

**USCMA Resolution
Celebrating 100 Years of Mission *Ad Gentes*
2008 Annual Meeting
Baltimore, MD**

The pilgrim Church on earth is by her very nature missionary, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father

Ad Gentes #2

The original Pentecost event propelled the young Church to all corners of the world to proclaim Jesus' offer of love and eternal life. This same spirit of Pentecost must animate us as well.

Benedict XVI, New York City, April 2008

Let it be resolved that:

USCMA members call on the US Catholic Church to join us in commemorating the 100th anniversary of the US Catholic Church's contribution to mission *Ad Gentes* and a revitalization of our commitment to international and home missions in our second century of mission evangelization to those who have yet to hear the gospel and see it in action.

Rationale:

During the historic visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the U.S., he repeatedly emphasized the urgency for global solidarity and the need for the Catholic Church to see herself living out a new Pentecost – imploring the Holy Spirit to give us a missionary outlook and a missionary heart. Additionally, when the Bishops of Latin America met in Aparecida, Brazil in April 2007, they called for a great continental mission. In August, 2008, the American Mission Congress (CAM3) declared the opening of that Continental Mission. What a timely call to look at our being a missionary Church!

The journey of the US Catholic Church in mission has seen various stages. In its first century, the US Church was primarily a “mission-receiving” Church, which welcomed clergy and religious from overseas. Spanish and French missionaries made major contributions, but ultimately all ethnic groups contributed to establish a vibrant faith community here at home. For the entire country, there was but one diocese, Baltimore, which this year celebrates the 200th anniversary of becoming, in 1808, the first archdiocese in the nation.

During the next 100 years, the Catholic community grew such that by 1908, the Vatican recognized the American Church as sufficiently established and it then officially became a mission-sending Church. The Apostolic Constitution *Sapientii Consilio* issued by Pope Pius X on June 29, 1908 (the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul) restructured the Roman Curia shifting responsibility for the U.S. hierarchy from the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith to the Congregation for Bishops. The church leaders at that time understood that the Church in the United States was ready to be missionary. This was a milestone in the life of our young US church. It meant that she, with her laity, clergy and religious, had matured in the faith.

In the second half of our first century of mission *Ad Gentes*, the number of long-term US missionaries has declined. While the United States church continues “to send workers into the field,” many go for shorter periods of time and with less formal preparation than before. And here in the U.S., our own Dioceses would struggle even more than they are now if not for the help of priests, religious and missionaries coming from outside the country.

The shifting demographics of mission, the ever-changing needs, and the urgency to live up to our missionary nature as a Church (*Ad Gentes* 2) urge us to recognize the Holy Spirit in this, our journey of hope, as we faithfully participate in God's mission. *We are receiving and sending now.*

As we enter the next hundred years in our missionary journey as a Church in the U.S., we call on all the USCMA members to celebrate *and promote* the gift of mission.

We, USCMA members, often join with our dioceses and parishes in celebrating their important anniversaries and jubilees with festivities lasting up to a year at times. As missionaries from the US Church we similarly invite

our sending institutes, dioceses and parishes now, in this Jubilee Year of St. Paul, to join us in recognizing the immeasurable contributions of missionaries from the United States in the development of local churches around the world – often in places where the Good News was not present or even welcome. Thousands of men and women have given the best years of their lives in the spread of the gospel by witness, proclamation, dialogue, and promotion of justice and the well being of the poor and abused of this world. Like Jesus himself, many paid the ultimate price for love of their neighbor.

Suggested actions:

- Encourage more US Catholics to participate in mission *Ad Gentes* by promoting mission vocations that will work with those people in this world who have yet to hear and see the gospel, especially the sick and those who struggle to live on less than \$2 a day;
- Promote diocesan and parish activities supporting mission institutes, congregations and associations; support Catholic non-government organizations working in countries poorer than our own; encourage global partnerships and mission immersion experiences;
- As we enter our second century of mission, thank your bishop for his past support of our common mission and encourage him to keep the mission spirit alive in the US church;
- Encourage your faith communities and parishes to study and reflect on gospel and church documents that remind us of our missionary vocation. Be sure to include the documents of the Latin American Bishops;
- Foster mission studies on campuses and in seminaries;
- Incorporate mission studies in religious education programs and sacramental preparations;
- Promote parish and campus activities designed to emphasize the call of all Catholics to be missionaries both by going and by giving (i.e. twinning and immersion trips);
- Put special emphasis on this Pauline Year, Paul being a great missionary. Consider publishing the Missionary Intentions of the Holy Father each month in the parish bulletin and websites, add a mission intercession for Liturgy, pray the mission rosary;
- Initiate local chapters of USCMA to promote sharing of mission experiences and collaboration among groups in your local area.

Other Resources:

- Decree on the Missionary Activities of the Church (*Ad Gentes*) www.papalencyclicals.net
- Decree on the Evangelization in the Modern World (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*) www.papalencyclicals.net
- On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate (*Redemptoris Missio*) www.papalencyclicals.net
- Document on the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean in Aparecida, Brazil on the Great Continental Mission <http://www.celam.org/MisionContinental/Documentos/Ingles.pdf>
- To the Ends of the Earth www.usccb.org
- *Teaching the Spirit of Mission Ad Gentes*, www.usccbpublishing.org; see Church Documents, Mission
- On the *Tercero Congreso Americano Misionero* (CAM3) see www.cam3ecuador.org
- www.mission-education.org
- www.worldmissions-catholicchurch.org ~ Pontifical Mission Societies; for Best Practices see side bar, World Mission Committee
- www.maryknoll.org ~ Maryknoll Missions
- www.columban.org ~ Columban Missions
- www.iamamissionary.org ~ celebrating 100 years of “financial” mission independence
- www.uscatholicmission.org ~ United States Catholic Mission Association