Mission Appeal Letter

"I am not from here, neither from there, but anywhere God wants that I be"
Rome, 18 October 2021

My dear confreres,

*May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!*

In the Mission Appeal Letters of the past years, I invited all the confreres around the world to get involved in the initiative:

“To send 1% of the members of the Congregation of the Mission every year to the missions ad Gentes.” The 1% of our overall membership of around 3000 confreres comes to 30 confreres, who would go as new missionaries to the missions “ad Gentes.”

The invitation to send 1% of the confreres to the missions ad Gentes every year does not limit us to just 30 confreres each year, but is always open and conveys a deep desire to surpass the number mentioned, because “the harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few” (Matthew 9:37).

When we speak of missions ad Gentes, we do not have in mind just the International Missions that are directly accompanied by the General Curia, but also all the mission territories of the different provinces, vice-provinces, and regions.

Our Little Company is missionary by nature. It is, therefore, so important that this missionary spirit that shapes our Congregation be present and fostered in the initial stages of formation and deepened throughout our lives. In this regard, I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all the provinces, vice-provinces, regions, and missions to have ever present in the different stages of formation this missionary spirit and to urge our seminarians always to be open to the call to go to the missions ad Gentes if Providence so desires.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank deeply the many provinces, vice-provinces, and regions that are so open to encouraging confreres to go to the missions ad Gentes, to the international missions coordinated by the General Curia or to the missions coordinated by the individual provinces, vice-provinces, or regions.
I have the joy to announce that two new missions ad Gentes have been opened recently: Malawi by the South Indian Province and Myanmar, by the Northeast Region of the North Indian Province. A few other missions coordinated directly by some provinces, vice-provinces, or regions are in the process of being opened. The process has slowed down a bit, especially because of COVID-19.

In the past years, with overwhelming joy and being very aware of Jesus’s vivid sign of mercy toward our Congregation, we reached the goal of the 1% we had set for ourselves. Confreres are being sent to our different missions “ad Gentes,” some in a very short period, others in one, two, or three years, as they still have commitments to conclude before moving to a new service.

In the Mission Appeal Letters of the past years, I also wrote that this overwhelming response would not be a true sign of a missionary spring within our Little Company if this spirit remains here and does not continue into the future. I would like to invite and encourage all of us to pray and support our confreres, who already applied or will apply to go to the missions “ad Gentes.” I would like to invite and urge you, who feel the call to go to the missions “ad Gentes” on the basis of this year’s Mission Appeal, after prayer, discernment, and discussion with your Visitor, to write to me (secreteria@cmcuria.org), volunteering to go to one of our many missions around the world that are so much in need.

Dear confreres, the sooner you write, the sooner we will be able to discuss your letter in a General Council meeting, and the sooner we will be able to respond to the many requests for help. As I mentioned in my previous letters, if you feel called to the missions ad Gentes but cannot go immediately because of present commitments where you serve, you can volunteer today, adding that you will be available in one or two years.

The theme of this year’s World Mission Day - “We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20), is a summons to each of us to “own” and to bring to others what we bear in our hearts. This mission has always been the hallmark of the Church, for “she exists to evangelize” (Saint Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi, 14).

Contemplating their missionary witness, we are inspired to be courageous ourselves and to beg “the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Lk 10:2). We know that the call to mission is not a thing of the past, or a romantic leftover from earlier times. Today too Jesus needs hearts capable of experiencing vocation as a true love story that urges them to go forth to the peripheries of our world as messengers and agents of compassion” (Message for World Mission Day 2021).
Next year from 27 June to 15 July, we will have in Rome our 43rd General Assembly whose theme is, “Revitalizing our identity at the beginning of the fifth century of the Congregation of the Mission.”

During the General Assembly, we will pray, reflect, dialogue, and come to concrete conclusions and lines of action for the next six years of our Little Company. That 1% of our members (30 confreres) might volunteer spontaneously every year to go to the missions ad Gentes is one of the signs of a new missionary springtime, a new Pentecost within the Congregation. One of the signs of our revitalized identity will be the missions opened by the provinces, vice-provinces, and regions or the international missions by the General Curia.

Here are the missions that, at this moment in 2021, need special attention and volunteers:

**ALASKA**

Currently, three confreres serve in the mission: from the United States, Colombia, and India. The mission is based in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadalupe of the Archdiocese of Anchorage-Juneau. The mission serves the Spanish-speaking populations in Anchorage, Wasilla, Kodiak, Juneau, and Ketchikan. After five years of serving the Hispanic population in the Diocese of Fairbanks, Vincentians, as of October 2021, will not be going there anymore because the Diocese of Fairbanks has a new group of priests from Argentina. Archbishop Andrew Bellisario, CM, appointed Father Shijo as the Director of Hispanic Ministry in the Archdiocese of Anchorage-Juneau. The confreres who wish to join the Alaska mission need to speak English and Spanish. In addition, the following skills are imperative for a missionary in Alaska: the ability to drive an automobile, strong pastoral skills, and adaptability to extreme climatic conditions.

**COSTA RICA**

Talamanca is the most important indigenous territory in Costa Rica and is located in the south of the country, on the Atlantic coast. Since its origins, the mission has been the responsibility of the Congregation of the Mission. The missionary service has two realities: parish life, providing monthly pastoral care to some 54 communities that are difficult to access (navigating rivers, by motorcycle, or walking); and the mission ad Gentes, where it takes up to five days walking through the mountains to visit hundreds of people living in miserable conditions. The indigenous languages are Bribri and Cabécar, but, in most communities, it is possible to communicate in Spanish. A confrere from the Province of Colombia joined the mission in January 2020. There are now two confreres in total and at least one more missionary is needed to take care of this vast and difficult-to-travel territory.
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is considered a Christian country, with a total population of around eight million. Its Catholic population is about 30%. The Church in PNG is comparatively young, facing many challenges. It needs the help of missionaries to grow and develop. Our mission there began in 2001. Presently, ten confreres are rendering their services to the PNG mission: two from Poland, three from the Philippines, two from Vietnam, one from Colombia, one from Chile, and one from the Oceania Province.

After serving many years in PNG, three confreres will be leaving the PNG mission to take up other responsibilities in the Congregation. Therefore, we need replacements for these three confreres who will be departing shortly. We need confreres who can work in the seminaries and in pastoral ministry.

The Vincentians are engaged in several ministries: spiritual formation of the diocesan seminarians at Holy Spirit Seminary, pastoral care and laity formation, social developmental activities, and staffing the Melanesian Institute. Evangelization possibilities are very high. Anyone who is committed and willing to face challenges is most welcome to join our efforts in PNG. Volunteers need to have a good command of the English language and should be prepared to learn the local language.

TEFÉ

Three missionaries presently are working in the international mission of Tefé (Brazil). They serve in two missionary areas. The neighborhood of Albial (in Tefé itself) is a very poor and depressed area, but they have established a platform (parish) from which they carry out missionary and promotional works. Two missionaries take care of this area. The second missionary zone is called Caiambé. It is a vast area of small villages, which need to be evangelized and promoted because they are very neglected in every way. Only one missionary is working in this entire area. One more would be necessary. Of course, we can also think of some work with the Prelature, because it is very poor in personnel and material resources. Finally, if someone is willing to integrate into such a mission, he could put into action his creativity and skills. The climate is very humid and travel is always by boat, because the villages are in the middle of the Amazon jungle, through which flow the Amazon River and its tributaries. Portuguese is required as a basic language.

MADAGASCAR

Father Pedro Pablo Opeka, CM, founded the Humanitarian Association “AKAMASOA” in 1989 to come to the aid of the poor people who lived on a garbage dump and on the streets of Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar. Akamasoa, meaning “Good friends” is
made up of volunteers and benefactors who assist the people in their fight against poverty and help them get out of their inhuman conditions. With deep faith and conviction that these abandoned persons can have a hope-filled future, the volunteers and benefactors have been helping hundreds of thousands of people for the past 30 years.

Aware of the enormous needs, Father Pedro asked the Province of Madagascar for support and collaboration. His wish was fulfilled on 13 February 2019 by the opening of a new international community as part of Akamasoa. The needs are enormous: faith formation in general, pastoral care of the youth, accompaniment of students, visits to the many villages of Akamasoa and much more. The opening of a community in Akamasoa is a new page of the mission of the Congregation in Madagascar. The mission needs many new missionaries.

The language is Malagasy, but it is also important to have a knowledge of French.

ANGOLA

As we have already reported, it is still difficult to form a community in the mission of Lombé, which is always in such great need of our presence. Three confreres (two from India and one from Colombia) have decided to go, and have been accepted by the Superior General and his Council, but they have been held up in the visa process because of the problems of COVID-19. Of the two missionaries who were there, Father Alfredo Aldana died. Father Jason is still alone and in need of our prayers and moral support. With the death of Archbishop Roberto Benedito of the Archdiocese of Malange, the situation has become even more complicated since time has passed and no replacement has been appointed.

Nevertheless, Lombé remains a mission in perspective, because of the mission’s extension and poverty. The presence of the Daughters of Charity and MISEVI in various works and places invites us to remain there, with an ever-greater commitment. One advantage is that the center (Lombé) does not have requirements that would prevent an older missionary from serving at home, while the other missionaries can open roads within the territory whose pastoral care has been entrusted to us. The pastoral visits to the various rural communities occupy a good part of the time.

Angola is a Portuguese-speaking Catholic country with awaking local vocations. In fact, we have a philosophy student and three young men in preparation for entry. May God give the green light to all the projects we have in view.
CUBA

The reconfiguration process initiated in Cuba is progressing with its achievements and limitations. Fortunately, the missionaries we were lacking have been replaced partially. The ordination of two new Cuban missionaries helped only in part, because one of them has decided to move to the diocese. It is hoped that in the next few years some more will be ordained from among the students we now have.

It fills us with hope and joy that the old seminary of “Cotorro” is being restored to be used for the formation of the vocations that God will send us. It seems that, so far, vocation ministry is on the right track.

There is still not enough staff to serve the poor on this island. Some of the priests are finishing their time in Cuba. The two we were expecting from the provinces of Asia will not be able to come, so this year we need at least two more missionaries who can collaborate in the Mission of San Luis, which is very large, or in one of the parishes of Cuba. We also need a formator with the desire to face the challenges that the formation of our confreres represents in the environment of this nation. May God move the hearts of our confreres to strengthen the faith of this People of God who are so much in need. The language is Spanish.

HONDURAS

Even though three different provinces are involved in the missionary work of Honduras, we continue to pray to the Lord to send us workers. The Province of San Vicente de Paúl, Spain, has missions in La Mosquitia, in San Pedro de Sula, and in Tegucigalpa. The Province of Slovakia has a mission in Sangrelaya, which is a group of small islets between the sea and the waters of lagoons and rivers. The Province of Saragossa has the missions of Cuyamel and Puerto Cortés. We are particularly concerned with the missions of “La Mosquitia,” in the Diocese of Trujillo, where our confrere, Luis Solé Fa, is bishop. The diocese is poor in resources and personnel. It is a vast territory, difficult to access, in many areas only by plane or boat, due to the inhospitable terrain. Help in this area can be a magnificent missionary experience, but above all, an authentic gesture of charity, fraternity, and dedication. The language is Spanish.

GUATEMALA

The Province of Central America has given pastoral attention to the Sayaxché Mission in an indigenous territory with different ethnicities of the Mayan culture and dialectal ramifications for many years. Two missionaries now animate the communities, but despite their apostolic zeal, they are not enough.
It is not an easy mission. The Petén region is a jungle area with difficult access to cities and communities in the interior, especially when it rains. At least two more missionaries should be sent to support such missionary and Vincentian work. The language is Spanish.

ARGENTINA

The number of members in this province does not allow it to advance on the missionary path on which it set out. The project of forming a mission team has been stopped not only by the pandemic, but also by lack of personnel. The province is collaborating with missionaries in the different needs of the Congregation, and yet it has dared to open a new community in the poorest and most needy area of Paraguay. It is a good opportunity to advance the internationality that our missionary spirit implies.

The language is Spanish.

VICE-PROVINCE OF MOZAMBIQUE

The Vice-Province of Mozambique is small, with about 20 missionaries, although it does not lack vocations. This leads us to believe that, in the future, it will have more personnel. At present, they need missionaries to attend to works that have been opened and that they cannot easily leave. They are requesting the help of four missionaries:

- Two missionaries for formation in the centers of Matola (20 seminarians) and Nacala (42 seminarians, half of them from the diocese).
- Two other missionaries for Tete (a very poor area of the country), to help the one who is in charge of the parish and of the area because, soon, he will be replaced to go for studies. The last missionary would be for Xinavana, to be a parish priest and work with the people of that place.

The language spoken is Portuguese.

VICE-PROVINCE OF SAINTS CYRIL AND METHODIUS - RUSSIA

The Mission in the Ural Mountains in the city of Nizhny Tagil is under the supervision of the Vice-Province of Saints Cyril and Methodius. The mission needs men who can obtain visas for Russia. The work is slow, mostly Eucharistic celebrations on Sundays in three small parishes requiring 350 kilometers of travel. There is also collaboration with the Daughters of Charity, the Association of the Miraculous Medal, and some other Vincentian-Charism-inspired groups. The Province of Vietnam is preparing men to join this mission. The language of ministry is Russian.
May Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Vincent the Paul, and all the Saints, Blessed, and Servants of God of the Congregation of the Mission, as well as of the whole Vincentian Family, intercede for us!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General