

"Peace is an art,

*starting from God's gift,
from the grace which
he has given us
in Jesus Christ."*

- Pope Francis



missionz

May Christmas Renew Hearts

In Bethlehem, Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. He was born, not by the will of man, but by the gift of the love of God our Father, who “so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

This event is renewed on Christmas Day in the Church, a pilgrim in time. For the faith of the Christian people relives in the Christmas liturgy the Mystery of the God who comes, who assumes our mortal human flesh,

and who becomes lowly and poor in order to save us. And this moves us deeply, for great is the tenderness of our Father.

Christmas invites us to focus on the sign of the Child and to recognize him in the faces of little children, especially those for whom, like Jesus, “there is no place in the inn”

The first people to see the humble Glory of the Saviour, after Mary and Joseph, were the shepherds of Bethlehem. They recognized the sign proclaimed to them by the angels and adored the Child. Those humble and watchful men are an example for believers of every age who, before the mystery of Jesus, are not scandalized by his poverty. Rather, like Mary, they trust in God’s word and contemplate his glory with simple eyes. Before the mystery of the Word made flesh, Christians in every place confess with the words of the Evangelist John: “We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only-begotten Son from the

Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14).

Today, as the winds of war are blowing in our world and an outdated model of development continues to produce human, societal and environmental decline, Christmas invites us to focus on the sign of the Child and to recognize him in the faces of little children, especially those for whom, like Jesus, “there is no place in the inn” (Lk 2:7).

We see Jesus in the children of the Middle East who continue to suffer because of growing tensions between Israelis and Palestinians. On this festive day, let us ask the Lord for peace for Jerusalem and for all the Holy Land. Let us pray that the will to resume dialogue may prevail between the parties and that a negotiated solution can finally be reached, one that would allow the peaceful coexistence of two States within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders.

We see Jesus in the faces of Syrian children still marked by the war that, in these years, has caused such bloodshed in that country. May beloved Syria at last recover respect for

the dignity of every person through a shared commitment to rebuild the fabric of society, without regard for ethnic and religious membership. We see Jesus in the children of Iraq, wounded and torn by the conflicts that country has experienced in the last fifteen years, and in the children of Yemen, where there is an ongoing conflict that has been largely forgotten, with serious humanitarian implications for its people, who suffer from hunger and the spread of diseases.

We see Jesus in the children of Africa, especially those who are suffering in South Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and Nigeria.

...may we commit ourselves, with the help of his grace, to making our world more human and more worthy for the children of today and of the future.

We see Jesus in the children worldwide wherever peace and security are threatened by the danger of tensions and new conflicts... To the Baby Jesus we entrust Venezuela that it may resume a serene

dialogue among the various elements of society for the benefit of all the beloved Venezuelan people. We see Jesus in children who, together with their families, suffer from the violence of the conflict in Ukraine and its grave humanitarian repercussions; we pray that the Lord may soon grant peace to this dear country.

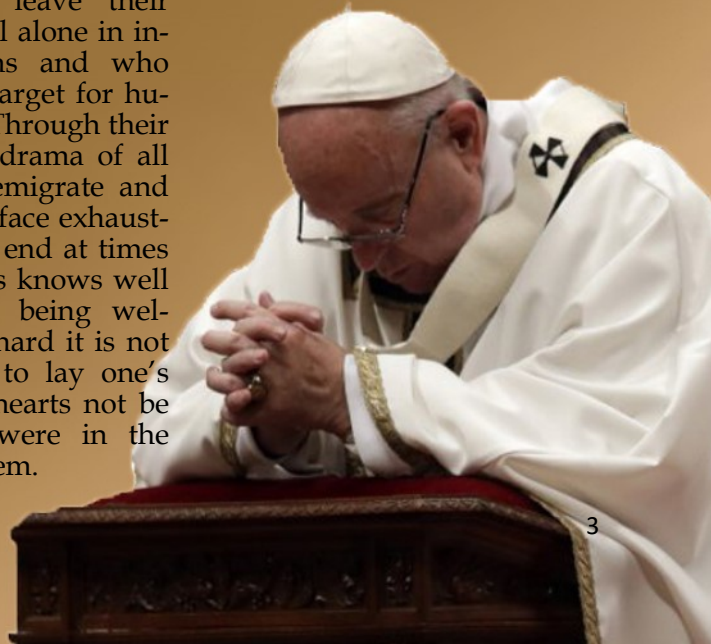
We see Jesus in the children of unemployed parents who struggle to offer their children a secure and peaceful future. And in those whose childhood has been robbed and who, from a very young age, have been forced to work or to be enrolled as soldiers by unscrupulous mercenaries.

We see Jesus in the many children forced to leave their countries to travel alone in inhuman conditions and who become an easy target for human traffickers. Through their eyes we see the drama of all those forced to emigrate and risk their lives to face exhausting journeys that end at times in tragedy....Jesus knows well the pain of not being welcomed and how hard it is not to have a place to lay one's head. May our hearts not be closed as they were in the homes of Bethlehem.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, the sign of Christmas has also been revealed to us: "a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes" (Lk 2:12). Like the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, like the shepherds of Bethlehem, may we welcome in the Baby Jesus the love of God made man for us. And may we commit ourselves, with the help of his grace, to making our world more human and more worthy for the children of today and of the future.

May the birth of Christ the Saviour renew hearts, awaken the desire to build a future of greater fraternity and solidarity, and bring joy and hope to everyone. Happy Christmas!

Francisco



God's Mission BRINGS Joy.

Once more we find ourselves at the end of another year. Time flies. Yet, when one sits down to revisit the past months one will find that many enlightening things have transpired. Difficulties and problems were after all challenges that have been overcome. I find it interesting that whatever has been happening this year it will by all means end with the Feast of Hope and Light. It fascinates me to realise that the last month of each year is also the beginning of a new Liturgical year. Advent is

a season of hope, and Christmas is a season of Light. *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* (Jn1:5). God's mission is made visible in Jesus. His coming is God's statement that HE IS WITH US: **prophesied as Emmanuel (Mt 1:23) and whose last words were "I am with you always, to the ends of the age"** (Mt 28:20). This is Good News. This must be the reason why Pope Francis prays that may Christmas renew hearts!

The photograph that you see at the bottom of this page is the group of young people who graduated from the School of Mission organised by the Institute for World Evangelization (ICPE) in Wellington. I presided in their Thanksgiving Mass at the end of their Mission Formation. And the Friends of **MISSIO-NZ** helped in making that 5-month Mission Youth Formation possible. Believers experience and express the joys of youth. And may that kind of joy be present in all who believe whatever age one may have.

If you leave a legacy of goodness and kindness to those who come to your life, they will find it difficult to erase you from their hearts. A blessed Advent and Christmas to all Friends of **MISSIO-NZ**

Fr Bernard Espiritu, SVD
National Director—**MISSIO-NZ**



Your CHRISTMAS GIFT MAKES A difference

YOUR Christmas gift is vital to furthering The work of **MISSIONARY CHILDREN** with the children around the world. With the gift from you, **MISSIO-NZ** can continue to help provide young and needy Dioceses with programmes that will help children to learn about God, and live good and healthy childhood.

Grateful hearts are best expressed with heartfelt smiles. It is a sincere expression that your prayers and gifts surely make a difference. The children who benefit know that they are not alone and forgotten. And their gratitude is also expressed in their thanksgiving prayers to God for the **MISSIO-NZ** Friends. Give only from the heart for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:6-7). The photographs of the children that appear in this page are pictures of some of the children who benefit from the gifts of **MISSIO-NZ** Friends.



"You are my Refuge and my Shield"

Psalm 119:114



Sr. Cecilia Namudira with Dembe
in Mother Claudia Primary School

The rain is coming down fast and heavy, flooding parts of the dirt road and making it slippery for the small group of young children walking in the darkness. Hushed chatter can be heard, interrupted by the sound of the engine from a motorbike in the distance. Having walked for several kilometres already, mostly on an empty stomach, they are starting to experience fatigue. But the children know the dangers of walking these paths and do not dare to stop.

Just weeks earlier, on the exact same road, a group of three young girls were violently snatched as they were walking to school. While one girl managed to escape, her two friends have not been seen since.

Sadly, although it is rare, abduction and child trafficking is a terrifying reality in rural areas in Uganda. Local missionary and head teacher, Sister Cecilia Namudira, together with her fellow Cistercian Sisters of Charity, runs the Mother Claudia Nursery and Primary School, a place that not only provides education for children, but also a safe home to board during the term, instead of travelling long and dangerous routes.

Here in New Zealand children travel to school in the safety and comfort of their parents' car or by public transport, but this is simply not an option for many children in Uganda. Most of the families at Mother Claudia are local farmers faced with generational poverty and hardship. Forced to work long days to earn a living to care for their families, they are not in a position to accompany their children to and from school, let alone to hire local transport.

*"I fear for the safety of
the children every day.
We ask them to walk
together in groups..."*

I can only imagine how unnerving it must be for the parents and teachers alike knowing that their precious little ones are forced to walk for hours each day to reach school, mostly in the dark, and how they are faced with the real risk of abduction and exploitation.

Sister Cecilia holds constant concern for the safety of the children. As she said, "I fear for the safety of the children every day. We ask them to walk together in groups as very few parents can afford to send the children to school on *boda bodas* (motorbikes). For the girl child, walking these distances increases their vulnerability to possible situations of sexual abuse and exploitation."

Sister Cecilia places her trust in God to protect the children from harm. As Psalm 119:114 says, 'You are my refuge and my shield' – a passage which is of great comfort to Sister Cecilia.



Some children must walk for hours to and from Mother Claudia as there is not enough room for them to board.

The Christmas story tells of Mary and Joseph being turned away before a kind heart offered them much-needed safety and shelter in the stable. In a similar way, Sister Cecilia and the Cistercian Sisters have begun to offer shelter for some of the children at Mother Claudia. The boarding arrangement initially started with children sleeping in classrooms and staff rooms as there was no boarding house. With the need so great and urgent, the Sisters simply could not wait until they

had the funds to build a boarding house.

Right now, Sister Cecilia is desperately trying to finish construction of the girls' dormitory, which recently saw twenty girls move in to it, and also to start work on a boys' dormitory. Once the dormitories are completed, they will be able to safely house sixty girls and sixty boys. To this day, the boys are still sleeping in classrooms.

The boarding arrangement initially started with children sleeping in classrooms and staff rooms as there was no boarding house.

Six-year-old Dembe is one of the current boarding students. Dembe was brought to the sisters in 2015 by her father from their home in South Sudan. After witnessing ongoing war and conflict in their home country, Dembe's father feared for the life of his only child. Despite being unable to settle in Uganda himself right now due to political reasons, he risked a great deal to put his precious daughter's safety before his own. Already he feels he has given her a better chance

at the life she deserves than she would have had in South Sudan.

Sadly, Dembe is one of more than one million South Sudanese refugees in Uganda, 85 percent of whom are women and children. During the school holidays, Dembe stays with relatives close to the school as it is too dangerous for her to travel back to South Sudan to see her family. She is constantly longing for her dad, who visits as often as he can.



The children is becoming more confident thanks to the opportunities given to them at Mother Claudia.

As Dembe had already experienced so much hardship and pain, Sister Cecilia was relieved that they could provide her a home in the dormitory. At this stage boarding is primarily offered to students who live very far away from the school to ensure that they are safe and also that they have time to focus on their studies rather than

spending several hours each day walking to and from school or doing domestic duties in the home.



Today, Dembe's photos show the bright smile, loving nature and positive energy of a girl who has come a long way.

Dembe herself is a hardworking student who enjoys reading, playing, singing and dancing. When she grows up she wants to be a doctor so that she can help people in need, like her friends and family back home. Today, Dembe's photos show the bright smile, loving nature and positive energy of a girl who has come a long way. Just a couple of years have made all the difference for this once timid girl who struggled

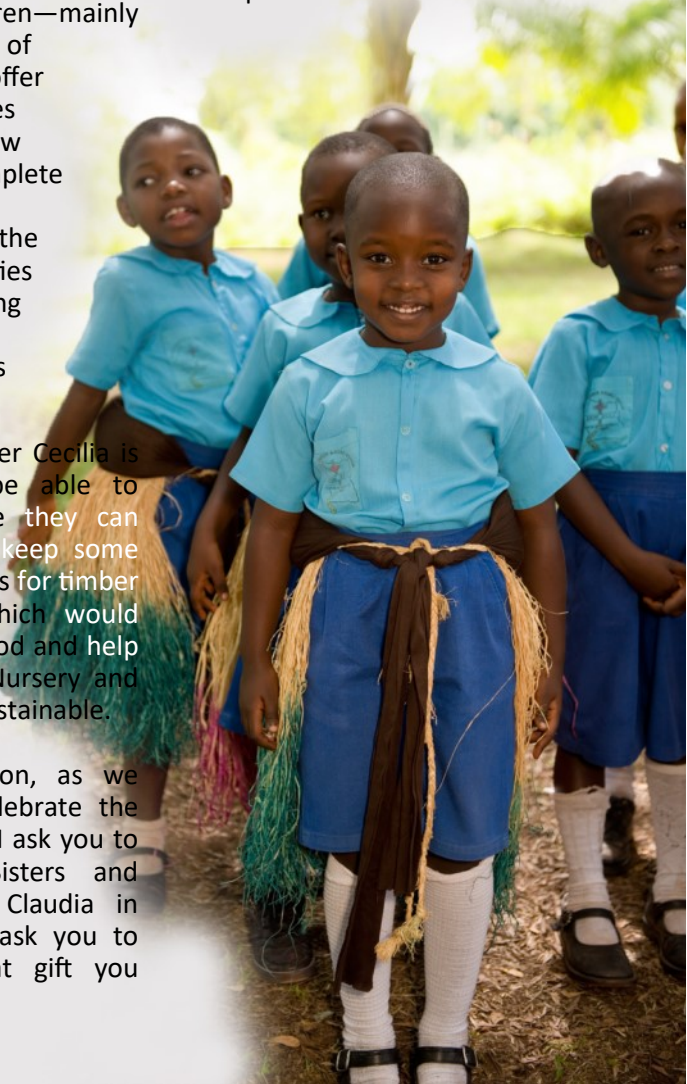
to adjust to a new curriculum, a new language and a new family.

Mother Claudia opened with one class of 20 students in 2003 and is continuing to grow year by year, now catering for 350 children from different denominations. As the school continues to grow and attract the interest of more parents and children—mainly because of the quality of education the Sisters offer and the Christian values they instil—there is now an urgent need to complete the initial two dormitories, including the water and toilet facilities needed for the boarding students, and also to build more dormitories and new classrooms.

Another hope for Sister Cecilia is to one day soon be able to purchase land where they can grow fresh produce, keep some animals and plant trees for timber production, all of which would reduce the costs of food and help the Mother Claudia Nursery and School become self-sustainable.

This Holy Season, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I ask you to please keep the Sisters and children at Mother Claudia in your prayers. I also ask you to please consider what gift you

might be able to give them this Christmas-- any amount you are comfortable with, they will be incredibly grateful. I would like to thank you for the generosity you have already shown in reading Dembe's story and how Sister Cecilia is providing vital shelter, safety and education to children in desperate need.



WHO IS MISSIO-NZ

MISSIO-NZ is the Kiwi agency of the International Pontifical Mission Societies (MISSIO). Locally and globally we hope to help build communities of missionary disciples of Jesus who share their faith through prayers and action.

MISSIO operates in over 160 countries to support initiative in 1,100 dioceses. Grassroots needs are identified by local Catholics, to give people the opportunity for a full, enriched life — physically and spiritually — regardless of race, stigma, religion or gender.

The gifts featured here are representative of some of the life changing projects for the children and their mothers around the world supported by MISSIO-NZ

This Christmas Appeal to the MISSIO-NZ Friends will all be given to the work of the Missionary Children Association, formerly called Holy Childhood Association.



\$20

Essential School
Materials for a child to
support their education



\$110

Sports equipment to
allow children with
disabilities to get active
and socialise



\$100

Support faith ministry
for one month for ten
children living in the
streets



\$ 15

Provide a child with
a nutritious meal for
five days.



\$ 10

Give six orphaned
children their own
rosaries



\$60

Support eight mothers
and their babies with
medicines and health
care in regional area



\$60

A bicycle can allow a
child in a rural area to
travel long distances to
school.



\$20

Support formation for
three children through
catechism classes



\$340

Provide a wheelchair to
a child who is physically
challenged

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ON MISSION IN THE WORLD



**Baptised
and sent**

On World Mission Sunday, October 22, 2017, Pope Francis publicly announced to the whole Church his intention to designate an Extraordinary Missionary Month for October 2019 (**EMM OCT 2019**) to celebrate the 100th anniversary Pope Benedict XV's Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*. He entrusted to Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation of Peoples and President of the Supreme Council of MIS-SIO «**the work of preparing for this event, especially by raising awareness among the particular Churches, the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and among associations, movements, communities, and other ecclesial bodies**». Pope Francis provided the theme for the event: **“BAPTIZED AND SENT: THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ON MISSION IN THE WORLD”**. Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* emphasized that the «missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church's activity» (EG 15).

It is about placing «the mission of Jesus at the heart of the Church, making it the criterion for measuring the effectiveness of her

structures, the results of her labours, the fruitfulness of her ministers, and the joy they awaken.

The commitment to personal and communal conversion to Jesus Christ crucified, risen, and alive in his Church, will renew the ardour and passion for witnessing to the world the Gospel of life and Paschal joy (cf. Lk 24:46-49) through proclamation and Christian living. **There are four dimensions**, specified by the Pope, to live more intensely the journey of preparation for and implementation of the Extraordinary Missionary Month - October 2019:

- 1. A personal encounter with Jesus Christ living in his Church: in the Eucharist, in the Word of God, and in personal and communal prayer.**
- 2. Testimony: missionary saints, martyrs, and confessors of the faith as an expression of the Church scattered throughout the world.**
- 3. Missionary formation: biblical, catechetical, spiritual, and theological.**
- 4. Missionary charity.**

PROPAGANDA FIDE AND THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES

The Missionary Dicastery of the Holy See, once known as *Propaganda Fide* (Propagation of the Faith) was founded in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV for promoting, coordinating, and directing the work of evangelization and missionary cooperation in the Church. In 1967, the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, reaffirming the validity of its apostolic service, renamed the Dicastery the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (CEP). The concrete effectiveness of Christian faith expressed through active charity makes all of the baptized responsible for supporting and helping the Pope in his mission as Universal Shepherd. **Prayer, self-sacrifice, missionary vocations, and material help continues the age-old commitment of the Pontifical Mission Societies (MISSIO),** which were born in the 19th and 20th centuries out of a deep concern for the missions of both laity and clergy alike. Together, the CEP and the **MISSIO** are revitalizing their **«efforts to collect and distribute material aid in the light of our mission and the formation that it requires, so that missionary integrity, awareness, and responsibility can once again be part of the ordinary life of the entire holy and faithful People of God».** (Pope Francis, 1 June 2018). «The four Societies – Propagation of the Faith (PSPF), St. Peter the Apostle (PSSPA), Mission-

ary Childhood (MCA), and the Missionary Union (PMU) – have the common purpose of fostering a universal missionary spirit among the People of God» (*Redemptoris Missio* 84). **PSPF, founded by the venerable Pauline Marie Jaricot in Lyon, France, in 1822, continues to promote prayer and self-sacrifice among the faithful, encouraging the offering of material aid for the mission, asking the Lord to call men and women who would consecrate their lives for the *missio ad gentes*.** MCA was officially founded in Paris in 1843 by Most Rev. Charles Auguste de Forbin-Janson, the then Bishop of Nancy (France), and engages children throughout the world in helping their peers in faith and charity through prayer and sharing according its motto: children helping children. **PSSPA, founded by Jeanne and Stéphanie Bigard in 1889 in Caen (France), animates and coordinates missionary collaboration through the offering of prayer and material aid for the formation of future priests, aspirants to consecrated life, and for their formators in young Churches in missionary lands.** PMU, inspired by Blessed Paolo Manna, a missionary priest of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, was approved by Pope Benedict XV in 1916. Considered to be the soul of the other three Mission Societies; its aim is to provoke a passion for mission in the Church, to

contribute to the formation of missionaries, and to stimulate missionary cooperation within Christian communities. It also aims at being the praying and tangible part of the activity of evangelization.

YEAR 2022: ANNIVERSARIES OF THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

A number of significant anniversaries will be celebrated in 2022: 400 years since the foundation of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, 200 years since the creation of the Missionary Society for the Propagation of the Faith, and 100 years since the first three Mission Societies (PSPF, MCA, PSSPA) received their pontifical and universal designation. These anniversaries may be providential in offering the whole Church one more opportunity to keep its missionary baptismal awareness alive and effective. **If the crisis of the mission is a crisis of faith, the maturity of the Church's faith is courageously expressed in her mission to attract everyone and everything to Christ.** The upcoming Extraordinary Missionary Month might, in fact, promise to be the beginning of an adventure of faith, prayer, reflection, and charity that doesn't end in October 2019, but may culminate in suitable forms of enthusiastic and renewed commitment for the mission ad gentes as the motor and paradigm for Church's entire life and missionary nature.

MORNING OFFERING

(Daily Prayer of MISSIO-NZ Friends)

Eternal and loving God, our Father, I give You thanks for the evening's rest and offer you everything I do today—my thoughts works, joys, and challenges. Grant that, enlivened by the Holy Spirit and united to Jesus in the Eucharist, my life this day may be of service to you and to others. Be graciously present with all the baptised and inspire them all to do their best where ever you sent them today. And with Mary and the whole Church I praise and glorify you and may peace permeate all your creation. All this I pray in Jesus' Name. Amen.

BE A MISSIONARY IN PRAYER AND GENEROSITY

Whoever and wherever we are, we can all be missionary: joining together in prayer with the wider Church, volunteering for MISSIO-NZ and giving generously from the heart. These are all valuable ways to further the work of mission.

One can be a MISSIO-NZ volunteer by sharing the materials produced by the MISSIO-NZ Office with other members of your parish. You may write, call, or email our Office and we will promptly mail you the requested materials. Or you may invite me, Fr Bernard, to give a reflection in your community. Please get in touch with us.

Pray at least a decade of the Rosary for missionaries and the missionary work of the Church all over the world especially in your parish.



SEND YOUR MASS INTENTION TO MISSIO-NZ

The custom of requesting a priest to offer Mass for a specific intention, even when one cannot be present at Mass, is a longstanding tradition in the Church.

The faithful generally make an offering, called a stipend, to the priest in order to apply the Mass to a specific intention, such as an anniversary or a birthday. By making this offering the faithful, by parting with something that is their own, associate themselves more intimately with Christ. The offering of a stipend is also a means whereby Catholics may contribute to the upkeep of the clergy.

Many priests in Africa and Asia depend entirely on Mass stipends for their income. Please help them by sending your Mass intentions to **MISSIO-NZ** and our office will pass them on to a priest in a mission territory overseas.

Please send your intentions and details to: Fr. Bernard Espiritu, SVD at MISSIO-NZ P.O.BOX 43226 Wainuiomata, Hutt Valley 5048 and make cheques payable to MISSIO-NZ.



is Pope Francis' official charity for overseas mission and is part of the worldwide network of the Pontifical Mission Societies (**MISSIO**). **GIVE GENEROUSLY.**

SEND YOUR DONATION TO: P.O. Box 43226 Wainuiomata, LH 5048 — Contact us on (04) 472 2210— info@missio.nz.

Online Donation: <https://missio.nz/donate> or **Direct Deposit to:** ANZ 060411 0021447 00