

Mission needs ongoing formation

The word “mission” has a negative connotation. It suggests the idea of proselytizing, forced conversion, imposing personal convictions on other people, or worse, destroying other cultures. Some episodes in history of mission have led to this prejudice. Missionaries are accused of despising the cultures of other peoples. Often they were convinced of the superiority of their own European culture and ignored or misunderstood the values and expressions of African cultures and religions. Already 100 years ago, Pope Benedict XV. in his Encyclical ‘Maximum Illud’, made a clear distinction between colonization and christian mission and demanded respect for the cultural peculiarities of peoples. The great challenge of the young churches of Africa today is to root the message of Jesus in the cultures and ways of living of the people.

Christians in Europe are facing similar challenges. Science and technology, globalization and secularization, radically and rapidly change our culture and our ways of speaking, thinking and living. How can we bring the message of Jesus to this everchanging world? This requires continuous reflection and formation of all actors of mission, who need to become familiar with the language and the culture of people today.

In his first apostolic letter ‘Evangelii Gaudium’, Pope Francis gave the church some guidelines as to how this process might look like. Important elements are:

- *To live a deep relationship with Jesus and be ready to face the radical challenge of his Word;*
- *To live close to the realities of the life of ordinary people and share their worries and hopes;*
- *To show in preaching and catechesis the relevance of the Gospel in the context of life today;*
- *To build a synodal church where bishops, priests and laity seek new answers to new developments and challenges in the spirit of Jesus.*

Texts

- All **Christian formation** consists of entering more deeply into the *kerygma* ... the first proclamation must ring out over and over: “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.” (Evangelii Gaudium 165)
Whenever we make the effort to **return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel**, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world. (EG 11)
- The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. (Gaudium et Spes 1)
An evangelizing community gets **involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives**... It embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers take on the **“smell of the sheep”**. (EG 24)
- Today’s **vast and rapid cultural changes** demand that we constantly seek ways of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding. (EG 41)
It is imperative to evangelize cultures in order to inculturate the Gospel. (EG 69)
- It is **the task of the entire People of God**, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word, so that revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage. (Gaudium et Spes 44) The bishop must always foster... a dynamic, open and missionary communion... Yet the principal aim of these participatory processes should not be ecclesiastical organization but rather **the missionary aspiration of reaching everyone**. (EG 31)



Questions for reflection

- ✚ Which modern expressions of the faith (texts, songs, pictures ...) appeal to me?
What in our traditional religious language is foreign and incomprehensible to me?
- ✚ Where are places where priests and lay people, young and old look for new spiritual forms?