

# INTRODUCTION

In the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* the Pope Francis says: „I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. «Mere administration» can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be «permanently in a state of mission»” (EG 25).

This desire of the Pope is, at the same time, a task that every local Church has to face, as it concerns her essential mission, that is, evangelization. Moreover, it sets before her in a way, a question about her authenticity, since, according to the Apostle: „What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life for the life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us” (1 J 1:1-2).

The Extraordinary Mission Month to be held in October 2019 will surely be a very special time for awakening missionary awareness. Nevertheless, before it happens, we need to work very hard in order to prepare ourselves to this „great chance” for the missionary work, on the field of animation, formation and missionary cooperation.

It is precisely in this perspective that we would like to share our reflection and experience concerning missionary service of lay missionaries. This study obviously concentrates on lay missionaries

from Poland but at the same time it places their service in a broader context of reflection in the field of theology of spirituality, missiology and sociology. It seems, therefore, that it may also inspire other scientific and ecclesiastical communities to undertake similar research.

We also hope that this study may be useful to those who coordinate the formation and service of lay missionaries. The Polish experience in this regard is very interesting, the more so because in recent years we have noticed extraordinary dynamics and missionary commitment of the young people. It has been reflected in undertaking missionary ministry, in the development of missionary volunteering and in numerous initiatives of supporting missionary work by lay people.

Although every local Church has her own richness and distinct character, all the Churches carry out the same mission: evangelization. If this work is to develop more and more fully we need an authentic, lasting commitment of all the baptized. We hope that the present study may contribute to this important mission.

I would like to thank the Secretariat General of the Pontifical Missionary Union for having encouraged us to do this research. Both their encouragement and support not only helped us to publish this book but also were an incentive for a harmonious cooperation between scientists from Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw and the National Department of the Pontifical Mission Society in Poland.

In this context it may be worth quoting a proverb from the Congo: „One finger doesn't wash your face”. Striving for the good of the missionary cause we need to work together, to exchange gifts and experiences but most of all to be constantly open to the Holy Spirit who is truly the author of the mission. Only then will we together fulfill the Holy Father's dream: „I dream of a «missionary option», that is, a missionary impulse

capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation" (EG 27).

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