



The *Missionary Childhood Association* is one of four *Pontifical Mission Societies*. It has a dual mandate of educating children about their part in the Church's missionary work and challenging them to share what they have with children growing up in mission countries.

The Pontifical Mission Societies also include the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the Society of St. Peter Apostle, and the Missionary Union of Priests and Religious. They are part of the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

#### A HISTORY OF HELPING

Bishop Charles de Forbin-Janson was much in demand. Many French bishops who were serving as missionaries in the United States – the “Missions” of his day – wanted this bishop of Nancy in France to visit the young U.S. churches and then return home to encourage interest and support for their work. In 1839, Bishop Forbin-Janson did just that, sailing across the ocean and landing in New York, where he was welcomed with open arms by Bishop John Dubois. “Poor New York,” he wrote to Catholics back in France, “there is not yet a minor or major seminary and this diocese is larger than all of England. There are already 200,000 Catholics, with the City of New York having about 24,000. Here everything is to be done for the sake of religion.”

Continuing his travels, Bishop Forbin-Janson also visited New Orleans and Baltimore, as well as Canada, all on horseback. He preached retreats; celebrated Masses for congregations packed into small churches and chapels, and gathered children for religious instruction.

In 1843, Bishop Forbin-Janson returned home determined to continue the great work of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, founded by a friend, Pauline Jaricot.

During a conversation between these two friends, Bishop Forbin-Janson shared his own longtime dream to help the children of the Missions.

Like Jaricot, he saw the “riches” of the poor mission churches of his day. And he was convinced that though weak and needing care, children rich in faith and love were capable of playing their own part in the Church's mission – and of even stirring adults to the same generous missionary spirit. Sometime during the course of their talk, the Missionary Childhood Association was born. Bishop Forbin-Janson started appealing to the children of France to reach out – in faith and love – to help the children of the Missions of our country and China.

In July, 1856, Pope Pius IX, raised the Missionary Childhood Association to the rank of “canonical institution;” all bishops were encouraged to introduce the association in their dioceses. In his Encyclical letter, Sancta Dei Civitas (December, 1890), Pope Leo XIII blessed the Missionary Childhood Association and recommended it again to the bishops emphasizing its privileged position in “the diffusion of the Gospel light to bring the largest possible number of those outside the Church to the knowledge and worship of God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent.”

In 1926, the Missionary Childhood Association was given the title Pontifical by Pope Pius XI, thereby designating it as the Holy See’s official agency for mission for children – providing substantial support for

their most basic human needs while offering them hope in the person of Jesus Christ.

The central administrative office for the Missionary Childhood Association in the United States was established in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1893 and at that time, entrusted to the Fathers of the Holy Ghost (Spiritans). After relocating to Washington, D.C., the Missionary Childhood Association national office was aligned, in 2001, with the headquarters for the other three Pontifical Mission Societies in New York City.

Today, MCA continues to follow his vision – “children helping children.” After learning about the great needs of the world’s poorest children, young people are invited to pray and to offer financial help so that children in the Missions today may know Christ and experience His love and care.

