



More than 600 people participated in **the 5th National Missionary Conference** held this week in Neuquen, Argentina, and committed to redoubling their efforts for a “Church that goes out.”

The theme of the Nov. 18-20 event was “Argentina in Mission, the Gospel is Joy.” It was hosted by Auxiliary Bishop Fernando Croxatto of Comodoro Rivadavia.

Pope Francis sent a letter to the congress, expressing his desire that participants “would grow in the missionary spirit, with that attitude of coming out of yourselves to proclaim Jesus.”

“Don’t be afraid – when there is love for Jesus Christ, this desire to make him known grows, to bring his love to everyone, with the enthusiasm that comes from faith,” the pope said in his message.

In the closing Mass, Bishop Croxatto said that Jesus encourages missionaries to stay strong and take courage, ready to choose death over betraying the Lord.

“The true missionary, who never stops being a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks with him, breathes with him, works with him,” he said.

“Going out on mission means going out in order to spend time with people; it means going through far away remote areas, towns, cities, social environments, the modern Areopagus,” he said. “Not just passing through, but spending time with people. Letting ourselves take the time to get close to people, to see those crying out from the fringes of society.”

Bishop Croxatto warned against “the greatest danger which is that gray pragmatism of the daily life of the Church, where everything appears to be proceeding as usual but in reality the faith is wearing thin, degenerating into pettiness.”

“Make us always see that faith in you, the Son of God made flesh, is inseparable from the gift of ourselves,” he prayed. “So enable us to take the risk of coming face-to-face with others, with their sorrows and their complaints, the risk of belonging to a community and becoming servants. Let us not tire of opting for brotherhood.”

At the conference, diocesan teams met to discuss how to implement the mission of Ad

gentes – the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church – to strengthen and encourage communities, and to spiritually prepare for the American Missionary Congress to be held in July 2018 in Bolivia.

Working in groups over the three-day event, the teams also acknowledged obstacles to their ministry, including poor communication, lack of communion, clericalism, signs of fatigue, disinterest, a lack of passion in the work of evangelization, resistance to change and “a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of the Gospel.”

The diocesan missionary groups renewed their commitment to create opportunities to “encounter Christ through the Eucharist and the Word of God; to increase missionary formation in all areas of pastoral ministry; to foster the bonds of communion and teamwork for a fruitful missionary witness.”

In addition, they committed to “increasing outreach to the poor and revitalizing ways of spreading the message, formation and support for missionary Ad gentes vocations.”