

Ad Gentes

Introduction to the Summary

The final vote at the Second Vatican Council on *The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* or, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, ran 2,394 in favor to 5 opposed. One of the final documents of the Council, it was promulgated on December 7, 1965. As with so many of our Catholic teachings, the document encourages balance and harmony between different aspects of the life of faith. On the one hand, we are reminded of our connection with the universal Church, our call to unity as one people, one Body of Christ. We go to GOD “not just singly, apart from any mutual bond,” (#2) but molded together as a people, made one by the Spirit. On the other hand, there is great exhortation that the particular genius, disposition and cultures within each society be preserved and respected. Each individual culture adds to the richness of the universal church.

The document underlines the importance of contemplation, prayer and inner conversion, as well as the outward, social action that should accompany such transformation, especially action which brings about justice, peace and economic improvement in the lives of the poor and afflicted. Conversion “must become evident with its social consequences.” (#13)

Spirituality and doctrine are denoted as equally important. Formation for clergy, missionaries, lay catechists should include spiritual as well as doctrinal and pastoral elements. All vocations, Clergy, Religious and Lay, are needed to form the Christian community. Cooperation is encouraged, not only between these different vocations within the Church, but also between Christians of different denominations.

The document teaches that the church is missionary at its very core and the first priority of the church is evangelization and mission. Sometimes the inner workings and local concerns of our own particular parish may overshadow this teaching. The church absorbs into itself the customs and wisdom of each people. Rather than flee from the world into some ethereal existence, the Christian is to embrace the world and be fully engaged in it, imbuing into civic affairs the values of the Gospel in order to proclaim and establish the Reign of GOD throughout the world. Mission includes both the planting of the church where it has not yet been established, as well as on-going evangelization and renewal in areas where there is need of conversion and renewal.

Foundational Principles

The mission of the Church is modeled on the divine missions of our Trinitarian GOD, the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit. The church's identity comes from modeling the divine missions of the Son and Spirit, whose mission Christians are called upon to share with the world. The Son and Spirit were sent into the world to rescue the world and bring it into union with GOD. So “the church is missionary by her very nature.” (#2). Mission is not just another task that the church should engage in, but is the very essence of its nature.

Christ “founded his church as the sacrament of salvation and sent his apostles into all the world just as he himself had been sent by his Father.” (#5) The Word became incarnate in order for humankind to share in the life of GOD. Through Christ and in the Spirit we are knit together and taken up as one people into the love of God. We must walk the path paved by our founder, Christ, a path of poverty, obedience, service and self-sacrifice. We walk in hope, knowing that even in trials and sufferings, our sacrifices will serve as a seed to bring about the plan of GOD, which is a plan for unity. The church becomes itself as it participates in the mission of the Trinity—going out in love to others.

Missionary Activity

Mission is going out and planting the church in places where people do not yet believe in Christ; but also involves ministry in places in need of renewal, where there is a state of regression or weakness. Pastoral activity among the faithful and activity to restore unity among Christians are separate but closely related activities to missionary activity.

The church is strengthened inwardly as it reaches outward in mission. “By missionary activity, the mystical body grows to the full mature measure of the fullness of Christ and the spiritual temple.”(#9) “Missionary activity is nothing else and nothing less than an epiphany, or a manifesting of GOD’s decree, and its fulfillment in the world and in world history.” (#9) The church is not separate from the world, but embraces the world. “Christ and the church, which bears witness to him by preaching the Gospel, transcend every particularity of race or nation and therefore cannot be considered foreign anywhere or to anybody.”(#8) The Gospel is the “leaven of liberty and progress in human history...a leaven of brotherhood, of unity and of peace.” (#8)

Our generous GOD has scattered treasures among the different cultures and nations of the earth. Christians, like Christ, must enter into the life of the people among whom they live and serve. Following the example of Christ, they should identify with and be one with others, especially the poor and afflicted. Christians should collaborate with others, including people of other faiths, as well as public entities, to improve the social and economic life of others, by participating in endeavors to eliminate famine, ignorance and disease, as well as those that seek to secure peace in the world. At the same time, Christians must keep in mind that they are not seeking mere material improvement in the lives of others, but are also working to promote human dignity, love for GOD and neighbor, and the union of all peoples. Christian formation does not merely involve learning doctrine, but involves a closer joining together with Christ, an apprenticeship for life.

Forming Christian Community

Missioners are GOD’s co-workers, and the Christian community is “a sign of GOD’s presence in the world.” (#15) A spirit of self-sufficiency should be fostered from the beginning in new Christian communities. The riches of each nation’s culture are to be valued. Special attention should be given to the Laity who, as a leaven from within the temporal order, can bring the spirit of the Gospel into the life of each society and bring others to fully receive Christ.

The “ecumenical spirit should be nurtured...and ecumenical activity should be furthered.” (#15). Cooperation in social and technical projects as well as religious and cultural ones is encouraged. This ecumenical cooperation should operate, not only among individuals, but also among churches or ecclesial communities. Racial prejudice and hypernationalism must be avoided and a universal love for humankind should be fostered.

Priests, Permanent Deacons, Religious and Laity are all necessary in the development and makeup of the Christian Community. The Laity have particular importance as a bridge between the church and civil society. They witness to Christ while also preserving the riches of their own cultures. They perfect their cultures as they imbue them with Christ and with Gospel values, and the church is perfected and becomes fully alive by their participation.

It is important for each local church to develop a diocesan structure with its own local bishop, priests and deacons. Priestly formation should include spiritual as well as doctrinal and pastoral elements. Clergy should maintain an appreciation for their own culture and mediate between the Christian religion and the traditions of their homeland. At the same time, stress should be laid on fostering a “sense of communion with the universal church.” (#19). Training for clergy should take place among their own people. Their

training should be done in an ecumenical spirit and should include preparation for dialogue with non-Christians.

The order of the diaconate should be restored. Religious life should be fostered. The Kingdom of GOD is spread through the prayers and active work of Religious men and women. Ascetic and contemplative traditions that may have existed prior to evangelization should be cultivated.

Men and women catechists are welcome and encouraged to join in the church's missionary work to the nations. The Society for the Propagation of the Faith should provide funds for training and support of catechists, who should receive a just wage. More schools for training and workshops for spiritual renewal of catechists should be instituted.

The Universal Church

As the People of GOD mature and the church becomes more developed internally in each local area, it is very important to maintain the connection with the universal church. Missionary activity, even by young churches that are struggling and may be short of ministers, will bring about perfect communion. Missionary activity benefits and perfects all churches. Suffering and struggling churches should receive aid, but as they stabilize, they should aid others.

The words and deeds that GOD has revealed should be reflected upon theologically from the perspective of each culture and society, incorporating the wisdom of each people, their customs, views on life and social order, into the Christian life. Christianity will be adapted to each culture; Catholic unity will be more complete when the genius and dispositions of each people are accommodated within it. Rather than being swallowed up, each people's culture should be preserved and will add to the richness of the universal church.

“All bishops...are consecrated not just for some one diocese, but for the salvation of the entire world.” (#38) Under the promotion of the bishop, the whole diocese will become missionary. The bishop will encourage and support youths and clerics who are called to mission vocations. A portion of each diocese's own budget should be set aside for the work of mission. Episcopal conferences should also promote a welcoming reception of and pastoral care for immigrants from other lands who enter their dioceses for studies or work, showing them the genuine face of Christ.

Priests...”should fully understand that their life is also consecrated to the service of the missions.” (#39) They should be promoters of mission within their particular parishes. “In their pastoral activities, priests should stir up and preserve amid the faithful a zeal for the evangelization of the world.” (#39)

Religious institutes play a major role in the evangelization of the world. They “should ask themselves sincerely in the presence of GOD, whether they could not be able to extend their activity for the expansion of the Kingdom of GOD among the nations; whether they could not possibly leave certain ministries to others so that they themselves could expend their forces for the missions.” (#40)

Laity cooperate in the church's work of evangelization by nurturing in themselves a knowledge and love of mission; by stimulating mission vocations in their families, associations and schools; by financial support for mission; by offering themselves for foreign mission work; by offering socio-economic support to developing peoples; and by research and scientific study of cultures and religions, which prepares them and others for dialogue with non-Christians. Laity should be given the necessary technical and spiritual preparation needed to be equal to all these tasks.

Missionaries

Every disciple of Christ has the duty of spreading the faith. Some Priests, Religious and Laity are endowed with natural qualities which make them especially suited for a missionary vocation. These qualities include: a spirit of initiative; constancy and perseverance in the face of difficulties; the ability to deal with solitude, fatigue and fruitless labor; an open mind, capable of adapting to changing circumstances and other people's way of doing things; a humble, self-sacrificing temperament; and a dedication to and reliance upon prayer.

Missionaries should receive special spiritual, moral and pastoral training, as well as missiological studies. That training should take in "both the universality of the church and the diversity of the world's nations" (#26). Even short term missionaries should receive training suited to their conditions. Missionaries should have a general knowledge of the peoples, cultures and religions of those among whom they will go to serve, as well as knowledge of their history and current situation. "Anyone who is going to encounter another people should have a great esteem for their patrimony and their language and their customs" (#26). As far as possible, training should be done in the lands to which they are sent. Given all these requirements for doing mission well, mission is best done, not by lone individuals, but by mission institutes where missionaries will be able to unify their efforts, receive proper training, work in the name of the church, and remain connected with the church hierarchy. Missionaries should stay in touch with their home church community and serve as a bridge between their home and the local church where they are sent. The communion that grows between the two faith communities will be mutually beneficial.

Coordination of Missionary Activity

Bishops "should give special consideration to missionary activity, which is the greatest and holiest task of the church." (#29) The Propagation of the Faith office should direct and coordinate mission activity, both as administrator and animator for mission. The role of the Propagation of the Faith office includes: promotion of missionary vocations and missionary spirituality, as well as zeal and prayer for mission; elaboration of reports on missionary work; organization of and impetus for evangelization plans; promotion and coordination of the collection of funds for mission; distribution of funds and missionaries where needs are greatest; cooperation with other Christian denominations in missionary undertakings; and utilization of current theology, methodology and missionary pastoral practice.

The Propagation of the Faith Office should receive direction from a broad representation of those who cooperate in mission work, including Clergy, Religious and Laity. The bishop should direct and coordinate mission activity within his diocese, "but always in such a way that the zeal and spontaneity of those who share in the work may be preserved and fostered." (#30)

Cooperation

Cooperation between episcopal conferences, between missionary institutes and conferences of men and women Religious is encouraged, as is cooperation with scientific institutes which specialize in missiology, ethnology and linguistics, sociology, the history and science of religions and others. Modern means of social communication should be used in the work of mission.

The work of evangelization is a "basic duty of the People of God" (#35), and all the faithful should cooperate in the expansion of Christ's Body in order to bring it to fullness. All the faithful "should have a lively awareness of their responsibility to the world; they should foster in themselves a truly catholic spirit; they should spend their forces in the work of evangelization." (#36) This task begins by leading a profoundly Christian life.

Reaching out in mission will bring internal renewal, in fact, “the grace of renewal cannot grow in communities unless each of these extends the range of its charity to the ends of the earth, and devotes the same care to those afar off as it does to those who are its own members.” (#37)

The St. Cloud Diocese and *Ad Gentes*

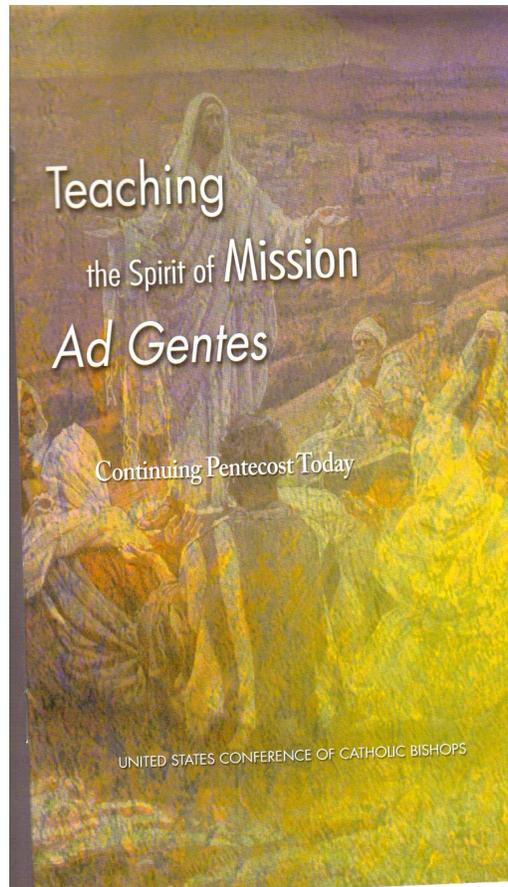
The St. Cloud Diocese is living out the spirit of mission as defined by *Ad Gentes*. Under the leadership of a mission-minded bishop, the ministry of the Mission Office (Propagation of the Faith), which is directed by a Board with diverse representation, has been expanded to include many of the facets outlined in this document. The missionary work of the church is supported and carried out by Clergy, Laity and Religious alike.

There is a growing trend toward relationship building among peoples – actually entering into the realities of others in order to share gifts in the spirit of the Trinity, following the principles laid out in this document and developed further in subsequent teachings. There is an increase in missionary involvement among the Laity through short term mission experiences as well as parish and diocesan global faith partnerships. Many of our missionaries abroad maintain contact with our local church and serve as bridges of connection and understanding between peoples.

There is a growing appreciation of the value in different cultures, both those abroad and those brought to St. Cloud by immigrants, and how they can enrich our lives and our faith. Of the three large partnerships the diocese is involved in: Homa Bay, Kenya; Maracay, Venezuela and Tenancingo, El Salvador, the last is an ecumenical partnership entered into jointly with Christians of other denominations, as encouraged by this document.

The church of St. Cloud continues to work on its own internal communion, spirituality and vitality, but with full recognition that its many gifts are not for St. Cloud alone, but are to be shared with the rest of the Body in order to spread the Reign of God to the ends of the earth. St. Cloud is also fully cognizant of the gifts it has received from its brothers and sisters across the globe with whom it has entered into communion. Thanks be to GOD.

Respectfully submitted by Rosanne Fischer



The United States Bishops have recently published the document, "Teaching the Spirit of Mission Ad Gentes: Continuing Pentecost Today." This document helps us understand the importance of Mission education throughout our Dioceses. Some of the Bishops' thoughts include:

"We, the Catholic bishops of the United States, commit ourselves anew to supporting the world mission effort, and we ask all Catholics to join us in this venture." (2)

"We call on everyone with teaching roles to guide the faithful towards a renewed fervor in spreading the Good News by witness and word." (3)

"Pope John Paul II thus reminded us all of something we know to be true: ad gentes mission not only strengthens mission abroad, it also increases our fervor for the faith at home." (4)

"The best Christian testimony is love for others." (11)

"The Holy Spirit has given to those responsible for the formation of the disciples of this age a special grace to enlighten the minds of others. It is our hope that these minds will join more enthusiastically in our mission to the nations." (11)

"We appeal to all educators to help give Catholics a better understanding of the task and demands of mission today. Theological studies should include a strong missionary emphasis...Authors of catechetical texts should highlight the missionary responsibility of every Christian so that young people may be educated from an early age in this essential aspect of the Church's life" (To the Ends of the Earth, #70). (13)