



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE NATIONAL DIRECTORS  
OF THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES**

*Friday 11 May 2001*

*Your Eminence,  
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,  
National Directors,  
Collaborators of the Pontifical Mission Societies,*

1. It is a great joy for me to meet with you, on the occasion of your annual assembly. First of all I greet Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe, for a short time Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, and I thank him for the words he addressed to me in your name. I greet Archbishop Charles Schleck, Adjunct Secretary of the same Congregation and President of the Pontifical Mission Societies, together with the General Secretaries of the four Societies. I particularly greet you, National Directors, who in your respective countries dedicate yourselves generously to missionary education and cooperation. Through you, I would like to extend my grateful sentiments to all who, in discretion and silence, work hard so that the announcement of the Good News may spread to every corner of the earth.

2. Today's meeting is taking place while the echo of the Great Jubilee is still alive in the Church and in the world. It was not only "a remembrance of the past" but a "prophecy of the future". In the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* I wrote: "It is especially necessary for us to direct our thoughts to the future which lies before us" (n. 3). A fruit of the Jubilee is to look ahead with an attitude of faith and Christian hope, so that we can live the present intensely and open ourselves with trust to the future, in the certainty that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever!" (Heb 13: 8). A new and fruitful season of evangelization awaits us.

The mission, the duty of all believers, must particularly occupy you. Dedicate yourselves without delay to missionary education, formation and cooperation; have the courage to dare and the

wisdom to discern, plan and develop every initiative helpful for the service of Christ. Responding to the gifts of the Spirit, you will thus collaborate in the plan of universal salvation, the fundamental objective to which we must always tend with constant trust.

3. In the days preceding this annual meeting, with the contribution of scholars and experts, you have reflected on the figure of the Venerable Paul Manna, Founder of the Pontifical Missionary Union, a work defined by my predecessor Paul VI as the "soul of the Mission Societies". Fr Paul Manna remains a shining example of apostolic daring. Impelled by the fire of love for Christ, he founded a new Society, pointing to unheard of possibilities and new bold frontiers for the mission. He lived and communicated to his collaborators a constant tension towards God, who "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2: 4). His concern to involve everyone, especially priests and religious, showed itself to be providential for a broader sensitization of pastors and the faithful.

May this also be your constant longing, dear National Directors, so that with the help of divine grace missionary vocations "*ad gentes*" increase and be ever more generous and ready to take risks. I am thinking primarily of those who dedicate their entire lives to missionary work. In this regard, I feel the need to thank again all who, amid difficulties of every sort, with their gaze fixed on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith (cf. Heb 12: 2), persevere in the proclamation and witness, ignoring the risks, and being ready to sacrifice their lives. God will not fail to make them feel his presence and his consolation. How many times does the death of the witnesses of the faith open un hoped for possibilities for the Gospel of love and peace! The unconquerable passion for Christ is a singular and eloquent testimony for the men of our time.

4. We are at the dawn of a new millennium, a time of grace, an acceptable time (cf. 2 Cor 6: 2). The Lord associates us with himself as he did the first disciples, and invites us to "put out into the deep" (Lk 5: 4), while, as I wrote at the end of the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, "a new missionary age" (n. 92) is dawning. All believers are called to "prepare the way of the Lord" (Mt 3: 3), abandoning every fear and hesitation. All are invited to welcome, though aware of their own poverty, the invitation of Christ: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16: 15).

Jesus calls us and invites us as he did the Apostles. He does not choose us on account of our merits or our works; rather he sustains us and strengthens us with his "Spirit ... of power and love and self-control" (2 Tm 1: 7). Only "armed" with his grace can we bring the Good News to the ends of the earth. Difficulties and obstacles will not block our steps because the Heavenly Father's love for all humanity will continually sustain us.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters, I entrust you and all the members of your Communities to the merciful hands of Mary, Mother of the Church and Star of evangelization. Guided by Her, take everywhere the Gospel of her divine Son, our only Redeemer. As for me, I accompany you with

my prayer and affection. I bless you and those who in many regions of the globe work for education, formation and missionary cooperation.

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