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MISSIONS TODAY

Spring 2025

**In the spirit
of hope**



The Society for the Propagation of the Faith

National Director's message

Missions Today spring issue 2025



As the Church moves further into the 2025 Jubilee Year, *Pilgrims of Hope*, we do well to reflect on the Holy Father's invitation to recognize the immense goodness present in our world, lest we be tempted to think ourselves overwhelmed by evil and violence. The signs of the times, which include the yearning of human hearts in need of God's saving presence, ought to become signs of hope. Global or personal, alone or with others, we can witness to these events and persons of hope.

From my perspective as director of the Pontifical Mission Societies Canada, I would like to share with you two signs of hope.

Due to the growth of the Catholic Church on the African and Asian continents, the Holy Father frequently creates new dioceses for the pastoral care of the faithful there. For example, on August 1, 2024, he established the Diocese of Ganda in Angola. This new diocese includes 633,636 Catholics who are served by 59 priests, 64 religious sisters and 49 seminarians. We should see these developments as events of hope that the Good News is being heard and followed. Through the Society of Propagation of the Faith, you can join us on a pilgrimage of hope with new local churches like the one in Angola. Our prayers and donations encourage the new bishop and the faithful on their journey of faith.

You can find more information on the hopeful growth of the Church throughout the world on our website, missionsocieties.ca.

A second sign of hope arises amidst tensions and violence. In Bangladesh there is a general crisis marked by uncertainty, economic problems and confrontations. Fr. Redon Robert Hadima, vice-rector of the Interdiocesan Major Seminary of Dhaka, offered this response to Fides:

"As a Catholic community, a community that represents only 0.03% of the population, we must strive to contribute to stability, calming tempers and consoling afflicted hearts. It is necessary to ask people for patience and to live, especially in this Jubilee year, as a time of hope. That hope exists; it is in the Lord and does not fade. From our modest reality, we are committed to fostering charity and solidarity with all, especially with the poorest and most vulnerable."

This is a powerful sign of hope from a region whose Catholics strive to make a difference and where your donations make a difference.

This issue contains many more examples of these signs of hope. There is the story of the missionaries who have laid down their lives for love of God and neighbour and the witness of Saint-to-be Carlo Acutis who set out to evangelize through the power of technology. We've also included reflections on the message of the Holy Year, as well the related theme for World Mission Sunday 2025 — *Missionaries of Hope Among All Peoples*. As we journey together through Lent and into the joy of Easter, may these words help you to connect more deeply to our shared responsibly to live out the Great Commission, and to do so with hope.

Yours in Christ,
Bishop John A. Boissonneau
National Director

The Society for the Propagation of the Faith

The Society for the Propagation of the Faith supports new Catholic communities as well as those lacking essential resources. Present in more than 120 countries, the Society for the Propagation of the Faith is one of four **Pontifical Mission Societies** that collectively encourages Catholics in their baptismal call to mission, inviting each one of us to contribute through prayer and financial support. Other Pontifical Mission Societies include the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood, Pontifical Society of St. Peter the Apostle and Pontifical Missionary Union.

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From Pope Francis' message for World Mission Sunday 2024

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Papal missionary message

Message for World Mission Day 2025: In the footsteps of Christ our hope

Pope Francis has chosen the theme of World Mission Day 2025, *Missionaries of Hope Among all Peoples*. In his message introducing the theme, the Holy Father explains that this motto reminds us of our “fundamental vocation to be, in the footsteps of Christ, messengers and builders of hope.” The theme, which complements the theme of the Jubilee, Pilgrims of Hope, is intended to inspire a new moment of evangelization in the Church.

The Holy Father begins his message by pointing us all to the hope of Christ himself. Though Christ experienced all of human frailty except sin, he commended his suffering with perfect trust in God the Father. Christ modelled for us how we can trust in the Lord, even in our darkest moments. The Holy Father says this makes Christ the divine “Missionary of hope.”

But, of course, Christ does not just give us an example. Christ is present to the suffering of the world, “he still bends over all those who are poor, afflicted, despairing and oppressed.” Christ accompanies those in need through us, his missionary disciples. Pope Francis does not only want us to experience the accompaniment of Christ in our own sufferings, but to be Christ to the world.

This is the Church that Christ calls for, a Church that follows in his footsteps. Here, the Holy Father reminds us of his own words, spoken in his homily at the concluding Mass of the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2024, “..not a seated Church, but a Church on her feet. Not a silent Church, but a Church that embraces the cry of humanity. Not a blind Church, but a Church, enlightened by Christ, that brings the light of the Gospel to others. Not a static Church, but a missionary Church that



ANNETT KLINGNER/PIXABAY



walks with her Lord through the streets of the world.”

In that homily, Pope Francis reminded the bishops of the story of the blind man, Bartimaeus, who encountered Jesus while “sitting by the roadside” (Mk 10:46), but was called by Jesus, was healed and “followed him on the way” (v. 52). While Bartimaeus was constrained by physical blindness, how much more does our own “inner blindness” paralyze

“ Not a static Church, but a missionary Church that walks with her Lord through the streets of the world.”

- Pope Francis

us? The Holy Father says that this, when we are “incapable of perceiving the presence of the Lord,” is what “holds us back from the dynamism of life and destroys our hope.” Pope Francis explains that in these moments we must turn to Christ and allow him to heal our blindness so that we too may get “back on our feet.”

To read the full text of the Pope’s message, visit missionsocieties.ca then go to Francis / Messages / World Mission Day

Spiritual reflection

Blessed Carlo Acutis: A modern missionary



COURTESY OF Dobroš - Own work.

On April 27, Pope Francis will canonize the first millennial saint, Carlo Acutis. Not only will the Church get its first saint to be buried in blue jeans and sneakers, its also gets a new type of saint, a saint of the New Evangelization – a modern missionary.

“To be always united with Jesus, this is my plan of life”

Since childhood, Acutis was known for his strong faith. Though his parents were Catholic, they did not practice their faith. It was Carlo’s interest in his faith from a young age that moved them to grow closer to Jesus. This was the effect that Carlo had on many of the people in his life.

Born in the U.K. and raised in Milan, Acutis had interests and hobbies like most young boys in 21st century Europe. He played the saxophone, rooted for AC Milan; he even made funny videos of his pets set to music from Star Wars.

Like many, Acutis was fascinated by computers. While he enjoyed video games, he limited himself to playing just one hour per week. Before his death he told his mother, “I am happy to die because I have lived my life without wasting a minute on those things that do not please God.”

God’s influencer

Acutis was inspired by Blessed James Alberione, an Italian priest and founder of the Society of St. Paul and the Daughters of St. Paul. Blessed James Alberione used modern means of communications – press, cinema, television and radio – to spread the Gospel. Acutis recognized

that with his computer skills he could use the internet to share the Word of God as well. He created a parish website and a site dedicated to promoting volunteering. Eventually, he set himself to creating a website to promote a devotion to Jesus in the Eucharist.

A Eucharistic missionary

“The Eucharist is my highway to heaven.”

Acutis was especially devoted to Jesus in the Eucharist. He truly believed that “with each Communion we come closer to the goal of sanctity.” Acutis was already living out the Great Commission in his personal life, but he wanted to share his faith with as many people as possible. He spent more than two years building a website which documented Eucharistic miracles.

“The more Eucharist we receive, the more we will become like Jesus, so that on this earth we will have a foretaste of heaven.”

In 2005, when Acutis was just 15 years old, he became suddenly and fatally ill. He was diagnosed with leukemia and died within just a few weeks. Though he suffered, he offered up his suffering to Christ for the Pope and the Church. Like many of us, Acutis didn’t go out and travel the world to be a missionary. But, regardless, he found a way to live out the Great Commission – first within his own family, then in his parish, and finally with the entire world through the talents, interests and resources that had been given to him by God.

The Pope’s monthly prayer intentions

Each month, the Holy Father asks for our prayers for a specific intention. You are invited to join the whole Church as we pray:

April: For the use of the new technologies

Let us pray that the use of the new technologies will not replace human relationships, will respect the dignity of the person, and will help us face the crises of our times.

May: For working conditions

Let us pray that through work, each person might find fulfilment, families might be sustained in dignity, and that society might be humanized.

June: That the world might grow in compassion

Let us pray that each one of us might find consolation in a personal relationship with Jesus, and from his Heart, learn to have compassion on the world.

Jubilee Year 2025: Pilgrims of Hope

'Spes Non Confundit': A universal call to Jubilee and a word of hope



For everyone, may the Jubilee be a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the “door” of our salvation, whom the Church is charged to proclaim always, everywhere and to all as “our hope.”

As the entire Church celebrates the Jubilee Year, Pope Francis guides us with a reflection on the theme of hope. In the papal bull officially proclaiming the Holy Year, *Spes Non Confundit* (*Hope Does not Disappoint*), the Holy Father invites us to experience the Jubilee as a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord. Whether we will be pilgrims to the Holy Door at Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome or the door of our local parish, the Holy Father asks all of us to be encouraged by the words of the Apostle Paul, “Hope does not disappoint,” (*Rom 5:5*).

“...We boast in our hope of sharing in the glory of God... Hope does not disappoint, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (*Rom 5:1-2.5*).

The Holy Father begins the text with a reflection on St. Paul’s words in the Letter to the Romans. After spreading the Gospel in the eastern reaches of the Roman Empire, St. Paul sets out to evangelize Rome itself. He approached this difficult undertaking with haste, emboldened by the conviction that he could not be separated from the love of Christ.

The Holy Father reflected on this thought in his catechesis on hope in May 2024, when he quoted Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical, *Spe Salvi* – “Only when the future is certain as a positive reality does it become possible to live the present as well.” In worldly terms, we all know that the future is not certain. Hardships are guaranteed. But here the Holy Father remind us that hope is a theological virtue. Hope does not come from us; it is a gift from God. When we have hope, we can endure the difficulties of life, confident of the promises of the Resurrected Christ. But when we sin against hope, when we become “despondent over our sins” and lack confidence in God’s mercy, we risk the foundation on which all other virtues are built.

“We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope” (*Rom 5:3-4*).

In our secular world, hope can sometimes be reduced to a platitude – a state of mind or mere optimism. But St. Paul’s picture of hope is much more complex. In fact, the Holy Father calls St. Paul a “realist” in the way he tackles suffering and failings of life. For Paul, though the lives of those who

preach the Gospel are so often marked by difficulty and persecution, it is in the darkness of that difficulty that the light of Christ shines clearly.

According to the Holy Father, there is one virtue that is critical to hope in the darkness of difficulty – patience. Even in the darkness that St. Paul describes, that all of us have experienced, there is the light of evangelization, a light that can only come from Christ’s cross and resurrection. But we must have patience to see and recognize that light, and to allow it to enkindle our hope.

In his catechesis on hope, Pope Francis reminds us of two important biblical models of hope and patience. The Holy Father says that “hope is the virtue of those who are young at heart.” But here he is not speaking about age. He gives the example of Simeon and Anna. Though elderly, they remained fixed on what was to come. They lived long lives in waiting to finally be blessed by the Messiah at the very end of their time

on earth. Their patience fuelled hope that was, in the end, fulfilled.

But in our modern world where so many answers can come to us instantly with just the tap of our fingertips, there seems to be no place for patience. So how can we relearn the patience that we’ve lost in our frenetic world full of distractions? How can we learn to wait, to observe, to appreciate the light in the darkness? Pope Francis tells us to look to Saint Francis and the Canticle of the Creatures. In the seasons, the life cycles, the harvests – in God’s creatures large and small – we can gain an appreciation for how, in time, our Lord keeps his promises.

Follow the events and messages of the Jubilee at iubilaeum2025.va/en

The Jubilee Prayer

Father in heaven,
may the *faith* you have given us in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother,
and the flame of *charity* enkindled in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,
reawaken in us the blessed *hope* for the coming of your Kingdom.

May your grace transform us into tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel.
May those seeds transform from within both humanity and the whole cosmos
in the sure expectation of a new heaven and a new earth,
when, with the powers of Evil vanquished, your glory will shine eternally.

May the grace of the Jubilee reawaken in us, *Pilgrims of Hope*,
a yearning for the treasures of heaven.
May that same grace spread the joy and peace of our Redeemer
throughout the earth.
To you our God, eternally blessed, be glory and praise for ever.
Amen

Franciscus

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No greater love

Missionaries who laid down their lives in 2024



COURTESY OF ILO FREY / PEXELS

Thirteen Catholic missionaries were killed in their work in 2024, including eight priests and five laypeople. An annual study published by Fides finds that, since 2000, more than 600 missionaries and pastoral workers have been killed worldwide. Africa and South America remain the most dangerous mission territories. As we pray for all missionaries who bravely share the light of the Gospel around the world, we reflect on the stories of some of those who laid down their lives in 2024.

Juan Antonio López
Honduras - López was a Catholic human rights and environmental activist. A husband and father of two, he was killed by a hitman on September 14, after attending Mass. He had been working to close an iron oxide mine that is said to be contaminating a local water supply.

“I join in the grief of that church and condemn every form of violence,” Pope Francis said of López’s murder. “I am close to

all those who see their fundamental rights violated and to those who work for the common good in response to the cry of the poor and the earth.”

François Kabore
Burkina Faso - Kabore was a volunteer catechist in Essakane, an area where most Christians have fled from terrorism and escalating violence. In February, he was attacked and killed while leading a prayer service for a community without a priest.

Edouard Zoetyenga Yougare
Burkina Faso - In April, catechist Edouard Zoetyenga Yougare was kidnapped and killed near Saatenga. A married father of eight, he was found with his throat slit and his hands tied behind his back. He is believed to have been tortured.

Another catechist, Jean Marie Yougare, was kidnapped by the same group. He was eventually released after his attackers recognized him – he had once welcomed them into his home during a thunderstorm.

Edmond Bahati Monja
Congo - As the coordinator of Radio Maria/Goma, Bahati had been investigating armed militias in eastern Congo. He was murdered in September- shot near his home after being followed by three assassins. He is one of at least a dozen journalists killed in that area in the past two years.

Father Marcelo Pérez
Mexico - Father Pérez had worked tirelessly to promote human dignity and end drug trafficking in Mexico’s southern state of Chiapas. He was shot by men on motorbikes while he was returning to his parish after celebrating Mass nearby. He had been receiving death threats for his work with victims of violence.

“I am close to all those who see their fundamental rights violated and to those who work for the common good in response to the cry of the poor and the earth.”

- Pope Francis

Maria’s faith

Hope rooted in faith brings positive change to young people



By Maria Fornasier

them.

According to Pope Francis, it is certainly reasonable for young people to be tired and overwhelmed by life’s responsibilities and pressures as well as by the inundation of contradictory advice and information that permeates their lives. Last September, for World Youth Day, he stated that “hope is precisely a new kind of strength that God instills in us, enabling us to persevere in the race, to see beyond present difficulties and to press forward to the goal of communion with him and the fullness of eternal

By developing and nurturing a trusting relationship with the Lord, through prayer, reaching out to caring, trusted role models, and participating in the Eucharist, young people can find hope that they can use to bring about much-needed, positive changes, big and small, in the world around

life.” In other words, by having faith in the Lord’s support, young people’s spirits will be lifted; by doing so, they can set an excellent example for all of us of maintaining hope, even in turbulent times. Strengthened by their faith, they can live their lives more positively, making themselves happier and enriching the lives of those around them and those suffering in some way. Hope will come to them when they rely on the Lord to provide them with strength, which will come slowly through consistent, honest prayer and listening to Him.

Hope also requires trust in the Lord. I taught at a school named after St. Thomas Aquinas. The school day began with his words, on the wall in every classroom: Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know you, a heart to seek you, wisdom to find you,

Even those who are young grow weak; young people can fall exhausted. But those who trust in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed. They will rise on wings like eagles; they will run and not get weary; they will walk and not grow weak.

Isaiah 40:30-31

conduct pleasing to you, faithful perseverance in waiting for you, and a hope of finally embracing you. Amen. By placing their hope and trust in Jesus, they can be missionaries, carrying forth a message of hope and an invitation for all to turn to Jesus. They can be an example to others through their idealism, enthusiasm and approach to life. Hope will help them use their energy to share their faith with others, including those who are less fortunate than they are. They must have the courage to use their hope to bring about change in the world around them.



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“I recommend to all dioceses throughout the world the service of the Pontifical Mission Societies.”

From Pope Francis’ message for World Mission Sunday 2024

Join us in proclaiming the Gospel, inviting everyone to be pilgrims of Hope.

Learn more about the **Society of the Propagation of the Faith**, and become a missionary through your prayer and support.

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Across the globe

Spotlight on Chile, India and Angola

With support from the Pontifical Mission Societies, missionary projects are making an impact in every corner of the world.

AMERICA/CHILE - More than 1,500 young volunteers on a mission to meet Christ at the service of the community

Santiago de Chile (Agenzia Fides) - Young volunteers are visiting 55 areas of the country to bring a message of peace and hope to families. There are more than 1,500 students on mission to encounter Christ at the service of the communities.

"Pope Francis sent me a letter inviting me to be less of a cardinal and more of a servant, so in your case it is a question of being less of an engineering, medical or pedagogical student and more of a servant," said the Archbishop of Santiago, Cardinal Fernando Chomali, in his homily at the sending-off Mass, referring to what the Pope had recommended to him when he was appointed cardinal in December 2024.

The cardinal urged the young missionaries to marvel at everything around them, starting with their own study disciplines, and to make use of their own talents. "Looking up to go out of ourselves, because Christ is the center, hands folded so that we can be people of prayer and bare feet to feel the suffering of poverty," said the Archbishop of Santiago before blessing the crosses of the volunteers. (AP) (Agenzia Fides, 8/1/2024)

Continue reading at fides.org/en/news/75870

ASIA/INDIA - Food and "certain hope" for the poor, in the spirit of the Jubilee: the Capuchin mission in Tamil Nadu

Dindigul (Agenzia Fides) – The "Assisi Free Food Support" initiative aims to offer food to the neediest students in rural areas, those who cannot afford even one meal a day, as well as to those who share this situation of deprivation. This initiative launched February 5 at Anugraha College (whose name means "Providence of God"), a center run by the Capuchin Fathers in the diocese of Dindigul, in Tamil Nadu, and is presented as a prophetic gesture for the Jubilee Year. "We intend to demonstrate in a concrete way our closeness to the poorest, in the spirit of the Jubilee that announces hope to those in need," says Father George Bernardshaw Jesudass OFM. Cap, director of the school, which houses 900

young people between 18 and 23 years old. The centre, dedicated to guiding students from rural families in their formation and higher education, is affiliated with the Kamaraj University of Madurai. "We are happy and receive support from both the friars of the Mary Queen of Peace Province and others, since any kind of help is precious in order to generate a positive impact in the lives of our students and ensure the basis of food security necessary for study," adds the friar. (PA) (Agenzia Fides, 5/2/2025)

Continue reading at fides.org/en/news/75996

AFRICA/ANGOLA - Angolan faithful pray for the Mozambican population: "The true battlefield is the human heart, from which evil and peace arise"

Luanda (Agenzia Fides) - "Let us pray for Mozambique caught in a spiral of violence that is not the remedy for our fractured world. Violence breeds more violence, causing suffering, anguish, and forced migration," Fr. Celestino Epalanga said during the January 3 Eucharistic celebration that was held at Our Lady of Fatima Parish of the Catholic Archdiocese of Luanda.

In his homily during the "Vigil for Peace" that concluded the three-day spiritual initiative, the Executive Secretary of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Angola and São Tomé (CEAST) highlighted the far-reaching consequences of violence in Mozambique and across the globe.

The initiative concluded with a call to end violence in the Southern African nation.

Participants at the event in Luanda brought candles, lighting them from the altar's flame as a symbolic offering of peace. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 9/1/2025)

Continue reading at fides.org/en/news/75874

FAST FACT

Angola is home to Shrine of Our Lady of Muxima, one of the largest Catholic pilgrimage sites in sub-Saharan Africa. Each year, many thousands gather for an annual pilgrimage at the end of August.

Editor's reflection



In this Year of the Jubilee, we are called to be pilgrims of hope, lifting our eyes beyond the shadows of our world to fix them on the enduring light of Christ. Even amid conflict, suffering, and loss, the light of God's promises continues to shine brightly, reflected in His

creation, in acts of love and in the hearts of those who serve selflessly.

This divine light leads us to God himself. As Pope Francis reminds us: *"By virtue of the hope in which we were saved, we can view the passage of time with the certainty that the history of humanity—and our own personal journeys—are not destined for a dead end or a dark abyss, but are guided toward an encounter with the Lord of glory."*

2024 was another year marked by profound sacrifice. Thirteen Catholic missionaries were killed while serving their communities, a somber testament to the ongoing persecution faced by those spreading the Gospel, especially in Africa and South America. Their courage and faith inspire us to continue working for justice and peace, undeterred by fear.

We similarly witness another radiant ray of hope in the missionary work supported by the Pontifical Mission Societies. In Chile, over 1,500 young volunteers are on a mission across 55 regions to serve communities and encounter Christ, inspired by Cardinal Fernando Chomali's call to embrace humility and service. In India, the Capuchin Fathers' "Assisi Free Food Support" initiative in Tamil Nadu provides meals to impoverished students, reflecting the spirit of the Jubilee Year by offering hope and food security. In Angola, the faithful held a "Vigil for Peace," praying for Mozambique amid post-election violence, emphasizing that true peace and conflict begin within the human heart.

This year also brings the joy of witnessing the canonization of Blessed Carlo Acutis in April. Carlo, a young modern missionary whose life centered on the Eucharist, reminds us that holiness is attainable in our everyday lives. His example encourages us to unite our sufferings with those of Jesus, finding meaning and mission even in our struggles.

As we enter Lent, a time of reflection, repentance, and renewal, may we draw closer to Christ, sharing in His sufferings and rejoicing in His Resurrection. Let this season prepare our hearts to celebrate Easter with renewed faith and hope, proclaiming the victory of Jesus over sin and death.

Wishing you a blessed Lent and a joyful Easter filled with the peace and light of the Risen Christ!

Aline Bedros

"We thank God for the new and numerous missionary vocations for the task of evangelization to the ends of the earth."

From Pope Francis' message for World Mission Sunday 2024

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Missions Today is interested in hearing from you. If you have any comments on the content or structure of the magazine, or if there is anything you would like to see us explore in future issues, please get in touch.

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