



Missionary Prayer Intention - March 2007: The Holy Father's missionary prayer intention for March: That those responsible for the young Churches may give ongoing attention to the training of catechists and lay mission animators for the service of the Gospel

Comment by Mgr Jerry Bitoon Officer of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - It is indeed well for us to bear in mind the condition and needs of young Churches all over the world, especially in mission countries. When we speak of young Churches in mission territories, we refer to those newly created Dioceses or Apostolic Vicariates, and the like, or to places where evangelization is still in its incipient stage. We can think, for example, of young Churches in the countries of Central Asia, like, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan; in the Middle East, like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq; or in the hinterlands of Africa, South America, South East Asia, Oceania and of the subcontinent of India. In all of these places, there is acute scarcity of local priests, or maybe none at all. It is sad to note that all these years, there has been massive and constant decline of missionaries coming from traditionally mission-sending countries of Europe and North America. In some places, however, there are missionaries ready for evangelization, but particular laws of certain countries or states forbid or make it extremely difficult for missionaries to come in or perform their evangelization activities.

This situation is very true in a great number of States in India at the moment. Still adding further difficulties for Christian missionaries to carry out the mandate of Lord to preach the Gospel to all is the resistance, at times violent and really life-threatening, of some unreasonable fanatic members or fundamentalists of local or ethnic religions. Indeed young Churches are a breeding place for martyrs! It is there where the more exciting and challenging actions of evangelization are taking place. Young Churches are in the forefront of evangelization. It is heart-warming to know that it is in these young Churches where the Lord of the great harvest calls out countless catechists, animators, especially lay mission animators, to collaborate actively with the Local Church. Not a few countless inspiring stories and testimonies of faith of heroic catechists and lay mission animators in India, Africa, South East Asia, Arab countries and in the thousands of islets scattered the vast seas of Oceania have been told. They prove to be indispensable helpers, collaborators and protagonists of Church evangelization works in young Churches. At times, it is indeed almost impossible to think of evangelization today in mission countries without taking into consideration the role of these lay catechists and mission animators.

Where does the effectiveness of these lay catechists and mission animators lie? How are they empowered? What is the secret of their untiring dedication to evangelization? Bishops of young churches are quick to point out that constant formation of these lay catechists and mission animators is the open secret of their effectiveness and dedication to Christ's mandate of proclaiming His Good News to all, at whatever cost, even at the cost of their very lives!

It appears very clearly then that we, Catholics all over the world, should pray that those responsible for young Churches may be constantly aware of the need to form well their catechists and lay mission animators. Let us ask the Lord of the great harvest that Bishops of young Churches, most especially, may ever be ready and willing to invest their human and financial resources, scarce though they may be at times, at the service of the constant formation of their lay mission collaborators. (Agenzia Fides 24/2/2007, righe 42, parole 560)