NUNTIA
Mission for Europe

Experiences and ways in view of the proclamation of faith in the present

We live in a time of rapid political change. Every year human rights violations force countless people to leave their homes and seek refuge in other countries. **The refugee organization of the Lazarists in Austria** has endeavored since 1991 through the two mission priests Josef A. Herget CM and Alexander Lainer CM to meet this diverse need and especially to take care of those Christian refugees who suffered persecution in their home countries and are exposed to numerous problems in Austria, too. Therefore, on January 25, 1995, the ***"Association of Refugee Organization St. Vincent de Paul"*** was founded in Vienna. Since then, numerous refugees have received legal, social and religious help.
In order not to mix up the social commitment of the refugee organization with the religious requirements and yet also to be able to address the cultural and **religious problems** of foreigners in Austria, the "Institute St. Justinus" was finally founded.

The Institute St. Justinus

The St. Justinus Institute was founded on **July 30, 1996 in Mariazell**. From the very beginning, the St. Justinus Institute sees itself as the **work of the first proclamation**, the **new evangelization** and **ecclesiastical integration**. **The St. Justinus Institute** is recognized by the state as an association in Austria and Germany and also by the church in Austria. It offers foreign-language Catholic religious instruction and preparation for baptism as well as various offers for deepening the faith for newly baptized, training and community experience, monthly church services in Turkish and Persian.
With the approval of the **Austrian Bishops' Conference**, the Institute St. Justinus began in 2002 together with the Pontifical Philosophical-Theological College Benedict XVI. Heiligenkreuz near Vienna to train **volunteer catechists** for the religious instruction of adult baptismal applicants. The ***"Course for the formation of catechists with special qualifications for the foreign-language catechumenate (LAK)"*** follows **guidelines** approved by the Austrian Bishops' Conference and concludes with the **ecclesiastical mission as a catechist.** The Archbishop of Vienna is the episcopal **protector.** Today (2020) there are already over 700 graduates sent as catechists by the bishops, and about 130 people are currently in formation.
The catechists sent by the bishops have received a profound intellectual, human and spiritual training which enables them to put into practice the theologically acquired knowledge immediately, true to the word of the Scripture: "Go to all peoples and make all men my disciples!" (Mt 28:19)

The Faith Situation in Europe

A new evangelization of Europe is urgently needed. Believing Christians in European countries are convinced of this, just as we must not turn a blind eye to the depressing ***fact of de-Christianization*** in Europe.
In the present day, ***de-churchization*** **and** ***de-Christianization*** have a particularly radical character. They go in width. In western Europe, they cover all population groups in urban and rural areas. They go deep and completely determine people's thinking and way of life. Parallel to the de-Christianization, other living spaces are also being dissolved, especially **marriage and the family**, which are largely canceled for their task of passing on the faith.
Since **many people in Europe** no longer know the Christian faith and no longer orient their lives according to the ***principles of the Gospel***, they are looking for a substitute faith in other religions and sects, or doctrines of self-redemption in **"esotericism"**.

Christ's commission remains

Even if the situation of the Christian faith, the Church in Europe, is extremely serious, Christ's instruction to his disciples **still applies today** to go to all peoples, to make all people his disciples.
Christ commissions all his disciples and sends **the church of every generation** to preach the good news into the world. His missionary mandate leads us into the third millennium with the invitation to the same enthusiasm that characterized the Christians of the first hour. We can count on the power of the same spirit that was poured out on Pentecost and that encourages us today to make a fresh start.
Conversion is grace and therefore only the work of God! Nobody should believe that they can lead someone to the Christian faith solely on the basis of skillful reasoning or methods. The task of Christians is **to obey the Lord's mission**, to teach and testify to the message of Jesus Christ with prayer and love, and to trust that God will do his work through the working of the Holy Spirit.
One of the most remarkable experiences in the life of the disciples of Jesus was certainly **fishing on the Sea of Galilee**. After their return the disciples washed the nets on the bank; they were tired, disappointed, at a loss. Their nets remained empty.
The image of the empty nets is very realistic and transferable to our time. But then Jesus set a sign that his disciples should never forget. He urged his disciples to cast the net again: ***"They threw the net and couldn't bring it back in, it was so full of fish"***.
The disciples on the other boat had to come to the rescue. The net was "filled with a hundred and fifty-three large fish, and although there were so many, the net did not tear" (cf. Jn 21: 1-14).
Alluding to this event, **Saint Vincent de Paul** said: ***"We just have to cast the nets, there was no talk of catching fish."*** With that, Vincent wanted to say, do not forget that it is the Lord himself who draws those who are called to him.
The newly established St. Justinus Institute soon had a similar experience. All it had to do was cast the nets, ***create opportunities*** for many non-Christians to meet our Lord. And because more and more baptism applicants came forward and the work could no

longer be mastered alone, the institute looked for the disciples in the other boat. This is how **volunteer catechists were trained**.

Re-Christianization

The proclamation of faith in the present will necessarily **proceed from the sacrament of baptism, lead to baptism and help make life possible through the grace of baptism**.
Christian baptism is *being born again out of water and the Holy Spirit for new life*. It gives justification and sanctification. It gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit and the gift of sanctifying grace. Baptism makes us children of God and thus heirs and joint heirs of Christ (Romans 8:17). The deepest, most immediate relationship is given to the baptized by God. That is why baptism is irrevocable, unrepeatable and puts an indelible seal in the heart of a person.
The joyful and grateful reflection on the spiritual reality of baptism motivates ***new evangelization*** and ***first preaching***. Only Christians who believe and who also profess their faith to the outside world, that is, Christians who are filled and ***"enthusiastic"*** by the Holy Spirit, can prevent the decline of European Christianity and, despite all difficulties, help people who seek Christ to find Christ.
The ecclesiastical dimension of baptism was a matter of course for the first Christians. Paul writes that baptism unites "into one body, Jews and Greeks, slaves and free; we are all watered with the one Spirit "(1 Cor 12:13). Baptism not only gives individual contact with Christ, it integrates the baptized into a larger whole: the Lord's church. It adds the new stones to the old ones and builds the church. Irrespective of nationality, race, income, intelligence or whatever, the baptized are accepted into that community which, like Christ himself, is dedicated to service. What has been said is confirmed by numerous testimonies from catechumens and the newly baptized.
The renewal of the faith of a community must include both the **"new evangelization"** and the **"first proclamation"** and cannot be carried out by ordinary pastoral care alone. It needs the willingness and cooperation of the whole Christian community. The Second Vatican Council left no doubt that the entire Church is missionary by nature and that all the baptized are called to transmit the faith.

New Opportunities for Evangelization?

For Christians in Europe, the increasing influence of other religions and worldviews is a growing challenge. At the same time, attempts are being made in the media and agnostic circles to reduce Christianity to a purely human wisdom, as a doctrine of good decency, so to speak to promote the **equality of all religions**.
In view of this situation, believing Christians are called upon to **deepen their knowledge of faith** in order to give unsettled and questioning people an answer, **"from which hope we live"!** This challenge can become an opportunity for preaching as Christians rediscover the truth and beauty of their faith and use all of their abilities and gifts in every state of life and in every kind of profession through a convincing Christian life for the Lord - everyone on the place where it stands.
This is especially true **with regard to Islam**. Because the very superficial opinion is often taken that the two religions Christianity and Islam are very similar to each other

and only differ in insignificant details. One can hear more and more often: ***"Ultimately we all believe in the same God."*** This strange thinking creeps more and more into the church.
Whoever knows the **Bible and the Koran** only superficially may very easily have the impression of great similarity. And because of the importance of the ***Christian-Islamic dialogue***, the differences then appear negligible. But such an attitude does not do justice to either the faith of Christians or the faith of Muslims. Because ***Christianity and Islam are fundamentally different religions*** and have a ***totally different image of God and man.***
Here **two major tasks for the mission in Europe** emerge, which in turn harbor great opportunities. On the one hand it is important to educate the people in Europe, especially the Christians, about the teaching of Islam, and on the other hand to proclaim Christ and the Gospel to the Muslims**. Muslims have a right to know the truth about Christianity.** Hardly anyone who comes from Islam has really got to know Jesus Christ, nor his message. It is important that Muslims get to know believable Christians and feel in them how much they are determined by Jesus Christ in their thinking, doing and speaking.

Helpers on the path of faith

The Acts of the Apostles tells of a minister who made a trip from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to get answers to his pressing questions of faith in the temple. An unusual trip. Almost two thousand kilometers - for the time and the travel conditions - a huge stretch of arduous journey. You can tell from this how serious it was for him to return to the roots of his belief in God, which had once penetrated through Egypt to Ethiopia through Jewish emigrants. But the minister does not seem entirely satisfied with the result. He probably did not find sufficient answers. On the way back he did bring himself a ***"travel reading"*****:** a scroll with the words of the prophet Isaiah, in which the Messiah is compared to a sacrificial lamb (Isaiah 53: 7). The reader did not understand. What is that supposed to mean?
A ***"hitchhiker"*** crossed his path and took him with him. It is **Philip**. He sees the traveller's helplessness and asks straight out: ***"Do you understand what you're reading?"*** The civil servant shakes his head. Then Philip explained the text: **The image of the sacrificial lamb** as a parable for the atoning death of Jesus. He tells him about his Lord, his deeds, **his death on the cross and his resurrection**. The Ethiopian listened with interest. What the stranger says not only makes sense to him, but hits him deeply. He began to understand what is important in life. They talk about faith. And when they passed a body of water, the minister from Africa stopped the car and asked for the baptism.
The Church today needs ***people like Philip*** who are there when they are needed, who are able to answer seekers' questions. People who care for other people who, like Philip, can narrate and explain the scriptures through the word and through life.
We shouldn't overlook one more important sentence in the story of the Chamberlain. After the baptism he separated from Philip - but it is then said: **"He went on joyfully". Full of joy!** Knowledge of the good news and baptism changed his life. **God's Spirit brings about liberation and joy!** The ministry of preaching, the ministry of Philip, properly understood and performed, is a miraculous ministry of deliverance and joy.

The “dormant” talents

The endeavor for the new evangelization must first ***sharpen the eyes of the faithful believers and encourage them*** to recognize and accept their calling through Christ. The problem that arises here is that missionary engagement in the Christian life has been ***isolated as something additional and extraordinary*** that has to be performed on top of all other tasks. It is important to show that this isolation is wrong, that no aspect of Christian life can be isolated and cut out without everything suffering from it.
In our day practicing believers often lack the conviction that it is possible ***to win new Christians***. Few are aware that through baptism they were each endowed with their own charisms, which should serve to build up the Christian community.
The first steps will therefore have to be many conversations with the active believers in order to consider with each individual what kind of charism he has, what he can specifically contribute to the congregation, for the ***new evangelization***, or for the ***first announcement***.
The many possibilities of modern technology should also be used, but also new modes of expression in music, pantomine and drama, etc. Soon you will be amazed to see how many talents and unused opportunities are ***"slumbering"*** in a community. Every service is in demand. It is important to re-inspire and motivate fellow Christians and to strive for good cooperation right from the start.
It is possible that through initial difficulties in soliciting the **faithful's care** and **cooperation**, we may feel helpless. It can still be quite beneficial. The apostle Paul experienced: “***When I am weak, then I am strong”*** (2 Cor 12:10). A church that knows about its weakness and trusts completely in the power of God will be able to convey the good news credibly to people today.

The Mission Center St. Justinus de Jacobis

> In Constitution II / 1/18 of the Congregation for Mission it says: “Just as Saint Vincent, following the example of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37), came to the aid of the abandoned, so too must the provinces and the individual confreres help even those who have been pushed to the margins of human society, those who have suffered disasters and the victims of all injustice,... "

With more than twenty years of pastoral care for foreign language baptismal applicants, the **St. Justinus Institute** was able to open a new **mission center** for these special pastoral activities near Vienna, in Kaltenleutgeben, in early **July 2018**.
The large and increasing number of **applicants for baptism** and the growing number of **newly baptized people**, who often live in difficult social and cultural environments and have to be looked after, are a major challenge.
Goals and tasks of the mission center:

- Training of **priests, religious and lay missionaries** for the first proclamation (baptismal applicants) and new evangelization (for a new form of “popular mission”).

- The house of St. Justinus is a place of **helping accompaniment, continuation and deepening of faith** for new Christians. Regular meetings and courses take place here for the numerous volunteers, godparents and those interested in missionary work.
- In the house of St. Justinus there is an **office for the coordination** and for all matters of the volunteer catechists in the German-speaking area (Germany, Switzerland and Austria). The often highly motivated and capable catechists also need sacramental pastoral service, spiritual accompaniment and deepening, as well as pastoral assistance.

The chapel of the St. Justinus Mission House was consecrated by Cardinal Christoph Schönborn **to OUR LADY OF EPHESUS** and there is already a monthly action plan. From the very beginning a **permanent deacon** was employed for the newly emerging mission center. And two spiritual sisters take care of the necessary establishment of two offices, for the numerous foreign-language new Christians and for the volunteer catechists working in the German-speaking countries. Two catechists of the St. Justinus Institute who study at the Heiligenkreuz University already live in the house.
The situation that we find today in our materially rich and spiritually poor Europe could also become an opportunity if Christians ***"wake up"*** and become aware of their responsibility and mission. With God's help, **well-trained missionaries** (priests, religious and lay people) can both **revive the faith** in our European Catholic congregations, and also intensify the preaching of the Gospel to the many millions of people of ***non-European origin*** who live in the have found refuge in western countries over the past few decades and many are searching for the truth.