

Visible Signs of Conforti's Legacy

Excerpts from the 100 year anniversary booklet (1895-1995)

"Since my youth I have always felt the strongest desire to dedicate my life to the foreign Missions" wrote Conforti. Now, the Xaverian Missionaries, the Missionaries of Mary, and people in the Laity all offer their contribution to the proclamation of the Gospel.

On December 3, 1895, Fr. Guido Maria Conforti officially began his "daring undertaking," to found a congregation having as its exclusive purpose "Mission." It was then but a tiny seed planted in the soil of his native land. No one could bet on the harvest outcome.



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He wrote on March 9, 1894 to Cardinal Ledochowski: *"Since my youth I have always felt the strongest desire to dedicate my life to the foreign Missions and, since I was unable to fulfill this holy disposition at the proper time due to reasons over which I had no control, I decided several years ago to found a seminary for the Emilia region dedicated to this most noble goal. This plan was not weakened in any way by the passing of time or changing circumstances; on the contrary, it became stronger and stronger and, encouraged by the wise counsel of holy persons, I believe it to be inspired by none other than God Himself... I shall offer myself entirely and all I possess in order to fulfill the holy enterprise. I shall thus contribute my own small stone to the great building of which Christ is the cornerstone... Although I am aware of my worthlessness, I shall not be daunted by any contradictions and difficulties; I shall place my trust in the Divine Heart that suffered for all the peoples of the earth and in the protection of the glorious Apostle of the Indies, who shall mercifully protect me from Heaven."*

Over a hundred years have elapsed. Despite its sparse beginnings, that "small stone," that tiny seed can today trace its offshoots to many lands, yet it retained its initial characteristic: to remain a "unpretentious family." Xaverian

missionaries are today present on four continents. From that sole sturdy stalk numerous spirited shoots sprout forth in continuity. These are the youth – of diverse churches, cultures, and nations – who commit themselves to serve within the universal Mission of the Church, to proclaim the "good news" to those who still know it not.



Xaverian Missionaries

The Xaverian missionaries, founded by Guido Conforti, are a visible legacy of their founder. Bishop Conforti preferred to have his missionaries work in China, Asia. His wish, since youth, was to leave for the missions; however, illness raised doubts about the possibility of his priestly ordination. He founded his missionary congregation and was anxious to send his first two missionaries to China, during the Boxer rebellion. Asia represents even today the greatest challenge for the church, where the number of non-Christians is great indeed. The Xaverians went to China, where their Patron, Saint Francis Xavier had hoped to arrive. For fifty years China was the only apostolic field of the Xaverians. During his visit to China, he was heard to exclaim: *"In you, O Lord, I place my trust. I will never be let down."* Could these words not be an overflow of his deep-rooted faith?

In the mysterious ways of Divine Providence, the story of the early Christian communities of the Acts of the Apostles was repeated in the Xaverian family. Persecution caused a scattering and dispersion, this dispersion provided Gospel proclamation to other peoples and lands.

Xaverian Missionaries dispersed as a result of the persecution of Mao now find themselves in Japan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Taiwan, United States, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Sierra Leone, Congo, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad and Mozambique. The Xaverian family history covers over a hundred years. And a group of young Xaverians in Taipei (Taiwan) are preparing to re-travel the route of the first Xaverian missionaries and to renew the dream of Conforti, namely, to announce the Gospel in China.

Missionary Sisters of Mary



The Missionary Sisters of Mary, who were founded in Parma in 1945, are another visible sign of the legacy of Conforti. This is a missionary congregation of women, which have their place within the Xaverian family. The seeds of this foundation can be found in the prophetic and illumined insights of Monsignor Conforti. He had hoped to found a community of missionary women in 1926 and again in 1928. He wrote to Rome about his wish to found a sister branch of his Xaverians. These missionary women were to be “mothers to the world” in a time when a woman’s touch was needed in many areas of the mission world. Bishop Conforti’s untimely death in 1931 placed the dream on the back burner for thirteen years until 1944 when Celestine Bottego was asked to consider an unsolicited and unexpected request. On May 24 1944, in fact, Celestine Bottego expressed her “consent” to

collaborate with Fr. Giacomo Spagnolo in the foundation of the Missionaries of Mary – the Xaverian Sisters. July 19 1945 saw the actual beginning of the community with the arrival of the first sister at Villa Bottego in Parma.

Thus was the unfulfilled desire of Bishop Conforti realized. Faithful to the Xaverian ideals and spirit, Fr. Spagnolo and Mother Bottego wished their community to be missionary, ready to respond to the command of Jesus: “Go forth to the whole world...”

Today the Missionaries of Mary are present in many part of the world: Italy, Southern Brazil, Amazon area, Mexico, United States, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Japan and Thailand. They are engaged in evangelization, catechetical activity, health care, human promotion (especially of women). They draw inspiration from Mary, in the mystery of the Visitation, and hold her to be the model of their interior spirit. Like Mary, they travel the world, hopeful that all people may come to know the love project of the Father and feel to be brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

Laitry for Mission

Thirdly, the Lay Missionary Movement is certainly an important phenomenon in the missionary life of the Church since Vatican Council II. Lay missionaries leave for mission to make their own contribution there where Churches are being born or where there is a particular need. The Xaverian missionaries, while glancing back over their years of existence, recognize how much they are indebted in their work of evangelization to laity: the parents of Xaverians presently engaged in mission; the friends and benefactors who support our houses for Xaverians in training, and for the vast network of initiatives in mission lands.



Bishop Conforti considered – to be a part of the Xaverian family, and sharers in the merits of his missionaries – such most valued mission cooperators. Speaking of the laity, Bishop Guido wrote:

“My dear brothers and sisters, you too share in the great merit of the works to which the missionaries dedicate themselves, because you have contributed both morally and materially to help them reach their desired goal. You have supported them with your prayers by asking the Lord to

confirm them in their chosen vocation. You have helped them by your generous assistance in support of the Congregation within which they have prepared themselves for the apostolate.”

This family includes many relatives, friends, benefactors, who often in silence, journey alongside missionaries and afford encouragement to nurture this constant miracle of selfless giving by those who offer themselves to Christ for Gospel proclamation

Today it is the wish of the Xaverians that these persons, organized in various groups, who come from every social rank and continent, may become a “third missionary family,” and that inspired by the same Xaverian spirituality, may live and share in a special way in the activities of the entire congregation.

Every family cherishes the giftedness received from previous generations, and the Xaverians are no exception. We treasure the heritage of those who have preceded us, particularly our Founder, Saint Guido Maria Conforti.

We are thankful to our Xaverian predecessors and all members of our extended family, who by their encouragement, generosity, support, make missionary work possible. We share a common dream: *“to make of the world one family.”*