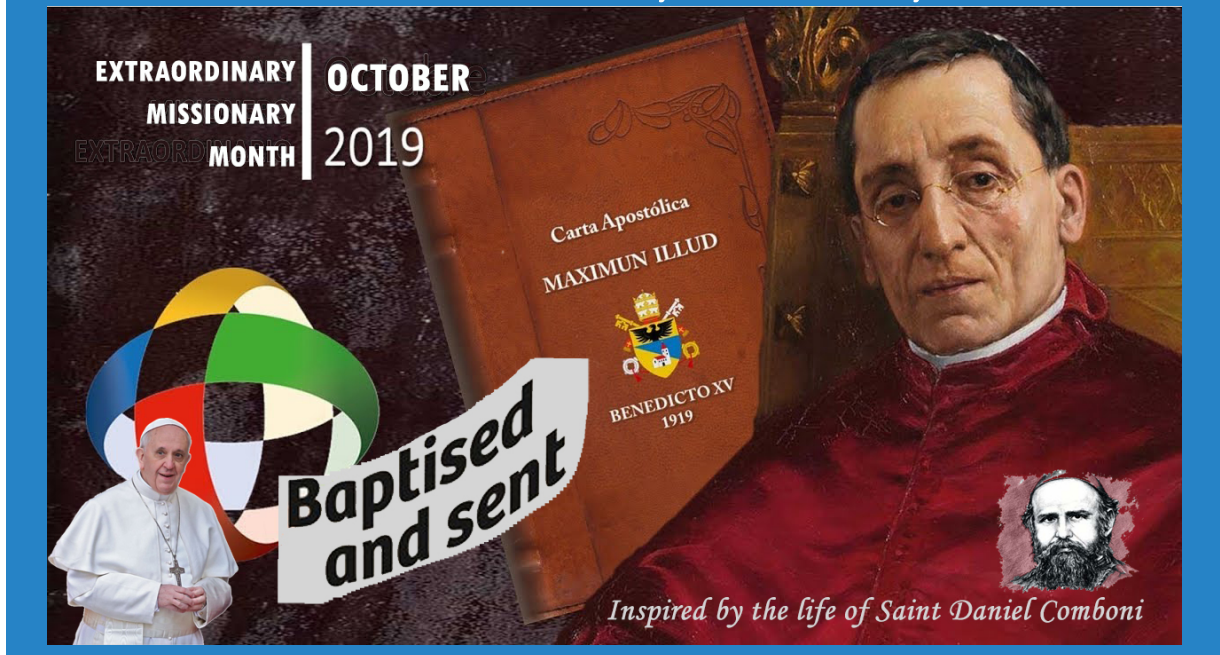


# Formation Extraordinary Missionary Month



## Introduction

As we know Pope Francis has called for an extraordinary missionary month in October 2019, in order to further awaken the missionary consciousness of the *missio ad gentes* and to resume the missionary transformation of life and pastoral with a new impulse.

One of the key proposals of this month should be training. That is why we offer you this little theme that can be used in youth and adult groups, in religion classes, confirmation groups, community formation and even as a personal reflection (although always better in community).

Therefore we will start from the letter of convocation of Pope Francis, from the [letter Maximun Illud](#) that Pope Benedict XV wrote (which we recommend reading or having next to consult) and whose centenary celebration causes the convocation of this extraordinary missionary month. We will also be accompanied by the writings and life of a missionary like Saint Daniel Comboni; His life together with that of other missionaries would inspire this letter and hopefully it will also help us and inspire each of us in our communities to be missionaries today.

## Pope Francis challenges us again

He reminds us in his letter that the year 1919 was running when Pope Benedict XV, after a tremendous world conflict that he himself defined as a "useless slaughter", understood the need to give an evangelical imprint to the mission in the world, to purify it from any colonial adherence and remove it from those nationalist and expansionist sights that caused so many disasters.

At this time, and within his pastoral work, Pope Francis also wants to encourage us to give a new missionary imprint to our Christian life. It reminds us that fulfilling this mandate of the Lord is not something secondary for the Church; it is an "inescapable task," as the Second Vatican Council recalled, since the Church is "missionary by its very nature. «Evangelizing constitutes, in effect, the happiness

*and vocation of the Church, its deepest identity. She exists to evangelize». To respond to that identity and proclaim that Jesus died on the cross and rose again for all, that He is the living Savior and the Mercy that saves, "the Church - affirms the Council - must walk, by motion of the Holy Spirit, by the same path that Christ followed, that is, on the path of poverty, obedience, service and self-immolation, "so that we can really announce the Lord", model of this renewed humanity, full of fraternal love, of sincerity and peaceful spirit, to which everyone aspires».*

*That is why pope Francis urge the Church to a "renewed missionary commitment", convinced that the mission "renews the Church, reinforces Christian faith and identity, gives new enthusiasm and new motivations. The faith is strengthened by giving!*

*Remember "the missionary cause must be the first".*

*It seems that only with these small excerpts from his letter of convocation we already have more than clear the importance of the mission for us as a Church.*

*And so he challenges us saying:*

*I hope that all communities will try to put the necessary means to advance in the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion, which cannot leave things as they are.*

*With confidence in God and with much encouragement, let us not be afraid to carry out «a missionary option capable of transforming everything, so that customs, styles, schedules, language and every ecclesial structure become an adequate channel for evangelization of today's world rather than for self-preservation.*

Well, there we have already launched the challenge

**What are each of us going to do as Christians to respond to this challenge?**

**What do we do as a CLM community to put ourselves at the service of the mission?**

Keep these questions in your hearts and let them be enlightened by some of the challenges that we will present to you from Maximun Illud and the missionary life of Comboni. At the end of the theme we will have the opportunity to answer it with more arguments.

## *The Maximun Illud Letter and the life of Comboni*

*We will place here some of the topics discussed in the letter (which will be numbered according to the letter MI) and that we can find in Comboni that lived half a century before. We will also highlight some aspects that still question us.*

### **1. Evangelization of the world, permanent duty of the Church. History and current affairs.**

*"Go all over the world and preach the Gospel to all nations" (Mk 16:15),*

... there still remain in the world immense multitudes of people who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death. According to a recent estimate, the number of non-believers in the world approximates one billion souls. [MI 1.6]

*This expression that we can read in Comboni is often the result of the time they live the way it is expressed. It somehow enlightens us about the missionary motivation of that time. However, what is the sense of the mission nowadays? What is the claim and the missionary urgency today?*

### *I. RULES FOR THE BISHOPS, VICARIES AND APOSTOLIC PREFECTS*

*The letter, written before Vatican II, is directed largely to the Church hierarchy as the responsible head of the mission. From Vatican II, we remember that the responsibility of the mission is not only of the hierarchy (although its responsibility is clear) but of the People of God, of every Christian, because our missionary responsibility is born from our baptism. That is why we propose that, when reading the letter, think that part of what is asked to the Church, each one of us is personally asked.*

#### **3. Paternal care of the missionaries**

*To carry out the mission, the Holy Spirit needs collaborators, missionaries, men and women, who are willing to give their lives. And we, as Church, are called to take care of them. It would be necessary to analyze at a practical level if that is the priority of the different dioceses or the day to day also makes it difficult to face that responsibility or how to improve this aspect.*

*To see how Comboni faced it, it is enough to remember here the testimony of Mr. Augusto Wiscniewski, a Polish lay missionary since 1856. In a letter written in 1873 from Khartoum, he said:*

*“As the Committee knows, it was my intention to leave the mission and return to Europe, with the departure of the Franciscan fathers; but I thank God for not having carried out that project of mine right away and for waiting for the Pro-vicar (Comboni) to arrive with his caravan first, because of that I can remain as a member of the mission, as my heart desire.*

*Already the entrance of the Provicar and his words have aroused the most favorable impression on all members of the mission, including those of the German language; **the way he treats us is excellent and there is a love among us as we had not experienced before. He cares about everything and each member of the mission is entrusted with a field of action: priests and laity receive the same treatment. The school of the Sisters is very popular and all esteem them;** they take care of the kitchen for all the members of the mission, which saves a lot on firewood and service personnel. All, as never before, appreciate the mission and there has been a decisive change in a better direction. The members of the mission are full of zeal for their exceptional vocation; if the means are not lacking, the diligent operators will certainly not be lacking” (To the Society of Vienna).*

#### **4. Promote the vitality of the mission**

*Pope Francis told us: Remember "the missionary cause must be the first". If so, we must rethink how to do it the first. How to encourage everywhere and all people to collaborate with the mission. We could certainly see Comboni touring continents, encouraging everyone, writing to countless people ... both in his time as a priest and in the end being Bishop. Reaching the last one at the last end of the earth was his vital need. And it was those times where people traveled by boat from Europe to Africa, carts were used along the roads and the first trains began to travel Europe, not forgetting the times that he crossed the Sahara desert in Camel. Undoubtedly many more difficulties than we can find in the world today, with airplanes, cars and especially the internet. We have many facilities just need to put them at the service of the mission.*

Can you think of any idea on how to do it in your specific case?

## 5. Find new collaborators.

*Now we talk a lot about networking, although we do not always carry it forward. In those days, Pope Benedict XV also encouraged to collaborate within the Church itself (it would not be so common). We can read:*

We wish to single out for commendation some Vicars Apostolic who have richly earned it: those who have kept this future development steadily in mind and are constantly engaged in the work of readying new provinces for the kingdom of God. If they find that their own order or congregation is not supplying enough manpower for the task, they are perfectly willing to call in helpers from other religious groups... [MI 11]

Therefore, the man entrusted with a Catholic mission, if he is working single-mindedly for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, goes out whenever it is necessary and searches, searches everywhere, for helpers in his holy ministry. He does not mind who they are; he does not mind whether they belong to his order or to another, or whether or not they are of his nationality, "provided only that, in every way... Christ is being proclaimed" (Phil 1:18).

Moreover, he does not limit his welcome to men, either. He will bring in sisters to open schools, orphanages, and hospitals, to found their hostels and establish other charitable institutions. He is happy and eager to do this, because he realizes how remarkably works of this kind, with God's help, contribute to the spread of the Faith. [MI 12]

*Comboni placed the mission at the center of all its activity and sought all help. Search to collaborate with other religious institutes but also gives a fundamental weight to the collaboration of religious sisters and laity. We can read:*

- The sister of charity in Africa does what three priests in Europe (W4465).
- (The secret of his success) ... because I have been the first to make the omnipotent ministry of the woman of the Gospel and the Sister of Charity collaborate in the Central African apostolate, which is the shield, strength and guarantee of missionary ministry (W5284).
- He believed and invested in the laity, who on mission "contribute to our apostolate more than priests participate in the conversion, because black students and neophytes are with them for a fairly long period of time. These, with the example and the word, are true apostles to the students, who observe and listen to them more than they can observe and listen to the priests" (W 5831).

No doubt, these words can help us to think about how we collaborate in our church today.

**How do we live this collaboration in our communities, parishes, movements?**

## 7. Care and formation of the native clergy

*Pope Benedict XV insisted, because it was thought that a Church could not be considered mature until it had its own clergy. This was and is a clear signal for what there was and you have to bet.*

It is only right, then, that those who exercise her sacred ministry should come from every nation, so that their countrymen can look to them for instruction in the law of God and leadership on the way to salvation. [MI 16]

*The single proposal of leaving the African Church in the hands of the native clergy caused difficulties for Comboni in the proposal of its Plan for the Regeneration of Africa. Many superiors of other orders did not see them prepared (nor could they prepare properly) .Remember that at that time for many the African had no soul.*

This ethnocentric posture repeat nowadays. The tragedy of illegal immigration reminds us that we may think that the lives of others are less important than ours. When thinking about the African, Asian or Latin American immigrant, many think that they cannot have a preparation as adequate as the one we have and therefore they can only do low-skilled jobs...

**Don't you think that some of that is still happening today?**

## *II. EXHORTATION TO THE MISSIONARIES*

### **9. Avoid nationalisms**

*This is one of the most important calls made by the Maximum Illud .We must think that in those days the missionary activity was closely linked to the colonial activity of the European powers. Wherever there was a European colony the missionaries of that country were implanted in that area. There was no such thing as a "church-state" separation. In many parts continue to be the idea of "the cross and the sword."*

*Comboni in that was also advance of his time, he told us:*

*"The Work must be catholic, not just Spanish, French, German or Italian. All Catholics must help the poor Africans, because one nation alone would not succeed in succouring the whole African race. Catholic institutions, such as that of the venerable Olivieri, the Mazza Institute, the work of Fr Lodovico or the Society of Lyons, etc. have doubtless done a great deal of good for individual Africans. Yet, up till now, a beginning has still to be made on planting Catholicism in Africa and ensuring that it lasts. By our plan we hope to be able to open a way for the Catholic faith among all the tribes in the whole territory occupied by Africans. To attain this end, it seems to me that all the initiatives already existing will have to be brought together, and that their supporters will have to keep their eyes fixed firmly on their noble aim and so set aside all their own individual interests". (W 944).*

*Concerned about the needs of the African, he requested that particular interests were put aside and everyone get united for this greater good.*

This may be consider of other times, but I don't know if it doesn't happen to us now too. Sometimes we are more concerned with our parish group and its activities than with the whole community, with our specificity or charism than for the good of the whole Church and especially for the good of all those men and women of the world who need us united to change the injustices that occur today. How do you see it?

## 16. Praise of Religious Sisters

*The letter also talks about missionary sisters*

We must not go further without saying something about the work that is being done by women, for since the very earliest days of the Church they have always been remarkable for their diligence and zeal in assisting the preachers of the Gospel. [MI 30]

*Comboni has clear ideas on that and goes much further:*

Just remember that it is women and St Joseph alone who will convert Central Africa. (W3114)

...the statistics of the African Mission show that European women, given their advantageous physical flexibility, the character of their moral life and their social and domestic habits, withstand the harshness of the African climate much longer than European men. (W836).

*It is clear that the role of women, and the laity, in the Church is something that has yet to be resolved.*

### III. COLLABORATION OF ALL THE FAITHFUL

*The maxim Max Illud exhortation is also addressed to all the faithful who ... the sacred obligation of assisting in the conversion of unbelievers applies also to them ... [MI 31]. That requested help focused on prayer, vocational promotion and financial aid. Today these three aspects also remain central.*

## 18. Prayer

There are three general ways in which a Catholic can assist the missionary effort, and missionaries themselves constantly remind us of them. The first is within everyone's capacity. This first means is prayer... [MI 32]

## 19. Fostering Vocations

Secondly, something must be done about the scarcity of missionaries. [MI 34]

... You will be performing a service eminently worthy of your love of the Faith if you take pains to foster any signs of a missionary vocation that appear among your priests and seminarians. [MI 34]

*But the MI refers to priests and seminarians ☺ (something typical of that period). Comboni believed and opted also for religious sisters as we have seen before and for lay missionaries, who on mission "are of greater benefit to our apostolate than the Priests who pursue conversions, because the African pupils and neophytes (most of whom, either to learn a trade or to work, must spend quite a long time with the "masters" and the "craftsmen" who, by their example and words, are the true apostles of the pupils) work alongside the lay Brothers, and they observe them and listen to them more than they can ever observe and listen to the Priests. contribute to our apostolate more than priests participate in the conversion, because black students and neophytes are with them during a period of quite long time". (W 5831).*

Therefore, we have received this missionary call, regardless of our ecclesial condition.

Have any of you felt called to the mission?

I think it is something that every Christian should ask seriously. Understand if the Lord calls you to leave for the mission or in what way you are called to collaborate in the Mission and with the missionaries. Don't you think so?

## 20. Economic Help

Finally, the missions need economic help, and a substantial amount of it... [MI 36]

It has wiped out a great number of schools, hospitals and hostels, has destroyed organized charities and put an end to many other types of foundation they once operated. [MI 36]

*We see the mission with its double component of evangelization, promotion and development of the peoples. It is something that has been developed and through it the Church itself gets the recognition of civil society. We must be encouraged to collaborate and share.*

## THE NEW PARADIGMS OF THE MISSION

*Currently the concept of mission is undergoing changes. People talk about mission with many terms that try to explain it, clarify it, but that many times confuse those who are not involved in the missionary study. {0We hear about Ad Gentes, Inter Gentes, Ad Extra, Ad Intra, Cum Gentibus...*

*We know that our missionary vocation starts from baptism, so every Christian should be a missionary ... so where is the specificity of the missionary vocation? There are many religious institutes, not specifically missionaries with missions, diocesan missions... The geographical concept of the mission is disappearing. There was much talk about the new evangelization... that "everything" is mission and that the mission is "everywhere". Where is the specific? Does it still make sense to leave? What is the motivation and reason for the mission? What is the vocational proposal we should make? What is the pressing need that caused the desire to leave, to surrender?*

*The mission has always provided a double aspect of evangelization and development, but is it still necessary with so many NGOs? Does it make sense to "evangelize" or is this not a new imposition and should we respect the religiosity of each people? Isn't it a new form of colonialism as Maximum Illud itself denounced? The increasingly secularized society questions us.*

*"Everyone in his house and God in everyone's" seems like a motto that is winning in society. Fears of losing everything, confidence only in the economy, and "save who can" ... is something that society want to impose. Market values, individualism ... influence in our society and in each of us (also as Christians).*

*Returning to the vision of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Francis has chosen the "Church on the way out" paradigm as the missionary program of our time. "We do not live in a time of change but in a change of time": with these words the Pope reminded us that the old patterns with which we interpret the world and the mission are no longer effective in facing today's challenges. The new global reality requires a "global mission", considered in all its complexity and with renewed assumptions, style and instruments respect the tradition of the past (EG, 33).*

*Pope Francis invites us from the borders, the "peripheries that need the light of the Gospel" (EG, 20). The geographical criteria of the mission is no longer the main point of reference. The idea of frontier remains but it now qualifies the human and existential peripheries. (Brother Alberto Parisse, mccj).*

*Facing this reality, a double answer is still necessary:*

- *If we look at the World and Humanity (the Laudato Si helps us to combine these two realities) we can see the great need that remains. Knowing God is a fundamental right of every person. To enable a dignified life and to take care of the common house is to Sanctify His name and do the will of the Father ("Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven").*
- *On the other hand, leaving home, work, land, culture, assurances to follow Jesus remains a Testimony of the infinite Love that God has for us. Full trust in His Word that everything can. Therefore a constitutive and essential part of our Christian faith.*

*The World and Humanity continue to be the responsibility of every baptized. The missionary vocation remains a necessary response to this responsibility (although not sufficient). In a globalized and interrelated world like the one we live in, networking, fighting against the causes and not just the consequences and seeking everyone's collaboration is essential. But the testimony, paid in person, of leaving (both for those who remain and for those who welcome) remains essential to show the Love of God that leaves everything to be with His people.*

What do you think of the mission today? Of the responsibility that as Church each one of us has? This is not about theorizing, it is about being sincere and raising what response we are willing to give each of us and as a group, as a community.

## ***THE LAY (AND IN SPECIAL THE MISSIONARY) THE GREAT FORGOT***

*Let me finally leave a note on the laity, the great part of God's people and probably the great forgotten in the Maximum Illud, not so in Comboni.*

*The Work that Comboni founded in Verona on June 1, 1867, despite being clearly rooted in that tradition of co-responsibility and cooperation between clergy and laity, which characterized the most fruitful ecclesial initiatives of Verona at the beginning of the eight hundred, nevertheless represents a novelty for the intensity and quality of the bond between priests and laity, between men and women, between diocesan church and missionary church (Joaquim Valente, Studium Comboniano).*

*The big difference with Comboni is its ecclesiology. His clear awareness of the great need of Africa and its peoples, and how we all should put ourselves at the service of this cause.*

*The whole Church is necessary for the regeneration of Africa, he said. The different institutes that work there (without charismatic distinction or nationality). He proposed the involvement of clergy, religious men and women and laity to promote a new society and a new church in Africa, in full co-responsibility with Africans "Save Africa with Africa" and from a full surrender "Africa or death."*

*In this, obviously, it is still more advanced than us.*

*The immensity of such work implies from the beginning that there will be different levels and forms of commitment:*



- *A large majority was expected to take part in the missionary effort, supporting the Work with their prayers and financial help.*
- *Others would be involved in keeping everyone's interest alive, reporting on the progress of the Work in Africa (mainly through a missionary magazine); they would also recruit new members and provide training to those called to exercise their ministries in Africa, as well as coordinate the channeling of the financial resources collected.*
- *Finally, those who feel called to a ministry in Africa should receive adequate spiritual and ministerial training in a community setting.*
- *Some of the ministries within the Work could be: government, missionary animation, formation, administration, economic resources, evangelization and human promotion.*

*It is interesting to note that none of the ministries was understood exclusively for clergy or lay people. (Joaquim Valente, Comboni Studium).*

Perhaps this scheme can give us clues of where to place each one facing our missionary work.

*Comboni absolutely believes in the local and missionary laity:*

*“All my efforts are directed at really reinforcing these two missions where we prepare good indigenous candidates from the central tribes, so that they may become apostles of faith and civilization in their own countries.” (W3293); “ have succeeded in training competent African teachers and catechists, in addition to cobblers, stonemasons and carpenters, and in providing the Stations of Khartoum and Kordofan with them. The indigenous trained in this way are indispensable for a Mission’s life” (W3409).*

*He believed and invested in the laity, who on mission “In Central Africa, well-trained Brother craftsmen are of greater benefit to our apostolate than the Priests who pursue conversions, because the African pupils and neophytes (most of whom, either to learn a trade or to work, must spend quite a long time with the “masters” and the “craftsmen” who, by their example and words, are the true apostles of the pupils) work alongside the lay Brothers, and they observe them and listen to them more than they can ever observe and listen to the Priests” (W5831).*

*Understanding the Church as the People of God as proclaimed by Vatican II is something that is still far away. We continue to maintain a church that is too clerical, with difficulties in letting the religious and especially the laity to assume responsibility.*

*Even so, it is true that the responsibility of our baptismal consecration as members of a living Church in the service of the Kingdom of God is something that continues to grow. The responsibility of the laity in the Church and in the mission of God is something that is present.*

*What is the challenge that as lay people we are willing to undertake?  
 What support are we willing to give to those lay people who choose missionary life? Will we be able as a  
 Church (Diocese, parish, group or community) to support them?*

*The lay missionary is not an altruistic adventurer but a Christian who follows the call received and who, as a Church, we send and for which we must take responsibility. All this knowing that when the laity*

*leave home, work are often not only adults but also have family and when they return they need to face this reality. Support the priests is somewhat easier to understand, if we talk about religious men and women it may be more difficult, but far from it is still the awareness that the missionary who leaves (the layman also or perhaps more) is the responsibility of the Church that send.*

*Living in places of first evangelization, often without light, water, etc. It can be very nice to tell but hard to be. In places with high rates of corruption and lack of formation, having professionally trained people and with values of honesty, effort, dedication... is essential. In these places the presence, the missionary's testimony is fundamental. In these countries, the presence of Christian families that testify of love in the couple, of the education of their children, of closeness (for their family status) with the people is essential. And that is something specific to the laity. A Church of first evangelization, which is the seed of a new Church, is not complete only with priests and religious whether men or women, the testimony at work, the testimony of family, love, care, education, etc. It is something that needs not only to be told but also to be testified, so the lay presence in mission is essential. A laity who does and lives as a laity.*

*The Church needs a clear conscience and missionary responsibility to recognize that the World and Humanity need us.*

*We must work for an adult Church, which will not be if it does not have a adult laity, from where new missionary vocations will be born and the necessary help to maintain them and extend a network of global solidarity that proposes and makes possible a new humanity on a sustainable planet.*

## **TO FINISHED**

*Let us recall the two questions launched at the beginning:*

**What are each of us going to do as Christians to respond to this challenge?  
What do we do as a CLM community to put ourselves at the service of the mission?**

*Well, we invite you now to pray about them and share them with your group or community. Let us not do it only in an intellectual way, but with the heart and thinking about what personal options and as a group these answers imply.*

*I hope that we will be able to draw concrete proposals, from each one and the group, to join the mission.*

*We wish you the best. May the Lord accompany you to make it possible in your lives.*

**Comboni Lay Missionaries.**

Correo: [info@lmcomboni.org](mailto:info@lmcomboni.org)

Web: [www.lmcomboni.org](http://www.lmcomboni.org)

Blog: [www.lmcomboni.org/blog](http://www.lmcomboni.org/blog)