

The Call to Mission Education

We have been created in the image of a relational GOD. In recognizing this image we bear, we must also recognize the call we all have been given to be in relationship with others. Our Triune GOD is one of three Persons, each fully relying upon and giving to the Others. The Trinity would not be complete without all three living in relationship to each other. And just as these Divine Persons cannot exist without each other, so we, created in the image of our Triune GOD, cannot exist without being in relationship with, giving to and receiving from others. This call to live in right relationships is our call to mission. It is a call to recognize that we do not exist in isolation, and that we must reach out beyond ourselves in living out the image of GOD within us. It is a call for each of us.

None of us exists in isolation; our world is continuously showing us this. Not only is our world becoming increasingly interconnected through technological advances, but we are also becoming more interconnected through advances in our recognition of what it means as Catholics to be a part of the universal Church. Not only must we strive to live in right relationship with those around us, but also those who are strangers or in far-reaching places as well. We are called to be members of the one Body of Christ in our local parishes and communities, as well as globally. The Second Vatican Council redefined the mission of the Church, including our mission to transform the world, a mission that can only be met when we realize that no community – be it a community of any race, faith, nationality, ideology, age or other demographic – can exist within its own boundaries. We no longer see our call as reaching out solely for the benefit of the other, prosthletizing and healing ‘mission territory’ as it were, but for the good of both us and the other, now recognizing that we too are ‘mission territory’ since other cultures and communities have gifts to share with us and faith that can evangelize us as well. This gift and faith sharing can only happen when we reach out beyond ourselves and allow others to reach out to us as well. In the Vatican II document, *The Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity (Ad Gentes)*, Church leaders urged all the faithful to answer our call as disciples by reaching out, so all involved can draw closer to Christ and His Kingdom can become more realized: **“Christ and the church, which bears witness to Him by preaching the Gospel, transcend every particularity of race or nation...By missionary activity [reaching beyond ourselves], the mystical body grows to the full mature measure of the fullness of Christ”** (*Ad Gentes*, #8 - 9).

Fifty years later we are still being reminded of the importance of this action of our faith. The Bishops of the United States have issued multiple documents in hopes of reiterating the essential call we all have to live as one global family. They urge us to step beyond ourselves as individuals, or even as individual parishes, schools and communities. **“A parish’s ‘catholicity’ is illustrated in its willingness to go beyond its own boundaries to extend the Gospel, serve those in need, and work for global justice and peace. This is not a work for a few agencies or one committee, but for every believer and every local community of faith”** (*Called to Global Solidarity*, USCCB).

In response to the call for *all believers* to be active in striving for global solidarity, our Church also recognizes the important role that children and youth play in fulfilling the mission of the Church and bringing about the Kingdom. In his World Mission Sunday message a few years ago, the late Pope John Paul II made this statement: **“Children can become missionaries of their peers and of others. With their simple honesty and their generosity, they can attract their small friends to the faith and create in adults the longing for a faith that is more impassioned and joyous.”**

(Over)

However, in order for our young people to answer their missionary call, they must be able to witness the truth and beauty of mission in adults around them. In addition to this witness from their parents in the domestic church, the Church also believes that mission education is a vital part of Faith Formation and education in schools and parishes, and strongly encourages us to make it a key part of our programs and curriculum. **“We appeal to all educators to help give Catholics a better understanding of the task and demands of Mission today”** (To the Ends of the Earth #70).

The United States Bishops have published the document, *Teaching the Spirit of Mission Ad Gentes: Continuing Pentecost Today*. This document reiterates the importance of mission education throughout our U.S. Dioceses, and calls forth all those in catechetical and educational ministries to help those with whom they minister to understand the important call each of us has for being a part of Mission in our world.

We, at the St. Cloud Mission Office, take this work and the challenge of our Bishops to heart, and we encourage all of the educators and ministers of our Diocese to join us. We believe in a two-pronged approach to Mission Education:

1. On-going curriculum, and
2. Supplementary relational activities/programs.

This approach provides students with the background understanding of our call to mission through the curriculum; it also offers the chance to put that understanding into practice through hands-on activities and relationships that bring this call to life for all involved!

However, we recognize that this is not an easy challenge to meet. It is for this reason that we are working to provide you with the resources necessary to easily and thoroughly incorporate mission education into your parish and school programs and curriculum. We have been working on a Comprehensive Mission Education Resource list that includes a variety of curriculum tools and resources to be used in classrooms or parish programs, as well as practical ideas as to how and when to utilize them.

The following is a list of some of the many resources that are available to you. These include existing curriculum from a variety of organizations, Pontifical Mission Society programming, helpful contact people, media resources, global connections, possible projects, Liturgy planning, and mission/cultural-oriented field trip possibilities, as well as ideas of key times and easy ways to incorporate mission activities and lessons into your existing calendar and curriculum. For more information or a copy of the curriculums included, contact us at the mission office.

“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”(*Teaching the Spirit of Mission Ad Gentes*). We, the St. Cloud Mission Office, also commit ourselves to this important task. Please, won't you join us? Let us all, together, answer our Baptismal call to follow the example of our Triune GOD in reaching out beyond ourselves and sharing with all of our brothers and sisters – be they our family members across the globe or the people we work and minister with on a continuous basis right within our parish and school family. ***We are called!***