Ad Gentes: Brief Summary on the Missionary Doctrine of the Church

The pilgrim Church is Missionary by her very nature, since it is from the Mission of the Son and the Mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.

This decree, however, flows from the "fount-like love" or charity of God the Father who, being the "principle without principle" from whom the Son is begotten and Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son, freely creating us on account of His surpassing and merciful kindness and graciously calling us moreover to share with Him His life and His cry, has generously poured out, and does not cease to pour out still, His divine goodness. Thus He who created all things may at last be "all in all" 1 Cor. 15:28, bringing about at one and the same time His own glory and our happiness. But it pleased God to call men to share His life, not just singly, apart from any mutual bond, but rather to mold them into a people in which His sons, once scattered abroad might be gathered together. cf. John 11:52

"Missions" is the term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel, sent out by the Church and going forth into the whole world, carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ. These undertakings are brought to completion by Missionary activity and are mostly exercised in certain territories recognized by the Holy See.

The purpose of this Missionary activity is evangelization, and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups where it has not yet taken root. Thus from the seed which is the word of God, particular autonomous Churches should be established and should grow up all over the World, endowed with their own maturity and vital forces. Under a hierarchy of their own, together with the faithful people, and adequately fitted out with requisites for living a full Christian life, they should make their contribution to the good of the whole Church. The chief means of the planting referred to is the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To preach this Gospel the Lord sent forth His disciples into the whole world, that being reborn by the word of God, men might be joined to the Church through Baptism - that Church which, as the body of the Word Incarnate, is nourished and lives by the word of God and by the Eucharistic bread.

Missionary activity is nothing else and nothing less than an epiphany, or a manifesting of God's decree, and its fulfillment in the world and in world history, in the course of which God, by means of Mission, manifestly works out the history of salvation. By the preaching of the word and by the celebration of the sacraments, the center and summit of which is the most holy Eucharist, He brings about the presence of Christ, the author of Salvation.

Excerpts from the Principle of Doctrine, Ad Gentes