

## Life Night: World Mission Sunday 2021

### **GOAL**

For teens to grow in their identity as a missionary disciple and their understanding of the mission they have received from Christ.

### **ABOUT THIS LIFE NIGHT**

This life night is designed to be used on or near World Mission Sunday (WMS) 2021 on October 24<sup>th</sup>.

### **GATHER**

#### **Welcome and Introductions (10 min.)**

Gather the teens into the main meeting space. Welcome them to the Life Night and begin in prayer.

Icebreaker Activity: Play a short game of charades or Pictionary. The idea behind this icebreaker is to cultivate our faith so that we have the same excitement and enthusiasm in sharing the Gospel that was present in the game.

### **PROCLAIM**

#### **Mission Teaching (20 min.)**

October is Mission Month in the Church (along with the month of the Rosary and Respect Life Month for US Catholics), with World Mission Sunday (WMS) falling on the second to last Sunday of October each year. WMS is an opportunity for all the faithful of the Catholic Church to renew their baptismal call to be a missionary and to join in communion with missionaries and mission dioceses around the world.

The “missionary mandate” is given by Jesus in all the Gospels when he says, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28: 18-20). See also Mk 16:15-18; Lk 24:46-49; Jn 20:21-23. While there are variations between the Gospel accounts, the “universal dimension” remains in each. Furthermore, Jesus assures His apostles that they will not be alone (*Redemptoris Missio* 23).

We are able to say that the Church is “missionary by her very nature, 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 missionary activity of the Church continues through the guidance of the Holy Spirit as, “The Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the Church’s mission” (RM 21).

World Mission Sunday recognizes all missionary activity of the Church, but focuses particularly on the mission “*ad gentes*” or “to the nations.” This refers to missionary activity among peoples in which Christ and his Gospel are not known or which lack the established Christian communities (RM 33). Mission *ad gentes* continues to be reaffirmed through Church teaching, especially through St. John Paul II’s encyclical, “*Redemptoris Missio*: On the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate.” (Fun fact, JP II was installed as pope on a WMS. He makes reference to this in his 1979 WMS Message. Also, he references traveling to so many countries as a reflection of this missionary consciousness in RM). In his encyclical, St. John Paul II says about the mission *ad gentes*, “This is one of the Church's fundamental activities: it is essential and never-ending” (RM 31). It is distinguished from the pastoral care of the faithful and the new evangelization, but of course, they overlap as well (RM 34).

Missionary activity is always directed towards people's freedom. St. John Paul II says, "Proclaiming Christ and bearing witness to him, when done in a way that respects consciences, does not violate freedom. Faith demands a free adherence on the part of man, but at the same time faith must also be offered to him" (RM 8). And later on, he continues, "*The Church proposes; she imposes nothing*" (RM 39). When sharing the Good News, we have to be careful to respect people's choices so that missionary activity remains evangelization, not proselytization. Proselytization is often associated with the forcing of one's beliefs upon another. God respects our free will, and we must do the same with others. But, the point remains, that each person needs to be offered faith in order to be able to make the choice in the first place. Finally, as Pope Francis emphasizes in his apostolic exhortation, the Gospel is meant to be shared with joy. That attracts others to the faith.

Everyone has a special role to play in this mission of the Church. First, we recognize that we are called to be missionaries by virtue of our baptism, which means we have the responsibility to share the Gospel (*Lumen Gentium* 17).

Everyone in the Church is called upon to pray and sacrifice for missions and missionaries around the world. Through prayer, Christians can unite themselves to missionaries and their efforts to share the Gospel. Furthermore, all Christians can share in the sacrifices of missionaries (RM 78). This can be financially and/or giving something up. We are given great examples to model our lives after, such as St. Thérèse of Lisieux and St. Francis Xavier. While St. Thérèse was too sick to go another country as a missionary, she united herself in prayer with missionaries and missions and thus lived her missionary call. The Church recognized that in naming her the patroness of missions and missionaries. Then, we have St. Francis Xavier, patron of missions, who lived the active missionary life, traveling to numerous countries to preach the Gospel, such as India, the East Indies, and Japan. He is said to have baptized more than 40,000 converts. He had a gift for great healing, even raising people from the dead (*CatholicSaints.Info*). While St. Thérèse is highlighted for her prayer and St. Francis for his sacrifices, both saints exemplified these aspects and show the importance of prayer and sacrifice combined.

On WMS, a collection is held to support the 1,111 mission dioceses around the world. The collection is organized through the Society for the Propagation of the Faith (one of the four Pontifical Mission Societies). Pontifical = relating the Pope. All four Pontifical Mission Societies are part of the universal Church. The WMS collection actualizes this sacrifice for missions around the world.

The theme for this year's World Mission Sunday is "We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). In Pope Francis' Message for World Mission Sunday, he reflects on how when we experience God's love, we are transformed in such a way that "we cannot help but proclaim and share what we have seen and heard."

## **BREAK**

### **Read WMS Message from Pope Francis (10 min.)**

Distribute copies of the Pope Francis' Message for WMS 2021 to each person to read silently. It can be found at:

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/missions/documents/papa-francesco\\_20210106\\_giornata-missionaria2021.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/missions/documents/papa-francesco_20210106_giornata-missionaria2021.html)

In addition, it is attached to the end of this document. Pass out pens/highlighters for underlining/highlighting things that stood out to them or parts that they had questions about.

- Variations: Core/teens take turns reading paragraphs aloud while everyone follows along – they can still underline/highlight. Or, if you feel it would be too long to read the whole document, just have them read a few sections.

### Small Group Discussion (25 min.)

Take the necessary time to divide into small groups. The Core Member opens in prayer and leads the small group discussion related to 2021 WMS Message.

#### Questions:

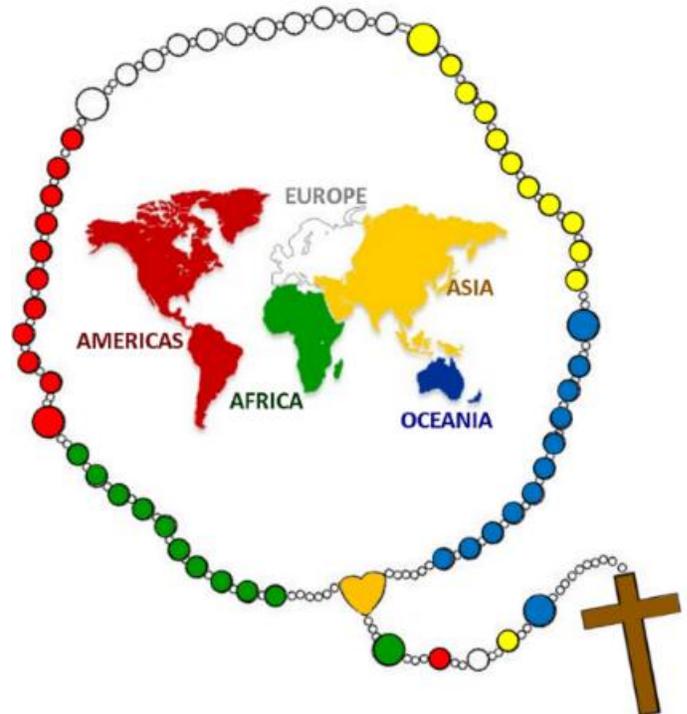
- 1) What struck you while reading Pope Francis' message?
- 2) What have you "seen and heard" of God's love that has transformed your life?
- 3) In his message, Pope Francis says, "To be 'in a state of mission' is a reflection of gratitude." What do you think he means?
- 4) Pope Francis talks about some of the challenges the first Christians faced, but how they did not let that halt their mission. Rather, he says, "Limitations and obstacles became a privileged occasion for anointing everything and everyone with the Spirit of the Lord." What are some of the obstacles you face in sharing your faith with others, and what is your response when those difficulties arise?
- 5) Towards the end of his message, Pope Francis challenges us to resist the temptation to form closed off groups but always remain open to sharing the Gospel with everyone in every place. He also says, "There is an urgent need for missionaries of hope." How can you be that missionary of hope, remaining open to sharing the Gospel with all people you interact with on a daily basis?

### SEND

#### World Mission Rosary (25 min.)

Invite and teach teens the World Mission Rosary. The world mission rosary was introduced by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, and while the prayers are the same, each decade of the rosary is a different color, representing a different region of the world: the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. As you pray the world mission rosary, you pray intentionally for that region of the world that lines up with the color of the decade.

- Green symbolizes the forests and grasslands of Africa
- Blue is for the ocean surrounding the islands of the Pacific
- White symbolizes Europe, home of the Holy Father
- Red shows the fire of faith that brought the first missionaries to the Americas
- Yellow is for the morning light of the east, symbolizing Asia



If you would like free world mission rosaries and explanatory pamphlets (English/Spanish), email [kimspecht@archstl.org](mailto:kimspecht@archstl.org) or call 314-792-7655.

## **MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR WORLD MISSION DAY 2021**

***"We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20)***

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Once we experience the power of God's love, and recognize his fatherly presence in our personal and community life, we cannot help but proclaim and share *what we have seen and heard*. Jesus' relationship with his disciples and his humanity, as revealed to us in the mystery of his Incarnation, Gospel and Paschal Mystery, shows us the extent to which God loves our humanity and makes his own our joys and sufferings, our hopes and our concerns (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22). Everything about Christ reminds us that he knows well our world and its need for redemption, and calls us to become actively engaged in this mission: "Go therefore to the highways and byways, and invite everyone you find" (*Mt 22:9*). No one is excluded, no one need feel distant or removed from this compassionate love.

*The experience of the Apostles*

The history of evangelization began with the Lord's own passionate desire to call and enter into friendly dialogue with everyone, just as they are (cf. *Jn 15:12-17*). The Apostles are the first to tell us this; they remembered even the day and the hour when they first met him: "It was about four o'clock in the afternoon" (*Jn 1:39*). Experiencing the Lord's friendship, watching him cure the sick, dine with sinners, feed the hungry, draw near to the outcast, touch the unclean, identify with the needy, propose the Beatitudes and teach in a new and authoritative way, left an indelible mark on them, awakening amazement, expansive joy and a profound sense of gratitude. The prophet Jeremiah describes this experience as one of a consuming awareness of the Lord's active presence in our heart, impelling us to mission, regardless of the sacrifices and misunderstandings it may entail (cf. *20:7-9*). Love is always on the move, and inspires us to share a wonderful and hope-filled message: "We have found the Messiah" (*Jn 1:41*).

With Jesus, we too have seen, heard and experienced that things can be different. Even now, he has inaugurated future times, reminding us of an often forgotten dimension of our humanity, namely, that "we were created for a fulfilment that can only be found in love" (*Fratelli Tutti*, 68). A future that awakens a faith capable of inspiring new initiatives and shaping communities of men and women who, by learning to accept their own frailty and that of others, promote fraternity and social friendship (cf. *ibid.*, 67). The ecclesial community reveals its splendour whenever it recalls with gratitude that the Lord loved us first (cf. *1 Jn 4:19*). "The loving predilection of the Lord surprises us, and surprise by its very nature cannot be owned or imposed by us... Only in this way can the miracle of gratuitousness, the gratuitous gift of self, blossom. Nor can missionary fervour ever be obtained as a result of reasoning or calculation. To be 'in a state of mission' is a reflection of gratitude" (*Message to the Pontifical Mission Societies*, 21 May 2020).

Even so, things were not always easy. The first Christians began the life of faith amid hostility and hardship. Experiences of marginalization and imprisonment combined with internal and external struggles that seemed to contradict and even negate what they had seen and heard. Yet, rather than a difficulty or an obstacle leading them to step back or close in on themselves, those experiences impelled them to turn problems, conflicts and difficulties into opportunities for mission. Limitations and obstacles became a privileged occasion for anointing everything and everyone with the Spirit of the Lord. Nothing and no one was to be excluded from the message of liberation.

We have a vivid testimony to all this in the Acts of the Apostles, a book which missionary disciples always have within easy reach. There we read how the fragrance of the Gospel spread as it was preached, awakening the joy that the Spirit alone can bestow. The Book of Acts teaches us to endure hardship by clinging firmly to Christ, in order to grow in the “conviction that God is able to act in any circumstance, even amid apparent setbacks” and in the certainty that “all those who entrust themselves to God will bear good fruit” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 279).

The same holds true for us: our own times are not easy. The pandemic has brought to the fore and amplified the pain, the solitude, the poverty and the injustices experienced by so many people. It has unmasked our false sense of security and revealed the brokenness and polarization quietly growing in our midst. Those who are most frail and vulnerable have come to feel even more so. We have experienced discouragement, disillusionment and fatigue; nor have we been immune from a growing negativity that stifles hope. For our part, however, “we do not proclaim ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor 4:5). As a result, in our communities and in our families, we can hear the powerful message of life that echoes in our hearts and proclaims: “He is not here, but has risen (Lk 24:6)! This message of hope shatters every form of determinism and, to those who let themselves be touched by it, bestows the freedom and boldness needed to rise up and seek with creativity every possible way to show compassion, the “sacramental” of God’s closeness to us, a closeness that abandons no one along the side of the road.

In these days of pandemic, when there is a temptation to disguise and justify indifference and apathy in the name of healthy social distancing, there is urgent need for *the mission of compassion*, which can make that necessary distancing an opportunity for encounter, care and promotion. “What we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20), the mercy we have experienced, can thus become a point of reference and a source of credibility, enabling us to recover a shared passion for building “a community of belonging and solidarity worthy of our time, our energy and our resources” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 36). The Lord’s word daily rescues and saves us from the excuses that can plunge us into the worst kind of skepticism: “Nothing changes, everything stays the same”. To those who wonder why they should give up their security, comforts and pleasures if they can see no important result, our answer will always remain the same: “Jesus Christ has triumphed over sin and death and is now almighty. Jesus Christ is truly alive” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 275) and wants us to be alive, fraternal, and capable of cherishing and sharing this message of hope. In our present circumstances, there is an urgent need for missionaries of hope who, anointed by the Lord, can provide a prophetic reminder that no one is saved by himself.

Like the Apostles and the first Christians, we too can say with complete conviction: “We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Everything we have received from the Lord is meant to be put to good use and freely shared with others. Just as the Apostles saw, heard and touched the saving power of Jesus (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-4), we too can daily touch the sorrowful and glorious flesh of Christ. There we can find the courage to share with everyone we meet a destiny of hope, the sure knowledge that the Lord is ever at our side. As Christians, we cannot keep the Lord to ourselves: the Church’s evangelizing mission finds outward fulfillment in the transformation of our world and in the care of creation.

### *An invitation to each of us*

The theme of this year’s World Mission Day – “We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20), is a summons to each of us to “own” and to bring to others what we bear in our hearts. This mission has always been the hallmark of the Church, for “she exists to evangelize” (SAINT PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14). Our life of faith grows weak, loses its prophetic power and its ability to awaken amazement and gratitude when we become isolated and withdraw into little groups. By its very nature, the life of faith calls for a growing openness to embracing everyone, everywhere. The first Christians, far from yielding to the temptation to become an elite group, were inspired by the Lord and his offer of new life to go out among the nations and to bear witness to what they had seen and heard: the good news that the Kingdom of God is at hand. They did so with the generosity, gratitude and nobility typical of those who sow seeds in the knowledge

that others will enjoy the fruit of their efforts and sacrifice. I like to think that “even those who are most frail, limited and troubled can be missionaries in their own way, for goodness can always be shared, even if it exists alongside many limitations” (*Christus Vivit*, 239).

On World Mission Day, which we celebrate each year on the penultimate Sunday of October, we recall with gratitude all those men and women who by their testimony of life help us to renew our baptismal commitment to be generous and joyful apostles of the Gospel. Let us remember especially all those who resolutely set out, leaving home and family behind, to bring the Gospel to all those places and people athirst for its saving message.

Contemplating their missionary witness, we are inspired to be courageous ourselves and to beg “the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest” (*Lk* 10:2). We know that the call to mission is not a thing of the past, or a romantic leftover from earlier times. Today too Jesus needs hearts capable of experiencing vocation as a true love story that urges them to go forth to the peripheries of our world as messengers and agents of compassion. He addresses this call to everyone, and in different ways. We can think of the peripheries all around us, in the heart of our cities or our own families. Universal openness to love has a dimension that is not geographical but existential. Always, but especially in these times of pandemic, it is important to grow in our daily ability to widen our circle, to reach out to others who, albeit physically close to us, are not immediately part of our “circle of interests” (cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, 97). To be on mission is to be willing to think as Christ does, to believe with him that those around us are also my brothers and sisters. May his compassionate love touch our hearts and make us all true missionary disciples.

May Mary, the first missionary disciple, increase in all the baptized the desire to be salt and light in our lands (cf. *Mt* 5:13-14).

*Rome, Saint John Lateran, 6 January 2021, Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord.*

Franciscus