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VATICAN - Pope Benedict XVI's Message for World Mission Sunday 2007: "All the Churches for all the World"

Vatican City (Fides Service) - We give below the text of the Message of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI for the 81st World Mission Sunday celebrated on the penultimate Sunday in the month of October, this year Sunday 21 October: "All the Churches for All the World ".

Dear brothers and sisters,
On the occasion of World Mission Sunday I ask the whole People of God - bishops, priests, men and women religious and lay men and women to reflect together on the urgency and the importance of the Church's missionary activity also in our day. Like a universal appeal and heartfelt appeal there continue to resound the words with which, before ascending into heaven, the crucified and Risen Jesus Christ entrusted to the Apostles the missionary mandate: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you " adding: " And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time" (Mt 28,19-20). In the demanding task of evangelisation we are sustained and accompanied by the certainty that He, the master of the harvest, is always with us and never ceases to guide his people. Christ is the inexhaustible source of the Church's mission. This year another event spurs us to new missionary commitment: in fact it is the 50th anniversary of the Encyclical Fidei donum promulgated by the Servant of God Pius XII, to promote and encourage co-operation among Churches for mission ad gentes.
"All the Churches for All the World" is the theme chosen for this year's World Mission Sunday. It is a call to local Churches on every continent to rediscover together the urgent necessity to re-launch missionary activity to face the multiple serious challenges of our times. Certainly the conditions in which humanity lives have changed, and in recent decades a great effort has been made to spread the Gospel, particularly since the Second Vatican Council. Nevertheless much remains to be done to respond to the missionary call which the Lord never tires of addressing to every baptised Christian. He continues to call first of all the Churches of 'old' tradition, which in the past supplied, besides material means, also consistent numbers of priests, religious and lay people for the missions, giving rise to effective co-operation among the Christian communities. This co-operation has produced abundant apostolic fruits both for Church in mission territories and for the ecclesial realities from which the missionaries were sent. Faced with the advance of a secularised culture which seems to penetrate ever more deeply into western societies, considering also the crisis of the family, decreasing numbers of vocations and progressive ageing of the clergy, these Churches are in danger of focussing only on themselves, looking with less hope to the future and slackening in their missionary endeavour. However precisely now is the time to open with confidence to the Providence of God who never abandons His people and guides them with the power of the Holy Spirit, towards the accomplishment of His eternal plan of salvation.
Also Churches of recent evangelisation are called by the Good Shepherd to dedicate themselves generously to mission ad gentes. Although they encounter no few difficulties and obstacles to their development, these communities continue to grow. Fortunately some have abundant numbers of priests and consecrated persons, many of whom, despite much local need, are nevertheless sent elsewhere to exercise their pastoral ministry and apostolic service, even in lands of ancient evangelisation. And so we see a providential "exchanging of gifts", which abounds for the benefit of the whole mystical Body of Christ. I sincerely hope missionary cooperation will become still more intense, valorising each one's potential and charisma. I also hope that World Mission Sunday will serve to render all Christian communities and every individual Christian ever more aware of the universal nature of Christ's call to spread his Kingdom to the far corners of the earth. "The Church is missionary by her very nature" John Paul II writes in his Encyclical Redemptoris missio, - "for Christ's mandate is not something contingent or external, but reaches the very heart of the Church. It follows that the universal Church and each

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individual church is sent forth to the nations. Precisely" so that this missionary zeal may flourish among the people of their own country," it is highly appropriate that young churches should "share as soon as possible in the universal missionary work of the Church. They should themselves send missionaries to proclaim the Gospel all over the world, even though they are suffering from a shortage of clergy " (n. 62).

Fifty years since the historical appeal of my predecessor Pius XII with the Encyclical Fidei donum for cooperation among Churches at the service of the mission, I would reaffirm that the proclamation of the Gospel maintains its urgency and relevancy. In the mentioned Encyclical Redemptoris missio, Pope John Paul II, for his part, said " The Church's mission is wider than the "communion among the churches"; it ought to be directed not only to aiding re-evangelisation but also and primarily to missionary activity as such. (64)". Therefore missionary endeavour is still, as it has been said many times, the first service which the Church owes to humanity today, to orient and evangelise cultural, social and ethic changes and to offer Christ's salvation to the men and women of our day humiliated and oppressed in many parts of the world because of endemic poverty, violence and systematic denial of human rights.

The Church cannot shirk this universal mission; it is an obligation. Since Christ entrusted the missionary mandate first to Peter and the Apostles it falls first of all to the Successor Peter, whom Divine Providence chose to be the visible foundation of the Church's unity, and to the Bishops directly responsible for evangelisation as members of the College of Bishops and as shepherds of particular Churches (cfr Redemptoris missio, 63). I therefore urge the Bishops of all the Churches, whom the Lord has chosen to guide His one flock, to share endeavours for the proclamation and diffusion of the Gospel. This was the intention which led the Servant of God Pius XII fifty years ago to render missionary cooperation more suited to meet the needs of the times. Especially in view of evangelisation he asked Churches and communities of ancient evangelisation to send priests to help Churches of recent foundation. In this way he gave rise to a new "missionary agent" which from the first words of the Encyclical took the name Fidei donum. He wrote: "As We direct our thoughts, on the one hand, to the countless multitudes of Our sons who have a share in the blessings of divine faith, especially in countries that have long since become Christian, and on the other hand as We consider the far more numerous throngs of those who are still waiting for the day of salvation to be announced to them, We are filled with a great desire to exhort you again and again, Venerable Brethren, to support with zealous interest the most holy cause of bringing the Church of God to all the world." - And he added - "May it come to pass that Our admonitions will arouse a keener interest in the missionary apostolate among your priests and through them set the hearts of the faithful on fire! " (Fidei donum n. 4).

We give thanks to God for the abundant fruits of this missionary cooperation in Africa and in other regions of the world. Hosts of priests, having left their community of origin, have put their apostolic energies at the service of communities, some only just formed, in areas of poverty and still to be developed. Among them no few martyrs who united testimony of the word and apostolic dedication with the sacrifice of their lives. Nor can we forget the many men and women religious and lay missionaries who work with priests to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. May World Mission Sunday be an occasion to remember in our prayers all these brothers and sisters in the faith and all who continue to work in the vast field of mission. Let us ask God that their example may give rise everywhere to new vocations and deeper missionary awareness among Christians. In fact, every Christian community is by nature missionary and it is precisely courage to evangelise which is the measure for believers' love for their Lord. We could say that for individual Catholics it is not simply a question of cooperating with the activity of evangelisation, but rather of realising that they too are agents of mission, they too share responsibility for the Church's missionary activity. This shared responsibility means communion among communities must be intensified and reciprocal assistance must be increased with regard to personnel (priests, religious and lay missionaries) and to the means necessary for evangelising today.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, the missionary mandate which Christ entrusted to the Apostles truly involves us all. May World Mission Sunday be therefore an opportunity to grow in awareness and plan together appropriate spiritual and formative itineraries to foster co-operation among the Churches and the formation of more missionaries to spread the Gospel in our day. However let us never forget that the primary and priority contribution we are called to offer for the Church's missionary activity is prayer. " 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, - the Lord says -. so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to do his harvesting" (Lk

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10,2). " More and more, then, - wrote Pope Pius XII of venerable memory, fifty years ago - Venerable Brethren, you must offer your fervent prayers to God. Cease not to direct your thoughtful considerations to the many peoples who are deeply involved in literally countless spiritual dangers: those who wander far from the way of truth as well as those who stand in such great need of the means of perseverance." (Fidei donum 55). And he asked for many Masses to be said for the Missions observing that "This is in accordance with the prayers of our Lord Who loves His Church and wishes her to flourish and enlarge her borders throughout the whole world." (ibid.52).

Dear Brothers and Sisters I too renew this call, more than ever timely. May there extend to every community the choral invocation of the "Our Father who art in heaven ", that His Kingdom may come on earth. I appeal especially to children and young people, ever ready for generous missionary activity. I address the sick and the suffering, mindful of the value of their mysterious and indispensable collaboration with the work of redemption. I ask consecrated persons, enclosed orders especially, to intensify their prayers for the missions. May effort on the part of every believer extend throughout the Church a spiritual network of prayer to sustain evangelisation. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, who accompanied the beginnings of the Church with her maternal care, guide our steps in this epoch and obtain for us a new Pentecost of love. May she help us realise that we are all missionaries, all sent by the Lord to be His witnesses in every moment of our life. To Fidei donum priests, men and women religious, lay missionaries on the frontiers of evangelisation and all those who in various ways help to proclaim the Gospel, I assure a daily mention in my prayers while I affectionately impart upon all my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 27 May 2007, Solemnity Pentecost
BENEDICTUS PP. XVI
(Fides, Our English Translation)

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