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On Sunday 18 October 2026, the Church celebrates the hundredth World Mission Day, established by Pius XI in 1926. Behind it lies a long history: from the inspiration of a young laywoman in Lyon to the great missionary foundations of the nineteenth century, including Don Bosco's missions. A prominent place in this history belongs to a priest from Turin who was educated at Valdocco: Saint Giuseppe Allamano, founder of the Consolata Missionaries and the Consolata Missionary Sisters. As early as 1912, he promoted a petition to the Pope asking for an annual Sunday dedicated to the missions. His approach to training missionaries bears the imprint of his former educator, Don Bosco.

The roots: a young woman from Lyon and the missionary nineteenth century

The story of World Mission Day begins a century before it was established, in Lyon. There, a young laywoman, Pauline Marie Jaricot (1799-1862), organised small groups of ten people, each committed to praying for the missions and donating a sou each week. This network gave rise, on 3 May 1822, to the **Society for the Propagation of the Faith**. Pauline Jaricot was beatified in Lyon on 22 May 2022.

The idea was simple yet revolutionary: evangelisation concerns not only missionaries or major benefactors, but every baptised person, through prayer and even a small offering. Over the course of the nineteenth century, other organisations inspired by the same spirit were founded: the **Society of the Holy Childhood** (1843), which involved children, and the **Society of St Peter the Apostle** (1889), for the training of local clergy. Together with the **Pontifical Missionary Union**, founded in 1916 by Blessed Paolo Manna, they now make up **the four Pontifical Mission Societies**.

New missionary institutes also arose in Italy during the same century: in Milan in 1850 (today's PIME), in Verona with Saint Daniele Comboni in 1867, and in Parma with Saint Guido Maria Conforti in 1895. In this climate, Don Bosco opened his young Congregation to the mission *ad gentes*. On 11 November 1875, in the

Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, he presented crucifixes to the first ten missionaries, six priests and four coadjutor brothers, led by Don Giovanni Cagliero; on 14 November, they set off from Genoa for Argentina.

Two years later, in November 1877, the first Daughters of Mary Help of Christians set out for Uruguay. The Salesian Bulletin was also founded in 1877, bringing the missionaries' letters into the homes of the Cooperators. On a small scale, this was already the work of fostering missionary awareness among the whole people of God that World Mission Day would make universal.

Giuseppe Allamano, a pupil of Don Bosco

Giuseppe Allamano was born on 21 January 1851 in Castelnuovo d'Asti, now Castelnuovo Don Bosco, the same village as Giovanni Bosco. His mother, Marianna Cafasso, was the sister of Saint Giuseppe Cafasso, the priest who guided Don Bosco during his years at the Ecclesiastical College and served as his confessor for a long time. The bond between Allamano and Don Bosco thus has its roots in the same homeland and the same school of priestly holiness.

In October 1862, at the age of eleven, Giuseppe entered the Oratory of Valdocco for his secondary studies. He stayed for four years, finished top of his class and, in his third year, also served as an assistant to his fellow pupils. Don Bosco was his confessor throughout that time: Allamano recalled telling him everything and feeling that Don Bosco «could read his heart».

Don Bosco would have liked him to join the Salesians, but the boy did not feel suited to that life. On 19 August 1866, he left Valdocco without saying goodbye, to avoid further persuasion, and entered the diocesan seminary in Turin. When Don Bosco met him later, he affectionately reproached him for leaving without taking his leave.

Choosing a different path did not weaken their relationship. Ordained a priest on 20 September 1873, Allamano became an assistant and then spiritual director at the seminary. In October 1880, at the age of 29, he became rector of the Shrine of the Consolata; in 1882, he reopened the Ecclesiastical College, the very place where Don Bosco had been trained by Cafasso. He remained in frequent contact with Don Bosco, meeting him for conversations and occasionally inviting him to lunch. Don

Bosco entrusted him with collecting recollections of Cafasso, which later enabled Canon Colombo to write the first extensive biography of Allamano's uncle. Allamano visited Don Bosco again just a few months before his death on 31 January 1888, and attended his funeral, kneeling among the crowd.

In January 1900, a serious case of pleuropneumonia brought him to the brink of death. His recovery, attributed to the Consolata, seemed to him a sign that the time had come to carry out a project he had been nurturing for years. The Consolata Mission Institute was founded on 29 January 1901; on 8 May 1902, the first four missionaries set off for Kenya; and on 29 January 1910, the Institute of the Consolata Missionary Sisters was founded. Allamano never went to the missions himself, but he devoted his whole life to them.

The spirit of Valdocco in the Consolata community

Allamano was not a Salesian, and that was a conscious choice. Yet Don Bosco's influence is clear in the way he trained missionaries. He wanted his Institute to be a family, not a boarding school: «This house must be a house of love», he would repeat. He became a father to his missionaries, seeking to be loved rather than feared, correcting them with gentleness and reason, and making use of a «quiet word in the ear» and personal letters, as he had seen done at Valdocco.

His own words confirm this: «I always admire Don Bosco»; «I still remember many things Don Bosco told me when I was young». And he pointed his followers towards a specific model: «Let us follow in the footsteps of the saints: Venerable Cafasso – Don Bosco». Alongside these two saints from Turin, he placed Saint Alphonsus and Saint Francis de Sales, the same patron saint Don Bosco had chosen for his Congregation. The famous motto «First saints, then missionaries» also expresses a conviction familiar at Valdocco: the apostolate springs from the holiness of everyday life.

1912: the proposal for a Sunday dedicated to the missions

On 29 August 1912, fourteen years before World Mission Day was established, Allamano wrote to the superiors of the other Italian missionary

institutes in Parma, Verona, Milan, Genoa and Rome; among them was Saint Guido Maria Conforti, founder of the Xaverians. In his letter, he decried how little was known about the missions in Italy, the apathy of many priests and faithful, and the shortage of missionary vocations, sometimes discouraged by bishops themselves. His conclusion was unequivocal: the Pope had to be involved.

The superiors welcomed the proposal and sent a petition to Saint Pius X. Among other things, they asked for an annual Mission Sunday, with a compulsory sermon on the duty to help spread the faith. The request, however, encountered several obstacles: it lacked the official support of Propaganda Fide, the Pope was elderly and unwell, and Europe was heading towards war.

Pius X replied on 31 January 1913 with a letter praising the missionaries' work, but without mentioning Mission Sunday. Curiously, in the reply, the name of the man behind the proposal became «Canon Alemanno». Allamano was not discouraged: he circulated the papal letter and commented on it to keep attention focused on the missions.

The seed was not lost. In 1916, Father Paolo Manna of PIME founded the Missionary Union of the Clergy, with the decisive support of Conforti, who presented its statutes to the Pope: they were approved on 31 October 1916.

From Benedict XV to Pius XI: World Mission Day is established in 1926

On 30 November 1919, Benedict XV published the apostolic letter [*Maximum illud*](#). He called for evangelisation to be freed from the political and nationalist interests of the colonial powers, for local clergy capable of leading the young Churches to be trained, and for the whole Church to share responsibility for the mission through the prayer and support of the faithful. In the same document, the Pope expressed the hope that the Missionary Union of the Clergy would be established in every diocese.

In February 1922, Achille Ratti ascended the papal throne as Pius XI, and would be remembered as the «Pope of the missions». In the autumn of 1883, as a young priest, he had spent two days at Valdocco with Don Bosco, a memory he cherished throughout his life: he would beatify Don Bosco in 1929 and canonise him on Easter Day 1934. On 3 May 1922, the centenary of its foundation, he gave the Society for

the Propagation of the Faith pontifical status through the *motu proprio Romanorum Pontificum* and moved its headquarters from Lyon to Rome.

For the Holy Year of 1925, Pius XI wanted a major Missionary Exhibition in the Vatican, open from 24 December 1924 to 9 January 1926: more than 100,000 objects in twenty-six pavilions and over a million visitors. The Salesians took part at the Pope's invitation, responding to the appeal of the Rector Major, Don Filippo Rinaldi. The Ethnological Missionary Museum, now the Anima Mundi Museum of the Vatican Museums, grew out of the Exhibition. On 3 May of that same year, Pius XI beatified Giuseppe Cafasso, whose cause Allamano had promoted for many years.

On 11 December 1925, through the encyclical [*Quas primas*](#), Pius XI instituted the feast of Christ the King, set for the last Sunday in October. On 16 February 1926, Giuseppe Allamano died in Turin, at the Shrine of the Consolata. Twelve days later, on 28 February, the encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* reaffirmed that the mission concerns the whole Christian people: bishops, priests, religious and laypeople, called to support it through prayer, vocations and material aid.

In March 1926, the plenary assembly of the General Superior Council of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith decided to ask the Pope for an annual day of prayer and missionary promotion, to be observed in all dioceses, parishes and Catholic institutes. According to an account also recalled by *Avvenire*, the idea originated with the Missionary Circle of the Seminary of Sassari. The petition called for a missionary sermon, the prayer *Pro Propagatione Fidei* at Masses, promotion of the Society, the collection of offerings and a plenary indulgence. Pius XI approved it on 14 April 1926, by a rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Rites: just two months after Allamano's death, the Mission Sunday he had dreamed of in 1912 became a reality for the whole Church.

Why the penultimate Sunday in October

The date was not chosen at random. World Mission Day was placed on the **Sunday before the new feast of Christ the King**, and the petition expressed the hope «that the universal recognition of his divine kingship may be hastened». The mission was understood as proclaiming the Kingdom of Christ to all peoples. With the calendar reform of 1969, the solemnity of Christ the King was moved to the last Sunday of the liturgical year, while World Mission Day retained its place.

The Salesians in 1926 and the first celebration

1926 was also a missionary year for the Salesian Family. For the fiftieth anniversary of the missions, a large Missionary Exhibition covering around 10,500 square metres was set up at Valdocco; its exhibits formed the basis of the Ethnological Missionary Museum now at Colle Don Bosco. On 28 October 1926, Pius XI also consecrated the first six Chinese bishops in St Peter's Basilica, putting the principle of a local clergy into practice.

The first World Mission Day was celebrated on Sunday 23 October 1927. Thus 2026 marks two anniversaries at once: a hundred years since its establishment and its hundredth celebration.

A century of World Mission Day: an entirely missionary Church

In the decades that followed, World Mission Day accompanied a profound growth in missionary awareness. With the decree [*Ad gentes*](#) of 7 December 1965, the Second Vatican Council declared that «the Church, during its pilgrimage on earth, is missionary by its very nature» (AG 2). Ten years later, Saint Paul VI wrote in his exhortation [*Evangelii nuntiandi*](#) (1975) that evangelising «is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity» (EN 14).

Saint John Paul II renewed the call to the mission *ad gentes* with the encyclical [*Redemptoris missio*](#) (1990). In [*Evangelii gaudium*](#) (2013), Pope Francis called the whole Church to be «a Church that goes forth» and, in October 2019, on the centenary of *Maximum illud*, proclaimed an Extraordinary Missionary Month. For decades, Popes have sent a message to the faithful for World Mission Day, and the offerings collected go into the universal solidarity fund of the Pontifical Mission Societies.

Recent years have linked World Mission Day with missionary saints in a remarkable way. On Sunday 20 October 2024, World Mission Day, Pope Francis canonised Giuseppe Allamano, who had been beatified by Saint John Paul II on 7 October 1990. The recognised miracle concerns Sorino, an Indigenous Yanomami man from the Brazilian Amazon who survived a jaguar attack while his community was praying to

Blessed Allamano. The Church commemorates Allamano on 16 February, the day of his death.

A year later, on Sunday 19 October 2025, again on World Mission Day, Pope Leo XIV canonised Sister Maria Troncatti, a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians. Born in Córteno Golgi (Brescia) in 1883, she arrived in Ecuador in 1922 and devoted nearly half a century to the Shuar people as a nurse, catechist and «little mother». She died in a plane crash at Sucúa on 25 August 1969. Thus, a year apart, a former pupil of Valdocco and a spiritual daughter of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello were proclaimed saints on the same occasion.

The centenary: «One in Christ, united in mission»

For the hundredth World Mission Day, celebrated on Sunday 18 October 2026, Pope Leo XIV has chosen the theme «One in Christ, united in mission». The [message](#) is dated 25 January 2026, the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, and is structured in three parts: «One in Christ», «United in mission» and «Mission of love». The Pope recalls that Pius XI «established the celebration of World Mission Day in 1926» at the proposal of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, which distributes the offerings «in the Pope's name» to meet the needs of young Churches.

At the heart of the message is the same conviction that inspired Pauline Jaricot and Giuseppe Allamano: «No baptised person, in fact, is uninvolved in or indifferent to the mission». Leo XIV recalls Blessed Paolo Manna's motto, «The whole Church for the conversion of the whole world», on the 110th anniversary of the Missionary Union. And he concludes with thanks: «I therefore wish to thank in particular today's missionaries, men and women, *ad gentes*».

For the Salesian Family, the centenary comes soon after the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition. In November 2025, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco, the Rector Major, Don Fabio Attard, commissioned the members of the 156th expedition and, together with the FMA Superior General, Mother Chiara Cazzuola, presented them with crucifixes. Over the past century and a half, around ten thousand Salesians have been sent to mission lands; today the Congregation is present in 136 countries.

First saints, then missionaries

A hundred years on, World Mission Day retains the meaning it had at its beginnings: reminding every community that Jesus' commission concerns everyone. «Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the world» (Mt 28:19-20).

Its history weaves together the inspiration of a laywoman from Lyon, the passion of founders such as Don Bosco and Allamano, and the decision of a Pope who, as a young priest, had met Don Bosco at Valdocco. Allamano never saw the Day he had asked for, but he prepared the ground for it, bringing the spirit he had learned from Don Bosco into the Church of Turin and beyond. Don Bosco had left his missionaries this charge: «Seek souls, not money, nor honours, nor rank». Allamano, in his own words, would tell his followers: «First saints, then missionaries». That remains the path to a Church united in mission.