Dear friends,

How wonderful to celebrate your 50th anniversary assembly with you here, in what was for most of his Jesuit life Francis’s workshop. I have prayed on my week’s retreat here that what I give you today will help you to offer yourselves for mission in today’s turbulent world; specifically in the Church led at this time by Francis, who is convinced that the Lord is asking us in particular, at this time, to evangelize. That is my theme. How is the pope calling on us to evangelize at this time of flux, of uprooting, of exculturation of Christianity?

The first half of my talk will be in Spanish, the second in English. Thank you to the interpreting team for your patience and professionalism.

Some of you have asked why I speak Spanish with a papal accent. I am British, with no Argentine connections or blood but over 25 years ago I came here often to research here for Master’s and later a D. Phil. at Oxford, taking as my subject the Church and politics in early twentieth-century Argentina. I learned to like mate amargo and understand why happy cows make the best dulce de leche. So I’m proof that sometimes doctorates can be useful. And that God, in His providence, can later make use of things we do in our lives. In my early 30s, I was for a time a Jesuit novice, in England, long enough to do the long retreat and to be changed by it, and finally to embrace a calling as a journalist and writer. And those two gifts from my past — my knowledge of Argentina, and my experience of Ignatian spirituality — gave me the confidence in 2013, to dare, as a Catholic journalist and commentator on the Church, to write a biography of Francis.

The last two or three years I have been working on a new book on Francis, a follow-up (continuación) to The Great Reformer, which will come out next year. Part of my
research has been to understand the Latin-American Church thinking that lies behind the pontificate. That’s how I met Mauricio, one day, in Quito.

One strong theme of the new book is Francis’s conviction that the Lord at this time wants the Church to evangelize; and for this the Church has to change, a change for which the Second Vatican Council has prepared us, but which we have not yet fully embraced.

With the cardinals prior to the conclave, he imagined Jesus not on the outside knocking to be let in, but on the inside, asking to be let out. He spoke of how the Church is paralyzed by introversion, when it lives from its own light, becoming sick and self-referential, bent over like the woman in Luke 13:10. He contrasted this with an evangelizing Church that puts Christ at its center, and goes out of itself to the peripheries, to places of need. The next pope, Bergoglio told the cardinals, should help the Church to be a fruitful mother who lives from the joy of evangelizing. From crippled paralytic turned in on herself to a fruitful mother, joyfully evangelizing — this is the journey summed up in the phrase “a pastoral and missionary conversion”.

This is in three parts. In the first, I want to explain the origins of his discernment of the signs of the times that led him to that diagnosis: what is the cause of the paralysis? Second, I will summarize what pastoral conversion implies: what it means to be a fruitful mother. In the final part, I have four concrete suggestions to help move us in that direction.

The text will be available afterwards but you might want to make a note of anything that particularly moves or inspires you.

I Mission in response to a change of era

The discernment behind the Francis pontificate is not just his own, but is the fruit of the Latin American Church’s in the years prior to the great continental gathering of its bishops in Aparecida, Brazil, in May 2007. It was the first such meeting of CELAM in 25 years, which ended with a document whose primary author was the man who is now pope.

When we speak of discernment, there are two kinds: the Ignatian discernment of spirits, but also the ‘discernment of the signs of the times’ which Gaudium et Spes asked to make. The Church in the north has never done this very well, but it has been well developed in Latin America. Aparecida was fruit of the most sophisticated signs-of-the-
times discernment happening in the Church anywhere at that time in the world. In many studies and meetings prior to that meeting CELAM’s discernment showed how the forces of technocracy and globalization were sweeping away the weak belonging of cultural Christianity, while bringing a new pluralism together with new forms of social and economic exclusion alongside concentrations of wealth. It showed the need for a “returning to the sources” of Christian faith.

Aparecida described this shift in terms of a change of era — *un cambio de época*, not *una época de cambio* — in which this new turbulence was bringing opportunities and advantages for the well educated and mobile, but its overall effect was to produce great anguish, because it was dissolving the bonds of belonging. CELAM saw rising inequality, the decline of states, mass migrations, ecological disaster, neo-Darwinist worship of power, technocracy — all the things we are very familiar with.

The change of era, combined with the option for the poor, demanded that the Latin American Church stand with those crucified by the new global economy, embracing not just those who were materially poor but victims of exclusion and solitude in its many new forms — the migrants, the elderly, and so on. The new context of cultural and religious pluralism meanwhile demanded that the Body of Christ work to build unity out of a reconciled diversity in dialogue and shared witness.

But the change of era also has implications for evangelization, because the dissolution of the bonds of belonging was doing away with traditional mechanisms of faith transmission from generation to generation. The Gospel was being excultured — expelled — from culture, and the Church’s traditional means of evangelization were being swept away by those same forces of liquidity.

Cardinal Bergoglio told his priests that “What happens in a change of era is that things are not longer in their place ... What seemed to us normal about family, Church, society and the world, will no longer apparently be that way”. Cultural Catholicism — a collection of rules and prohibitions, occasional devotional practices, etc. — would not survive. The Catholic faith of the future would depend on a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and the experience God’s transforming mercy.

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2 Documento de Aparecida [DA] 37
What Aparecida expressed was a desire to return to “that attitude that planted the faith in the beginnings of the Church”. What was needed now was to embrace the idea of mission as not so much an activity or a program as a way of being: “permanent” and “paradigmatic”. Nor was it just *ad extra*, but *ad intra* at the same time. In going out on mission, the Church is converted and evangelized. The challenge was to enable a “personal and community encounter with Jesus Christ that raises up disciples and missionaries”, which Bergoglio described as the *encuentro fundante de nuestra fe*, “the foundational encounter of our faith”. He said this would require spiritual, pastoral and also institutional reforms “to make the Church visibly present as a mother who reaches out, a welcoming home, a constant school of missionary communion”.

What Aparecida saw was that the traditional distinction between Christian countries and mission territories no longer applied. *Evangelii Gaudium* wants us to grasp this point. If the Church is not missionary, it cannot evangelize; and if it does not evangelize, it ceases to be. That is the challenge; it is also the invitation, the *kairós*. Hence Francis’s famous phrase from *Evangelii Gaudium*: “I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.”

I want you to notice something important in this story: faced with the tribulation of secularization the Latin-American Church’s answer is not to lament and condemn but to discern and reform. The question was not, how do we resist or combat this attack on our way of life and our values, but: What is the Holy Spirit asking of us, in this time of rapid change and liquidity? How do we change in order to evangelize? You see here a pedagogy of reform for the sake of mission in response to secularization, very different from the north-Atlantic Catholic world, with its various reactions in response to modernity: a defensive, ethical response; a retreat into traditionalism and nostalgia; a seeking of new Constantines — Putin, Trump, Salvini — or an ostrich-like resignation, even cynicism.

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4 EG 27
Seen through the *Exercises*, Bergoglio perceived these defensive reactions as signs of giving into temptations characteristic of desolation, a desolation triggered by post-1968 relativism and secularism. His acute perception of this was shaped by a series of his own writings in the 1980s on religious bodies in a time of tribulation. These temptations were essentially why the missionary, evangelizing vision of the Second Vatican Council was not being fulfilled. Rather than focus on Christ, the Church, like Peter stepping out of the boat at the invitation of Jesus, focussed on the waves. Rather than discern what the HS was saying to the Church, the Church focussed on defending itself. This was one form of paralysis.

In focussing on the defence of its threatened spaces, rather than attending primarily to the needs of the people of God, the result was to reinforce the juridical, preconciliar notion of faith as a moral code. Rather than a source of life and love, an expert in humanity, an oasis of mercy identified by its compassion and care for the poorest, the Church has come to be seen as a self-interested corporation, a political lobby, harsh, moralistic, dogmatic, etc. It is the view of the Church and of Christianity that we, as Catholics in today’s world, meet everyday.

Benedict XVI shared this discernment of where contemporary Catholicism had gone wrong, which is why right at the start of his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, he pointed out that “being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” The quote appears in the Aparecida document and again in *Evangelii Gaudium*, where Francis says he never tires of repeating these words, “which take us to the very heart of the Gospel.” The absolute truth, Francis has said elsewhere, is the love of God for us in Jesus Christ. Therefore the truth is a relationship. When we evangelize, we communicate that relationship — Jesus’s ‘Abba’ relationship with the Father.

To reduce the Christian offer to some kind of knowledge — ethical or spiritual — is a particular temptation for educated Catholics. In his message to this assembly, Francis warns us of this “gnostic illusion”. (It may be worth reading the second chapter of *Gaudete et Exsultate* to see what exactly he is warning us about when he refers there to a

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“disincarnate spirituality”. Is there a temptation here, which, when it is resisted, becomes a source of grace for you?) When we offer what is true and good, we have to remember the third trascendental, beauty. Only the beauty of God can attract; when we are attracted, fascinated by that beauty, we want others to share that beauty, that experience. Hence — as Francis told the Brazilian bishops, recalling Aparecida — “Mission starts precisely from that divine enchantment, the amazement of the encounter.” The Church loses people when it imports a rationality that is alien to people, forgetting the “grammar of simplicity”.

In sum: The beauty of God is the experience of His grace and mercy, incarnate in the person of Christ, available to all, and more easily available to the poor.

This is especially true when we speak of morality and ethics. In a 2004 talk on the anniversary of *Veritatis Splendor*, Bergoglio said Jesus doesn’t simply give us a moral code, or a series of rules and rituals to live by; living the love to which Christ calls us is impossible by our own efforts, but was only possible, said Bergoglio, quoting the encylical, “by virtue of a gift received” — that is, His grace. Quoting St Augustine, he noted how it was not the keeping of the commandments that earns God’s love but the other way round: God’s mercy and love enable us to be moral and holy, merciful and loving also. (He made this point simply in a retreat he gave in 2012. The Gospel does not tell us if the adulterous woman whom Jesus forgave in John 8 returned to her sinful, promiscuous life, but you could be sure that she didn’t, “because whoever encounters such great mercy cannot depart from the law, it’s the result.”)

Bergoglio asked an important question: was it because Christian morality was so often reduced to a lofty precept in western nations that contemporary humanity had succumbed to relativism? If morality is a kind of judicial code, imposed from the outside, rather than a free response of the heart to the experience of God’s mercy, it becomes an ideology which is then vulnerable to manipulation in service of political or other interests. In that case, relativism becomes an assertion of freedom, an affirmation of autonomy against an imposition.

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7 *Almuerzo con los Cardenales de Brasil, la Presidencia CNBB y los Obispos de la Región, Palacio arzobispal São Joaquim, Rio de Janeiro, July 27, 2103.*

8 ‘Es posible ser santos’, en Spadaro (ed) *En Tus Ojos* ... pp 406-413

9 See Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, ch 6
Hence his criticism, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, of *eticismo sin bondad*. By *eticismo* Francis means reducing everything to ethics. The document critiques “doctrines that are more philosophical than evangelical”, those who speak more of law than grace, more of the Church than Christ; or who imply that Christianity is a form of stoicism or self-denial or a moral code. Before all else, he tells us, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others. ... If this invitation does not radiate forcefully and attractively, the edifice of the Church’s moral teaching risks becoming a house of cards, and this is our greatest risk.”

Bergoglio once told his catechists that Aparecida’s great insight was to see that greatest danger to the Church came not from without but from within, “from the eternal and subtle temptation of enclosing ourselves and putting on armour [*abroquelarnos*] in order to be protected and secure.” The word he uses there, *abroquelamiento*, is the same as he used recently in a letter to Chile’s bishops in which he called them to Rome to discuss the terrible clerical sex abuse crisis there. He wrote that how at times of tribulation, when we are “frightened and armour-plated in our comfortable ‘winter palaces’, the love of God comes out to meet us and purifies our intentions so we can love as free, mature and critical men.” This is a powerful description of a fearful defensive Church that does not evangelize: “armour-plated in its comfortable winter palaces”. And it is a reason to hope that through tribulation and failure — which the Church is clearly suffering — God is coming out to meet us, so we can change, so we too can experience a missionary and pastoral conversion. As in our lives, our moments of defeat are opportunities for conversion and growth.

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10 Badly rendered in the official English translation as “ethical systems bereft of kindness”. He is not referring to “systems” but an ideology.
11 EG 39
12 ‘Él llama a cada una por su nombre y las hace salir’, in Spadaro (ed) *En Tus Ojos ...* pp 691-696
II: A missionary evangelization is close and concrete

So what must our missionary evangelization look like? To some extent that question is unanswerable, because as we move out of our winter palaces we have to abandon our preconceptions and be guided by the Spirit, as Mauricio said on Sunday. But clearly there is a pedagogy of reform here. Bergoglio pointed out after Aparecida that a Church with evangelizing audacity, offering the encounter with Christ’s mercy, needs concrete changes and a transformation in mindset. He even drew up a list for his priests and catechists of what he saw as the new attitudes now needed, which he would later develop in Evangelii Gaudium. It is an interesting list, which I’ve given you in a handout for you to reflect on.

One of these was “pastoral action with a Samaritan heart”. Like the Holy Trinity in the Exercises responding with love to a suffering and sinful world, Bergoglio saw the need for the Church to respond to the anguish caused by liquid modernity. The symbol of that anguish is the migrant — whether the refugee, or the trafficked person, or the family fleeing war and poverty — who for Francis is the icon of the suffering Christ in today’s world: in embracing the migrant, we create a new future.

In 2001, he gave a meditation in which he invited people to imagine themselves as a migrant arriving from the interior to Buenos Aires. You have only one thing in your heart and mind: will I be safe, welcome, find shelter, be warm? Will I find hospitality? It is the question asked by contemporary human beings suffering desocialization and deracination. And it is asked in three main ways: affectively, in the sense that the dissolution of the bonds of belonging of family, communities and institutions is producing a deep emotional and psychological anguish; existentially, in the sense that it is harder to have a clear identity and sense of self, to make plans, and to build a future; and spiritually, in the loss of transcendence, of signs and symbols that connect the present with eternal that secularization is bringing.

As a Good Samaritan, the Church’s response to this woundedness is also threefold: First, to help people reconnect with creation and the world as creatures of God, who is “working and labouring” on their behalf. Second, to experience family and community, the

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14 Mauricio López Oropeza, ‘Mensaje del presidente de la CVX Mundial a la Asamblea de Buenos Aires 2018’
15 HANDOUT 1. ‘Volver a las raíces de la fe: la misión como propuesta y desafío’ (2008) in Spadaro, En Tus Ojos... 745-754
16 ‘Acerquémonos a las diferencias’ (2001), in Spadaro (ed) En Tus Ojos... pp 165 et seq
bonds of trust and unconditional love that will build resilience, character, and self-esteem. Third, to help people find sanctuary — places of peace, privacy and prayer safe from the relentless pressures of the technocratic paradigm, places where they can recognize their intrinsic worth and discover holiness. You can see the basis here of his priorities as pope: to rebuild and restore the human environment damaged by technocracy, reflected in his apostolic exhortations — *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Amoris Laetitia*, *Gaudete et Exsultate* — and of course *Laudato Si’*. The word *oikos*, our shared home, is where we get the word ‘ecology’. Francis is an ecological pope, rebuilding our environments — natural, ecclesial, familial — so that they reflect the hospitality and mercy of God.

This capacity for welcoming is key to evangelization. In Asunción, Paraguay, in July 2015 Francis said a Christian is someone who has learned to welcome others, to show hospitality. “How many times do we see evangelization as involving any number of strategies, tactics, maneuvers, techniques, as if we could convert people on the basis of our own arguments. Today the Lord says to us quite clearly: in the mentality of the Gospel, you do not convince people with arguments, strategies or tactics. You convince them by learning how to welcome them.”

But this is *missionary* hospitality and welcome. We have to go out to welcome. Francis constantly insists that the Church must be **close and concrete**, because this is how God saves humanity. The Incarnation is close and concrete. In a liquid, technocratic society, the Church’s besetting temptations – the problem with all institutions – is to become abstract and remote, to recoil, to take refuge in ideas (*gnosis*) or functionalism (Pelagianism). If people are angry today with their leaders and their institutions, it is because liquidity has made them seem distant and uncaring.

The Church has to go in the opposite direction. It must imitate God’s *synktàkabasis*, his abasement; it must show a God who attends to the particular, to the person, to realities rather than ideas. Attention is mercy. It is the time we spend with people, one by one. Faced with a lack of hope, the Lord is moved, comes down, and gets close. Our task, Francis says, is to rediscover His way of coming near in order to evangelize. The key word is ‘proximity’. As he put it in one of the synods he attended as bishop: “Encounter,

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17 Homily, Campo grande de Ñu Guazú, Asunción, 12 de julio de 2015
conversion, communion and solidarity are the categories that express the proximity ... that opens the way to hope.”

The shift from the abstract to the ‘close’ and ‘concrete’ of pastoral conversion is beautifully captured in Amoris Laetitia Chapter 2. As he says there: “We have long thought that simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace, we were providing sufficient support to families, strengthening the marriage bond and giving meaning to marital life.” But it didn’t work. Marriage collapsed, in the Catholic world as much as anywhere else. In a liquid, postmodern world, an idea is just an idea; it’s a narrative; it has no power to change or save. In a Christian society yes, the Church telling you that marriage is permanent is an order that can be obeyed or rejected; but in a liquid society, a commitment to permanency must be a conviction of the heart. You do not help people marry and stay married simply by opposing divorce laws or defending the principle of indissolubility, but enabling people to commit and love and stay together. A Church that is close and concrete recognizes that it is harder for people to be good, to live ordered lives, to be in community, to stay together. That’s why Amoris Laetitia doesn’t teach the truth about marriage — although it reaffirms it on every page; rather, it shows how God’s grace enables us to live that truth, however apparently irregular or far from the Church.

In being merciful — close and concrete — we have credibility. As Francis says in Misericordiae Vultus, Jesus has shown that mercy is the criterion of credibility of our faith. The Church is credible when it is merciful, because it communicates who and how God is. And nothing better communicates the being of God than being merciful and acting mercifully — which is why, in Guadete et Exsultate, Francis insists that the heart of the Gospel is Matthew 25 and the Beatitudes. Mercy is always expressed in action: misericordiar. Mercy never stands outside, shaking fingers or lecturing you; it gets in with you. In the words of James Keenan SJ, mercy is the “willingness to enter into the chaos of another” — that is the Incarnation.

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18 ref to come
19 AL 37
20 MV 9
When Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* refers to the “hierarchy of truths and Catholic doctrine” he is referring to a missionary priority. All revealed truths are important, but some give direct expression to the heart of the Gospel and are what people need to hear before anything else. “In this basic core, what shines forth is the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead.” That is why he says, in the following paragraph, “works of love directed to one’s neighbour are the most perfect external manifestation of the interior grace of the Spirit”. People may be convinced by the truth, or inspired by goodness, but only if they have first been captivated by beauty; and the beauty of God is His mercy. Without that beauty, as he said in 2010, “truth grows cold, even pitiless and arrogant”. In a retreat he once gave, he spoke of truth being like a precious stone in a person’s hand: if it is offered, it seduces; if it is thrown, it wounds.

Mercy captivates because it reflects **gratuity**, which communicates who and how God is — the gift of life, freely given, freely received. In the early Church, the disinterested love shown by the Christians towards those who were suffering — which flowed from their direct experience of God’s love in Christ — amazed and scandalized the communities around them, whether Jewish or pagan. That is what Francis wants the missionary Church of today to recapture — the gratuity of mercy. Jesus tells his disciples: “you received without charge; give without charge”. So the first task of a missionary disciple is to enable, through his or her mercy, an encounter with the gratuity of God (his mercy, his forgiveness, his grace). The ethical transformation follows.

This is one of the reasons Francis doesn’t constantly lament secularization: he has discerned in it an opportunity to recover **gratuity**. This is what Francis means by saying this is a time, a *kairós*, of mercy. Secularization, the triumph of technocracy, the exculturation of Christianity from western law and culture, the Church’s institutional failure — it is as if everything is now geared to revisit the birth of the Church itself, to return to its sources, to its missionary vigour based on a direct experience of God’s merciful love. This is what Francis is inviting the Chilean Church to see this year, beginning with his address in Santiago cathedral in January, his two powerful letters to the Chilean bishops, and finally his May 31 letter to the people of God in Chile, which I’ve also

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asked to be shared with you: (it’s published by the Vatican only in Spanish, but I have found two unofficial translations in English and French).  

It’s really worth reading these letters to see what Francis is helping the Church to do in the west, in place where once it was strong and is now weak. His model is the transformation of Peter from disciple to apostle as a result of being forgiven by the risen Jesus for his abandonment and betrayal at the Crucifixion. Forgiveness changes Peter from an inward focus, ruminating on his desolation and on his persecutors, to a focus on Jesus, and from there an outward focus — to mission and evangelization. “A wounded Church does not make herself the center of things, does not believe that she is perfect, but puts at the center the one who can heal those wounds, whose name is Jesus Christ … To know both Peter disheartened and Peter transfigured is an invitation to pass from being a Church of the unhappy and disheartened to a Church that serves all those people who are unhappy and disheartened in our midst.” That is the conversion he is mapping out for them — and indirectly, for us.  

In his letter to the people of God in Chile Francis shows how abandoning an abusive culture means reconnecting with the people of God, and recognizing them as subjects and objects of evangelization, as missionary disciples. As he said to the Jesuits in Colombia — and Jesuits here will remember him saying the same in the 1980s — that “sadly we are often tempted to evangelize for the people, toward the people, but without the people of God. Everything for the people, but nothing with the people”. “The People of God does not have first, second or third-class Christians,” Francis tells Chile’s faithful. “Their participation is not a question of goodwill, concessions, rather it is constitutive of the nature of the Church. It is impossible to imagine a future without this anointing operating in each one of you, which certainly demands and requires new forms of participation.” If we do not hear these words directed at us, we are not with this papacy.

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24 That response is to be found, firstly, in his address to clergy and religious in Santiago’s cathedral on January 16; and then in three letters: the first, to Chile’s bishops after receiving Archbishop Scicluna’s report, on April 8; the second, which he handed to Chile’s bishops on the first day of their emergency summit with him in Rome, on 15 May, which was private but leaked; and thirdly, his letter to the People of God in Chile of 31 May.


Finally, the shift behind Francis’s call for a missionary and pastoral conversion in response to the change of era involves asking for the grace of **consolation** and **joy**. When St Ignatius spoke of “consolation” in the *Exercises* he referred to “every increase in hope, faith and charity, to all interior happiness” — the Spanish word is *leticia* — “which calls and attracts to heavenly things”. Look at the titles of his three apostolic exhortations, *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Amoris Laetitia*, and *Gaudete et Exsultate* — and it is clear he thinks there is something missing, something that he is trying to put back. Francis told the Jesuits in 2016 — but it applies to all evangelizers — that their “true work” was “to console the faithful people and through discernment help them so that the enemy of human nature does not rob us of our joy: the joy of evangelizing, the joy of the family, the joy of the Church, the joy of creation …” It is a joy, of course, that comes from the grateful acceptance that all is gift.

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28 EE 336
Part III: Four suggestions for embracing mission

I’ve used a number of words and terms that are particularly meaningful in capturing this transition:

- missionary transformation
- pastoral conversion
- close and concrete
- mercy
- grace
- hospitality
- gratuity
- credibility
- People of God
- consolation
- joy

Perhaps one or two of these words will have struck you, because of what you are doing, and what you might be invited to do. I want to end with four suggestions that might help stimulate that sense of mission.

1. Read AD GENTES

My first suggestion is to read the Vatican II’s decree on the mission of the Church, *Ad Gentes*. It’s short, and exactly describes the west now — “circumstances are sometime such that, for the time being, there is no possibility of expounding the Gospel directly and forthwith ...” (#6) — and helps think about evangelization in contexts of hostility, misunderstanding or simply ignorance.

The future of the Church is described in *Ad Gentes*, because that is the context of the change of era. A missionary Church cannot afford to be clerical: it requires a mature Christian laity to act as missionaries with proper apostolic training. It has to be a
missionary diaspora — maybe with parishes and schools and complex networks, but the mindset / approach will be the one described here. But we are in a Church that is caught between these two models, moving from a Christendom to a missionary paradigm, which Francis is seeking to precipitate. What’s needed is a mission that takes place in a kind of vanguard space to be occupied by small, adaptable groups with a missionary eros.

Is this the moment for CLC to see itself as having the freedom and mobility to help show the way, to create spaces where the Church in a context of secularism recovers its missionary dynamic? Is this why CLC has prospered especially in France and Uruguay, the capitals of laïcité?

In his address to you in 1979, Fr Arrupe spoke of CLC as “an essentially lay spiritual movement, with the limits, yes, but also the apostolic opportunities that this implies.” If you put this with what Francis says about the People of God now being essential to mission and evangelization, it seems to me you have a way of rediscovering and activating your God-given identity as lay missionary disciples. Read Ad Gentes, my friends, and perhaps you will see yourselves there.

2. **Embrace the threefold dynamic of mercy**

My second suggestion is to read Amoris Laetitia, because there you see Francis seeking to move the Church into a missionary key in the vital area of marriage and family. I mentioned Chapter 2, which is essential, but I’d also invite you to reflect on the threefold dynamic of Chapter 8: accompaniment, discernment and integration. These three steps reflect the movement of mercy, which can be expressed as

(a) to sense need (to be aware of suffering and anguish),
(b) to respond concretely (the Works of Mercy, responding to all kinds of needs), and
(c) a third stage of integrating, incorporating, saving, which involves a careful attention to the workings of grace in people’s broken lives.

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29 P. Pedro Arrupe SJ, ‘Una comunidad al servicio de un solo mundo’, Discurso a la asamblea general de la CVX, September 13, 1979
In these three steps of mercy we experience, literally, the saving love of God. To be saved by Christ is to be saved this way; and to evangelize is to offer this experience. Does my community offer that three-part dynamic in what we do? How well do we do each of them?

It is an offer and an experience always accompanied by joy, because it arises from grateful remembrance of God’s action in us — which is why Francis is so insistent that we make the effort to recall that action in our lives and in the histories of our nations.

(3) Water diviners

I owe this third suggestion to the French Jesuit theologian, Christoph Théobald, in his book Urgences Pastorales, who talks of le charisme des sourciers, meaning people who go to the sources, or water-diviners. He means people in our communities, who spontaneously earn the confidence of others; who are known as sympathetic listeners, and who have the art of spiritual conversation. To discover and acknowledge this listening ministry, this charism, is key for missionary communities in a highly mobile, liquid society, where people are constantly arriving and leaving.30

Sourciers makes me think of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well, it is a ministry of attentiveness to what oppresses and liberates people. It offers a gateway into the hospitality that we, as Church, can offer contemporary society.

(4) Reconcilers

Finally, I’d invite you to ponder the famous four principles in Evangelii Gaudium (217-237), which Francis proposes for people to advance in peace, justice and fraternity. When I first read EG, I didn’t understand why he included them in a document on evangelization, but the more I have understood his discernment of modernity, I’ve come to see why the construction of fraternity is a clear sign of the Gospel in a polarized world. Just to give a recent example, his address to the Catholic university in Santiago de Chile in January, in which he spoke of the loss of the sense of a people, family and nation; and warned that life would become more and more fragmented, conflictual, and violent. I think we are seeing this now — in the world, and in the Church.

30 Theobald, Urgences Pastorales, pp 315-6.
I would invite you to re-read that section in the light of a book which came out last year in Italian, and will shortly be out in English, and surely soon in French and Spanish: an intellectual biography of Francis by Massimo Borghesi, which was written with his cooperation. (It is called *The Mind of Pope Francis* in English; in Italian: Jorge Mario Bergoglio: *Una biografia intelettuale*). You will see there just how powerful is Francis’s thinking, especially about the Church as a *coincidentia oppositorum*, a place where things in polar tension can be held together, and become chains in a new process, as Francis describes it in *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Modernity is dominated, as we know, by the great triad of the French Revolution: liberty, equality, fraternity. The first two have been promoted with great vigour, especially recently the second: equality. But they have advanced at the expense of fraternity. Liberty and equality are both legal values, that can be advanced by politics and law; but fraternity is a moral and spiritual matter.

There are many forces seeking to polarize us, forcing us to choose identities, to take up positions in a series of false polarities. In this context, to evangelize is also to show that it is possible to have and be a culture of encounter, a reconciled diversity, a capacity of transcending polarizations and creating a new culture, of encounter and inclusion and reconciled diversity.

To be able to discern the difference between a true contradiction, good versus evil, while not allow ourselves to be polarized over contrasts that are not truly in opposition. This is the work of the Incarnation, which is strong and active in our world whenever we read the times in the light of the Gospel and our prayer, and become active peacemakers and reconcilers in our workplaces, and families, in our civic life and in the Church — and can show and teach others how to do that too, as signs of God’s presence in our turbulent world.

I want to leave you with what Francis told Catholic Action in 2017: that “mission is not one task among others: it is the task.” And he gave them this advice:

*Avoid falling into the temptation of “perfectionism”, endlessly preparing for the mission with interminable analyses that, once finished, are already obsolete.*

*Jesus, with his apostles, gives us the best example: he sent them out with what*
they had. Then he met with them and helped them to discern what they had experienced.

Let reality dictate times and places, and let the Holy Spirit guide you. He is the inner teacher who illumines our work once we are free of preconceptions and conditionings. We learn how to evangelize by evangelizing, just as we learn how to pray by praying, provided we have a good disposition.31

On Sunday I was with the young people of Fr Rafa’s parish who last week led the four-day mission in his parish. They had many stories of the faith they had encountered, as well as life stories and suffering and much besides. They were incredibly moved. One of them said her heart was “filled to bursting”. Another said he had realized that misionando, fuimos misionados. In missioning to others, they were missioned to. That is what we are being invited to experience today, and in the Church Francis is calling us to.

31To Congress of the International Forum of Catholic Action (IFCA), Synod Hall, April 27, 2017