



PRESS RELEASE

Starting today the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019
"Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on a mission in the world"

Today marks the liturgical memory of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, Universal Patroness of Missions together with St. Francis Xavier. Pope Francis presides over the celebration of Vespers in St. Peter's Basilica, introduced by the Missionary Vigil with testimonies from missionaries from around the world. This opens the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019, desired by the Pope "in order to awaken more awareness of the *missio ad gentes*" (Angelus, October 22, 2017). The Extraordinary Missionary Month falls on the 100th anniversary of Benedict XV's letter *Maximum Illud*, a document that separated the work of evangelization from the work of colonization and insisted on the creation of a native clergy and hierarchy in missionary territories. The Holy Father indicated for the Extraordinary Missionary Month the theme "Baptized and Sent: the Church of Christ on Mission in the World." Awakening the awareness of *missio ad gentes* and regaining with new momentum the responsibility to proclaim the Gospel unites the pastoral solicitude of Pope Benedict XV in *Maximum Illud* and the missionary vitality expressed by Pope Francis in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: "Missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church's activity" (EG 15).

Throughout the world, the Extraordinary Missionary Month has been welcomed by an extraordinary mobilization of lay and consecrated faithful. The intense activity and catechetical formation has seen the creation of funds in many nations, along with the involvement of all age groups starting from the youngest ones, for the preparation and development of the Extraordinary Missionary Month. This is an extraordinary opportunity for the Church to renew missionary zeal, which is also the main purpose of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS), a worldwide network at the service of the Pope to support missions and young Churches with prayer and charity. The PMS are at the service of the missionary Church and give every baptized person the opportunity to live their faith by sharing it with others. Prayer, witness and charity are concrete ways that the PMS offer to live a missionary and universal faith.

In particular, all the national offices of the PMS have been activated by organizing communication and social networks with dedicated sections, prayer initiatives and events scheduled all over the world which can be seen by visiting the website dedicated to the Extraordinary Missionary Month <http://www.october2019.va/>.

During today's Meeting Point with the Press on the occasion of the opening of the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019, in which H.E. Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, H.E. Msgr. Giampietro Dal Toso, President of the PMS and Assistant Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Fr. Frédéric Fornos, international director of the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network, took part. Fabrizio Meroni, Secretary General of Pontifical Missionary Union, Director of the International Center on Missionary Animation (CIAM) and Director of Fides, Sr. Simona Brambilla, Consolata Missionary, Fr. Gabriel Amal Costa, PIME missionary, will officially launch the video of the Holy Father with the prayer intention for the Extraordinary Missionary Month 2019, prepared together by the PMS and the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network, who places himself at the service of the Pontifical Missionary Societies in this month. This video of the Pope shows the common commitment to underline the importance of the Holy Father's words addressed to the PMS, "that the soul of the mission is prayer," and to the Worldwide Prayer Network, that "the heart of the Church's mission is prayer."

Following on Monday, October 7th at 3:00 p.m. in Rome at the Basilica of Saint Mary Major on the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, the international rosary prayer led by Cardinal Filoni will take place. The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Mission Societies have invited Radio Maria to organize this event which will be significant worldwide for it will be broadcast live on radio and video by approximately eighty Radio Maria stations scattered throughout five continents.

In the end on Sunday, October 20th, the World Mission Day will be celebrated throughout the world. Pope Francis will preside over the celebration of the Eucharist at 10:30 a.m. in St Peter's Square.

SR. SIMONA BRAMBILLA, CONSOLATA MISSIONARY

Sister Simona was born in Monza Brianza (Italy) on March 27, 1965. After graduating from the School of Professional Nursing at the Hospital of Merate (Lecco) in 1986 and working as a professional nurse in the same hospital, she joined the Institute of the Consolata Missionary Sisters in 1988 where she made her first religious profession in 1991. In 1998 she obtained a Licentiate in Psychology at the Institute of Psychology of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and the following year she was qualified to practice as a Psychologist at the Sapienza University. In 1999 she made her perpetual vows and during the Great Jubilee in 2000 she was a missionary in Mozambique where she stayed for two years. Until 2005 she was assistant professor at the Institute of Psychology of the Pontifical Gregorian University and from 2001 to 2005 she was General Counselor of the Institute of Consolata Missionaries. In 2008 she obtained her Doctorate in Psychology at the Pontifical Gregorian University. Since 2011 she has been Superior General of the Institute of the Consolata Missionaries. She has published "Evangelizing the heart: the inculturated evangelization among the Macua Scirima of Mozambique" - An anthropological and psychological study, Consolata Missionary Sisters Edition, Nepi (VT) 2009 and some articles including: "Women's Missionary Institutes: which formation for which mission," *Ad gentes - Theology and anthropology of the mission*, 1, 2010, pp. 40-52; "Community: Challenge and Mission", *UISG Bulletin*, 153, 2013, pp. 3-14 and "Blessed Night of Missionary Institutes", *Mission Today*, 2, 2014, pp. 29-30.

"Our vocation is to live the uniqueness of the *missio ad gentes*," Sister Simona witnesses. "We are in Mongolia, we will be in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, if God wills. When you are in these places you have the feeling of being in another world. The *ad gentes* lived in Europe is different. These people do not have the opportunity to see Christ proclaimed. There is a mission to non-Christians that is the uniqueness of *missio ad gentes*. We as missionaries by vocation are called to this mission: the first proclamation to non-Christians. Mongolia is *ad gentes*, we arrived in 2003. The Church there was born in 1992. It struck me a lot. We are faced with extraordinary people open to dialogue, but with all the difficulties of being foreigners and missionaries, with the precariousness of not knowing if their permission will be renewed. My visit to this country in 2015 was impressed into my memory, during which we gathered Christians for the first time. The question we asked those who had chosen to become Christians, passing from Buddhism to Christianity, was: Why this choice? The answers amazed me and still move me. Rather than being told that it was convenient even from a formative point of view (in our sobriety we still have after-school, training activities, etc.) the answers were roughly as follows: "The en-

counter with a Father, the discovery that God is a father, that I am a beloved son, that he loves me and forgives me as I am." The answers revolved around a paternal-filial relationship: in fact, the essence of the Christian faith."

Biography Fr. Gabriel Amal Costa

Fr. Gabriel Amal Costa was born in Narayangonj (Bangladesh) on January 1, 1961. He was the first bangladesh to join the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, who became a member in 1996. Ordained a priest since 1997, from 1998 to 2003 he worked in Côte d'Ivoire; then he was vice-rector in formation in Monza and rector since 2006. "My family has been Catholic for several generations now. My family is composed of my parents, five brothers and two sisters. My father was a farmer and my mother a housewife. They were simple people but of strong faith and they were very active in the parish. They gave me faith in God; my mother taught me how to pray," recalls Father Gabriel. "As children, we used to pray the Holy Rosary together at home every evening before dinner. Dad and Mom often told us many scriptures from the Bible as little stories, and they also told us the lives of many saints. When I was 4-5 years old I knew all the prayers and I knew many Bible scriptures. My older brothers were also examples of Christian life for me. Until high school I studied in Catholic schools and that is why I had an excellent Christian education. Although I am a farmer, my father made us study until university, in fact, in 1986 I graduated in economics then worked for some years. My parents and my parish priest helped me so much in understanding the Lord's call to priestly missionary life." About his missionary vocation Fr. Gabriel Amal Costa explains: "The local Church also knows how to offer its children for the Universal Church. I was the first Bengali priest to leave the country as a missionary. In formation, I saw that the majority of our seminarians came from missionary countries, and despite the fact that there is a need in their own countries, they decided to become missionaries in other countries. The Church of Mission becomes the Missionary Church. The years I have lived in mission have been truly beautiful and I have tried to transmit this missionary zeal. When the Bishop asked me why I wanted to leave, I answered: we still need many missionaries, but the Bengalese Church has reached maturity and therefore I want to leave. The Bishop responded: If you think so, I have no objections."