the particular churches. For this reason, the national director of the PP.OO.MM has an eminent role in bringing the sense of mission to each diocese and, through the diocesan institutions, to all the baptized. We cannot cancel or minimize the missionary mandate. Every church, every portion of the Church, every Christian community and every Christian is by its very nature missionary. "Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!" (Redemptoris Missio, n.2). Prayer for missions is also essential. Pope Francis insistently repeats that the subject of evangelization is the Holy Spirit. We are only His collaborators. The mission is His work. It is useless to become anxious. No need to organize us, no need to shout. We do not need any gimmicks or stratagems. It is only necessary to ask to be able to have today the experience that makes you say, "we have decided, the Holy Spirit and us". Therefore, for mission we must pray all together as the People of God. It is the duty of the bishop, even before carrying out any missionary activity. Another important challenge is to promote the openness of the local churches to the universal Church and to the world. Jesus told us, "You are all brothers" (Mt 23:8). On the other hand, in some mission territories there are often excesses of nationalism, tribalism or casteism, which are worrying for the proclamation of the Gospel. Against such deviations, we need to commit ourselves to building a world that is more open, more fraternal and in solidarity. It is necessary, as Pope Francis recommends,

“to expand our circle of friends, to reach those who, even though they are close to me, I do not naturally consider a part of my circle of interests” (cf. Encyclical Fratelli tutti, 97). Missionary yearning is a privileged ground for experiencing this openness and unity with the universal Church and for sharing the joys and sorrows of the contemporary world. Therefore, we must lead a life of faith that is ever more open and capable of reaching out and embracing everyone (cf. Message for World Mission Day 2021).

In the light of the Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium", both the Congregation and the young churches must have a perspective for seeking and conversion to be ever more luminous bearers of the message of the Gospel to all people. Therefore, a pastoral conversion is needed to have the dynamism of a “A Church which goes forth” (EG 20) and to be “permanently in a state of mission” (EG 25). We need to question ourselves to make our lives and actions ever more transparent and coherent following the Gospel.

Inculturation of the faith is a “process by which catechesis 'takes flesh' in the various cultures” (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 59). The Dicastery is convinced of the value of embodying the faith in cultures but is equally convinced of the need to be vigilant to avoid falsifying or watering down the image of Jesus and his message. The Christian faith is not identified with any culture. As John Paul II recognized, “remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, it will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root.” The Holy Spirit, Pope Francis affirms, beautifies the Church with the new expressions of people and communities who embrace the Gospel. Thus, the Church taking on the values of different cultures becomes “*sponsa ornata monilibus suis*,” (“the bride bedecked with her jewels”) of which the Prophet Isaiah speaks.

“Evangelization and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support and nourish one another” (EG, 251). Dialogue does not replace proclamation (cf. *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 1991). Therefore, the Dicastery is convinced of the importance of promoting interreligious dialogue in carrying out its mission. Today more than ever, the Church must remain committed to a sincere dialogue between the different faiths and with all believers, especially with Islam. We must open our hearts, get to know each other, and recognize what we have in common and respect differences as the basis for a culture of dialogue. “Faced with disconcerting episodes of violent fundamentalism, our respect for true followers of Islam should lead us to avoid hateful generalisations, for authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Koran are opposed to every form of violence.” (EG, 253). Dialogue with moderate Islam is a way of combating fundamentalism. In fact, dialogue serves to “establish friendship, peace and harmony, and to share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love...The different religions, based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society.” (*Fratelli tutti*, 271). It is important to educate young people especially in respect, dialogue, and fraternity in various educational environments: at home, at school, in churches and mosques. In this way sectarian violence will be countered and peace and harmony among the various religious communities can be promoted.