St. Francis Xavier

In 1525, when Francis Xavier (baptized Francisco de Jasso y Azpilicueta) left his war-torn home in Navarre (now Spain) for the University of Paris, the young nobleman had great plans for instructing the ignorant … but only in philosophy.



St Francis Xavier (Shutterstock)

Although his roommate at the university, the future St. Ignatius of Loyola, pleaded with Xavier to consider the priesthood, Francisco ignored him. He had his eye on worldly advancement and wasn't interested in serving the Church. Eventually, though, Ignatius wore his roommate down, and in 1534, Xavier joined Ignatius and five other students in making secret vows of poverty, chastity and obedience to the pope. Three years later, he was ordained, and in 1540, after the pope approved Ignatius' plan for a new religious order, Xavier became the first missionary priest of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). His first journey was to India, where the king of Portugal needed someone to re-evangelize the Portuguese who had settled in the Near East.

Not long after Xavier arrived in Goa, however, he began reaching out to the native people with as much zeal as he reached out to the debauched Portuguese merchants and sailors. Traveling up and down the Pearl Fishery Coast, Xavier instructed the people of southern India and Ceylon in the Christian faith, baptizing thousands and building more than 40 churches.

Eventually, Xavier expanded his mission beyond India, traveling throughout Malaysia and Japan before eventually reaching Shangchuan, an island just off the coast of China.

Almost everywhere he traveled, Xavier was the first Christian missionary the people had met. Although he struggled with languages, he worked with native interpreters and used both art and culture to introduce thousands to the Gospel.

By the time, Francis Xavier died – at age 46, in 1552, on Shangchuan – he had baptized at least 30,000 people. It’s said he was responsible for more conversions to Christianity than any one single person since St. Paul the Apostle.