



# DOCUMENT FOR THE JOURNEY

towards the Ecclesial Assembly  
of Latin America and the Caribbean

“WE ARE ALL MISSIONARY DISCIPLES  
GOING FORTH” 



**ASAMBLEA  
ECLESIAL**  
DE AMÉRICA LATINA  
Y EL CARIBE

ENGLISH

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# INTRODUCTION

1. With the motto *“We are all missionary disciples going forth”*, we are called together to begin a journey towards the First Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean. We do so as the People of God, in communion with Pope Francis, who in his video message of January 24, 2021, encouraged us to walk this path: *“I want to be with you at this moment and in the preparation until November... it is the first time that this has been done... I accompany you with my prayers and good wishes, go forward with courage!”*. Thus, our Assembly is not only of bishops or an elite, as the Holy Father also refers to: *“enlightened elites of one ideology or another”*, but of all the People of God. Hence its synodal character, which literally means “walking together”: lay men and women, religious men and women, deacons, seminarians, priests, bishops and all people of good will who wish to be part of this journey in community.

2. The Ecclesial Assembly will be held from November 21 to 28, 2021, under the loving gaze of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Mexico City. Because of its synodal character, Pope Francis also reminds us that we are all the People of God: *“the Church is at the breaking of bread... with everyone, without exclusion. And an Ecclesial Assembly is a sign of this”* (video message of January 24, 2021). Thus, in preparation of this Assembly we will live a broad process of listening to discern together the will of God and the call that He makes to us as Church in this region of the world, 14 years after the V General Conference of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Aparecida (Brazil), and on the horizon of two founding celebrations: the 500th anniversary of the Guadalupan Event (2031), and the 2000th anniversary of the Redeeming Event of Jesus Christ (2033).

**“WE ARE ALL MISSIONARY  
DISCIPLES GOING FORTH”**



3. In our journey towards 2031, let us remember that the Virgin of Guadalupe met Juan Diego, a representative of native peoples and of all the poor and marginalized in diverse cultures and societies of Latin America and the Caribbean, to be her messenger at the service of handing on the faith, as well as of communion and solidarity among all the peoples of this earth. At the same time, the journey towards 2033 will help us to remember that Jesus gave himself on the cross, reconciling us with the Father and with each other, members of diverse cultures and social realities, for *“he made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity”* (Eph. 2:14) with boundless love, uniting us and sending us forth as missionaries so that our peoples may have life in Him.

4. Let us walk towards this Ecclesial Assembly in full awareness that we are entering a time of prayer and listening to the Spirit, who will help us to recognize the signs of the times in community (cf. EG 14). It is an occasion to practice the prayerful reading of the Word of God and to listen to one another, with the certainty that the Holy Spirit is present, acts in our midst, speaks to the Churches (cf. Rev 3:11) and transforms us into a community attentive to the voice of God, which we must learn to discern in an experiential contact with his Word and with our history.

5. In continuity with the General Conferences of the Latin American Episcopate, from Medellin to Aparecida, we use in this document the pastoral method of “see”,



“judge” or “enlighten” and “act”, as the Conclusive Document of Aparecida indicates: *“this method entails viewing God with the eyes of faith through his revealed word and life-giving contact with the sacraments, so that in everyday life we may see the reality around us in the light of his providence, judge it according to Jesus Christ, Way, Truth and Life, and act from the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ and universal Sacrament of salvation, in spreading the kingdom of God”* (DA 19).

6. We hope that these reflections will be a help for dialogue and personal and community discernment, eliciting many contributions from the People of God in mutual listening and common deliberations in preparation for our First Ecclesial Assembly. Together with Mary of Guadalupe we begin this journey, with the certainty that she will help us to grow in our baptismal vocation so that all of us may be missionary disciples going forth.

# I. THE LIFE OF OUR PEOPLES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (SEE).

## A. Some aspects of reality that challenge us as missionary disciples at this time in history.

7. We must look at the signs of the times with the eyes of faith (Cfr. DA 19) in such a way that discerning them leads us to a proposal that is capable of reach *“affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind’s criteria of judgment, determining*

*values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation”* (EN 19). With this background we expose some signs of the times that today impact the life of our peoples.



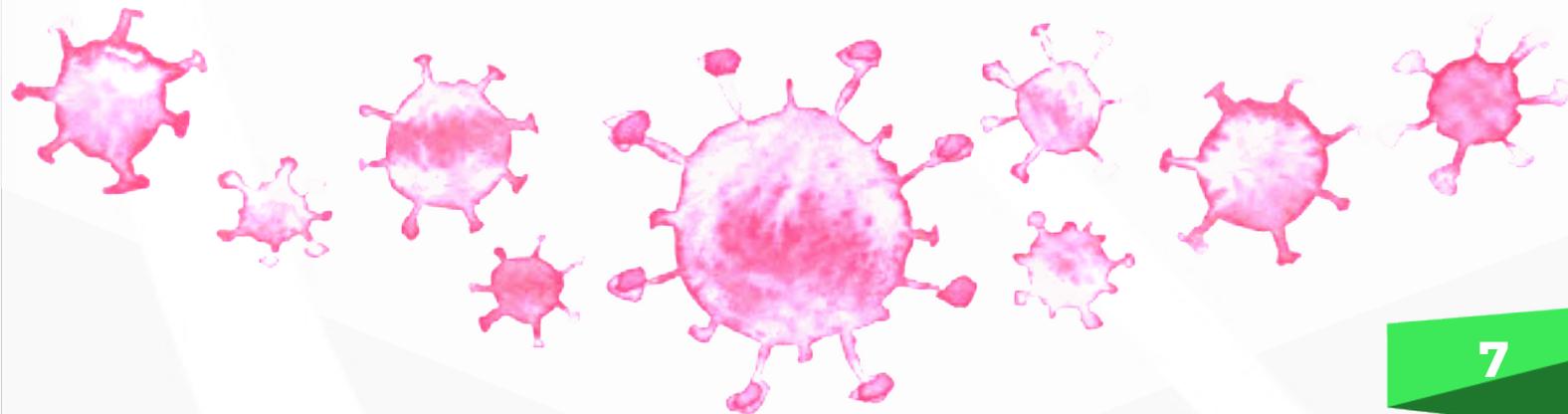
## 1. Socio-cultural reality.

### a) The COVID-19 pandemic, sign of an epochal change

8. The COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly globally, at the same time that *“Latin America and the Caribbean has become one of the critical areas”* (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC). For his part, Pope Francis, in the extraordinary moment of prayer on March 27, 2020, speaking of the pandemic and the storm it unleashed, said: *“exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities”*, also showing us *“how we have allowed to become dull and feeble the very things that nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities”*. While it is true that in the pandemic we have all felt fragile and disoriented, it is equally true that people living in poverty and extreme poverty have been and are the most affected.



9. In our region, the pandemic has revealed with great force the serious problems we have been suffering for decades: the great income inequality in our societies, the unhealthy conditions for a worthy life in dignity, the limited access to quality health and education services, no access to clean water, sewage and electricity, as well as the problem of discrimination and exclusion of millions of people. These and other social



inequalities expose the poor to greater risks of contagion, for example, due to the lack of water, it is very difficult for them to practice sanitary measures such as frequent hand washing. In addition, most of the urban poor live in very crowded conditions, making it difficult for them to maintain the social distance required to prevent infection. The pandemic marks a pause and a change of era, finally challenging us to take

concrete and decisive steps towards a “*bold cultural revolution*” (LS 114), that is, a major transformation of our culture towards a way of life that is ecologically, socially, economically, politically and culturally sustainable. The word that God addressed then to the people of Israel, he addresses to us today: “*I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live*” (Dt 30:19).

## **b) An economic and social model that turns against human beings.**

10. Our current economic system endangers the foundations of life and of just and peaceful human coexistence on our planet. Not only the Pope insists on this in many pronouncements, but also several economists who participated in a meeting convened at the Vatican in February 2020, such as the winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2001, Joseph Stiglitz, who said in his speech that the capitalist system is in a crisis that encompasses various social, moral and ecological aspects.

11. This fully coincides with the Holy Father who emphasizes in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* and in other messages, that the current economic model is not sustainable, so we urgently need a new one. For this, as Church, we are called to generate alliances with diverse actors in society. The Pope himself

has given us the example of calling many people globally, especially young people, to the meeting called “The Economy of Francis”, to work together for an economy at the service of life, based on an integral ecology inspired by the values of the Gospel, as practiced in an exemplary way by St. Francis of Assisi. The Pope invited all young





## UNA ECONOMÍA CON ALMA – ECONOMÍA DE FRANCISCO: CAMINO A ASÍS



### TO WORK TOGETHER FOR AN ECONOMY AT THE SERVICE OF LIFE, BASED ON AN INTEGRAL ECOLOGY INSPIRED BY THE VALUES OF THE GOSPEL

people, also in our Latin America and the Caribbean, through their research, studies or work related to the practice of economics, to be aware that another economic narrative is urgently needed to *“to have a concrete impact on cities and universities, workplaces and unions, businesses and movements, public and private offices, and to work with intelligence, commitment and conviction in order to reach the centres where ideas and paradigms are developed and decided”*, reminding them not to remain at the center of the economic narrative, but to work together for an economy at the service of life, based on an integral ecology inspired by the values of the Gospel, as practiced in an exemplary

way by St. Francis of Assisi, reminding them not to absent themselves from those places where the present and future are generated.

12. Latin America and the Caribbean is definitely the region with the greatest inequality, where various economic models that have eroded the quality of life of the people and the future of new generations have been tried and tested. It is urgent to design new economic proposals that take into account the human being as the center of their concern, with a purely human sense, based also on our responsibility to care for the earth and our common home on behalf of the life of the people and not for profit and accumulation.

<sup>1</sup> Video message of Pope Francis at the International Online Meeting “The Economy of Francis”. Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, 19-21 November 2020.

### c) Growing exclusion, throwaway culture and solidarity practices.

13. It hurts us *“the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labour rights”* (FT 116). The commitment to justice and solidarity demands that we *“think and act in terms of community. It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few”* (FT 116). It is an encouraging sign that in recent decades and in many parts of the Church in Latin America and the

Caribbean, multiple networks of solidarity have grown, moreover, in this hard time of the pandemic have been forged with much creativity valuable solidarity initiatives to care for the health and life of the most fragile and vulnerable, especially for many people in conditions of poverty and without a stable income, as well as for many elderly people living alone.

### d) Listen to the cry of the earth by caring for our common home.

14. The pandemic has shown very clearly that it is not possible to have a healthy life on a sick earth, so plundered, more and more ecologically damaged and unbalanced, where climate change is also advancing at an accelerated pace. As a consequence, natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods are increasing in some regions, and on the contrary, prolonged droughts and lack of water in other areas. The poor and most vulnerable, particularly women, children and the elderly, are the most affected as their lives and health are at risk. Many of the poor are stripped of everything



they have and forced to live in misery. As missionary disciples we are called to listen to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth.

## e) The growing violence in our societies.

15. In Latin America and the Caribbean, there has been an increase in violence in various spheres of society, perpetrated by armed groups and increasingly linked to organised crime and various mafias. Globally, our region has the highest number of murdered environmentalists, engaged in the defense of collective rights to territory, who are often victims of serious human rights violations while defending land, forests and rivers against environmental damage. Mining conflicts have greatly increased, including those caused by informal mining and by oil, as well as by the expansion of agribusiness.

Also in many cities, levels of aggression, vehicular traffic violence and especially intra-family violence increased during the strict confinement caused by the pandemic, in which many minors and women were left



helpless and without backing of any kind. Violence against women from different cultures and social sectors, who are victims of multiple injustices, violent acts and abuses, including femicide, has increased alarmingly.

## f) In view of the large gaps in education, a “Global Compact on Education” is necessary.

16. “*Latin America and the Caribbean are in the midst of a particular and delicate educational emergency*” (DA 328), as stated in the Aparecida Document and now, 14 years after that great ecclesial event and in the midst of a pandemic, the already existing deep educational gap has widened even more. A large number of children, adolescents and young people have practically lost

the school year or have interrupted their studies for lack of resources and internet access to follow classes virtually, making their future very uncertain. For this reason, Pope Francis called for the establishment of a “Global Compact on Education”, stressing that at a time “*of extreme fragmentation, it is necessary to unite efforts to create an educational alliance that forms mature*



*people, capable of living in society and for society*<sup>2</sup>. One of the main goals of the Pact is to promote education for universal solidarity and a new humanism, in the midst of an epochal change that gained momentum with the pandemic, and in which the Pope seeks to create greater awareness because *“we cannot make a change without educating for that change*<sup>3</sup>”, which must necessarily take place also in our own society. The Global Compact on Education must

2 Video message of the Holy Father for the Launch of the Global Compact on Education (12 September 2019)

3 Ibid.

therefore include an alliance between the residents of our common home, to which we owe care and respect.

17. The Pact also aims at education for peace, justice, social friendship and fraternity among all the peoples of the

earth, as well as dialogue among the various religions and cultures. The Pope has called upon the educational institutions in the Catholic Church and in the other Christian Churches, as well as in the various societies. Also from our many educational institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean, we are called to adhere to this Global Education Pact along with many others, sharing our great educational experiences with the most marginalized and impoverished populations of our region.



**“ LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN ARE IN THE MIDST OF A PARTICULAR AND DELICATE EDUCATIONAL EMERGENCY “ (DA 328)**

## g) Migrants are the new poor.

18. Among the people most affected by the severe ecological, climate and social crisis in the countries of our subcontinent are migrants. Many expose themselves to high risks to their lives, safety and health when they choose to migrate to another country because they do not see a viable future for themselves and their families at home. In the countries where they arrive, there are places where they find hospitality and solidarity. But in more than a few places they are increasingly exposed to rejection and hostile treatment. This reality is exacerbated by the pandemic and its impact on the precarious economy of so many people in the countries of our region. Certainly, migrants are among the most vulnerable people in our societies.

Pope Francis tells us in *Fratelli Tutti* that our relationship with them shows whether our Christian affirmation that we are all brothers and sisters “*takes flesh*” (cf. FT 128). Here we are also tested on whether we really assume the commitment to “*welcome, protect, promote and integrate*” (FT 129) migrants as our brothers and sisters, and the complex challenges that this commitment of solidarity presents to us (Cfr. FT 129). Let us remember the words of Jesus who identifies with the most vulnerable people when he says at the final judgment: “*I was a stranger and you welcomed me... Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me*” (Mt. 25:35,40).



## h) Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples: towards full citizenship in society and the Church.

19. In Aparecida, the members of the indigenous and afro-american peoples were recognized as “new social actors” (DA 75) that *“are now taking their place in society and the Church”* (DA 91). This fact was considered as a “kairos” to deepen the Church’s encounter with these peoples. At that time it was clearly perceived that the native and afro-descendant peoples were demanding *“full recognition of their individual and collective rights, being taken into account in Catholicism, with their cosmos vision, their values and their particular identities, so as to live a new ecclesial Pentecost”* (DA 91). Recently, since listening to the peoples during the Synod of the Amazon, this fact continues to be a “kairos” that urges us to relate as equals with these brothers and sisters throughout

Latin America and the Caribbean, respecting their history, their cultures and their style of good living, overcoming colonial mentalities and practices where they are still present and making our own the commitment of the Church in the Amazon that rejects a colonialist style evangelization. Furthermore, Pope Francis asks us as a Church to promote social dialogue (Cfr. QA 26) not only with indigenous peoples, but also with afro-descendants and peasants, who at a table of equals *“are our principal dialogue partners, those from whom we have the most to learn, to whom we need to listen out of a duty of justice...Their words, their hopes and their fears should be the most authoritative voice at any table of dialogue”* (QA 26) about their respective territories.



## i) Globalization and democratization of social communication.



20. Currently, there is concern about the growing control and manipulation of information through hegemonic media. These tend to diminish plurality and diversity in information and communication, in addition to favoring the market and large transnational corporations, since *“media may be independent of governments, but they will never be independent of their economic and political interests”*<sup>4</sup>. It is therefore urgent to promote the democratization of communication by strengthening diverse public media that could de-monopolize the control exerted by a few power groups. At the same time, there is a need for the formation of critical audiences and the creation of media observatories that independently report on what is

<sup>4</sup> Anahi Macaroff: Is it possible to democratise communication? Debates on public and private media in Ecuador, 2010.

produced by both private and public media. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to strengthen journalistic practices ensuring real freedom of the press.

21. In this way, we will be able to further develop the potential of

communication, especially through digital media which, during the pandemic, are strengthening the globalization of solidarity and hope by allowing the exchange of information, testimonies of good practices and training content in real time and making possible an emotional closeness in spite of physical isolation. We are witnesses of how the digital allows an interlearning between people from different social and cultural contexts, besides being a space where the youngest open the doors of communication to the elderly, thus strengthening the intergenerational bond. All this as a contribution to the democratization of social communication, so necessary in Latin America and the Caribbean.

## j) Overflowing information, fragmented knowledge and the urgency of an integrating vision.

22. The globalized world presents an unprecedented challenge that knocks at the door of our peoples. The efficiency of procedures achieved through information, even with the most developed technologies of our time, cannot satisfy the yearning for dignity inscribed in the depths of the human vocation. For this reason, it is not enough to suppose that the mere diversity of points of view, of options and, finally, of information, which is often called pluri or multiculturalism, will resolve the absence of a meaning for all that exists (cf. DA 42). The human person is, in its very essence, that place in nature

where the variety of meanings converge in a single vocation of meaning. For this reason, access to information through the different digital media brings us face to face with the paradox that the excess of information tends to fragment reality as we seek to understand it, but does not succeed in re-articulating the set of relationships between the various fields of knowledge (Cfr. QA 44) and confuses us in the search for meaning. The problem is not diversity, but the inability to bring together all these meanings of reality in an integrative understanding that allows us to exercise freedom with discernment and responsibility.



## 2. The reality of our Church in present day history.

### a) The advancing secularization in several countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

23. Secularization is not only a phenomenon of European countries, but also of Latin America and the Caribbean. This is not something new, since the Conclusive Document of Aparecida already warned about “*serious tendencies toward secularization*” (DA 219), affirming

also the situations of our peoples who live “*in the environment of secularization*” (DA 264). More than a decade after Aparecida, this phenomenon has progressed significantly, being very present especially among adolescents and young people.



**SOMETIMES THERE IS A VERY CRITICAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, WHICH IS PERCEIVED AS NOT VERY OPEN TO NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN SCIENCE AND DIVERSE SOCIETY**

24. Many know very little of the Christian faith because it is no longer transmitted in their families, others belong to families in which the grandparents, and sometimes the parents, still actively practice the Christian faith, but adolescents and young people already live with a great indifference towards it, as well as towards questions of religion in general. Sometimes there is a very critical attitude towards the Catholic Church, which is perceived as not very open to new developments

in science and diverse society, very conservative and not very open to dialogue. In several Latin American and Caribbean societies it can be observed that “*the process of secularization tends to reduce the faith and the Church to the sphere of the private and personal*” (EG 64) and that not infrequently among the young there is “*general sense of disorientation*” (EG 64). Many have their own communities outside the Church, in which they share their searches and forge their life projects.

### b) Growing of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in our continent.

25. The data provided by various studies indicate a strong decrease in the number

of Catholics, as well as the emigration of many of them to other ecclesial realities. The

concluding document of *Aparecida* already spoke of the “*the exodus of believers to sects and other religious groups*” (DA 185). From 2007 to the present there has been a rapid and ever-increasing growth of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. This fact was also a theme in the various moments of “listening” to communities in the preparatory process for the Synod of the Amazon. Many

people commented on the strong growth of evangelical churches throughout that region and, even in the most remote areas, noted at the same time that the presence of Catholic communities is increasingly diminishing. This is a sign of our times that challenges us to ask ourselves the question: What are people looking for in other churches?, why don't they find it in the Catholic Church?, what is missing?

### **c) The challenge of a greater development of urban pastoral care.**

26. The General Conference of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean in *Aparecida* recognized the challenge posed by “large cities” as “laboratories of this complex and

*many-sided contemporary culture*” (DA 509). It proposed and recommended “a new urban ministry to respond to the great challenges of increasing urbanization” (DA



517). The Ecclesial Assembly is an important moment to discern how we are taking up this challenge and where we are in this process. Fourteen years after *Aparecida*, we can observe that cities in our region are more and more meeting places of diverse and often antagonistic cultures. What the bishops affirmed in *Aparecida* is still valid because *“coexisting in it are dualities that challenge it on a daily basis: tradition-modernity, globality-particularity, inclusion-exclusion, personalization-depersonalization, secular language-religious language, homogeneity-plurality, urban culture-multiculturalism”* (DA 512).

27. In the cities, new cultures are coming into being with new language and new sets of symbols (cf. DA 510). In the midst of the complexities, inequalities, anguish and suffering, the pulsating life and potentialities of the city, God is present. From faith we can

affirm that *“God lives in the city”* (DA 514) but we must seek Him and discover His presence in the different environments and realities in the city. In several cities of our region there are interesting and innovative urban pastoral projects that seek to embrace different pastoral impulses proposed by *Aparecida* as, for example, the impulse to be open *“to new experiences, styles and languages that can incarnate the Gospel in the city”* (DA 514 d) and to *“transform parishes more and more into communities of communities”* (DA 514e). It is necessary to know more widely the steps taken in the exploration of new paths in urban pastoral care, the experiences and pastoral fruits that are emerging in order to inspire each other and foster common learnings in discerning the pastoral situation in the city. The road to the Ecclesial Assembly can be a very propitious moment to share our experiences, searches and challenges in urban pastoral care.

#### **d) Young people as social actors and cultural managers.**

28. Among the diverse faces of the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean, that of the youth stands out above all. What the Synod of the Amazon affirmed for the Church in the Pan-Amazon region

is also valid for the Church in the entire Subcontinent: it is a Church with a young face. As missionary disciples, we are called to commit ourselves to human promotion and the defense of the rights of young people,



**AS MISSIONARY DISCIPLES, WE ARE CALLED TO  
COMMIT OURSELVES TO HUMAN PROMOTION AND  
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especially those who live in situations of great vulnerability, exposed to the danger of suffering various types of violence.

29. Currently, the vast majority of young people, both in rural and urban areas, live

in very precarious conditions and, because of the pandemic, see their future as very uncertain. In addition, many of them do not have the means to continue studying and others of working age are unemployed.

### **e) Women and the challenge of their full participation in society and the Church.**

30. Since *Aparecida*, in the various societies of Latin America and the Caribbean, the number of women, particularly young women, who demand full participation not only in society but also in the Church, has grown even more. This was also an explicit request of the Synod of the Amazon, which was accepted in the Final Document where it is stated: *"It is needed that she [women]*

*fully assume her leadership within the Church and that Church recognize and promote it by strengthening her participation in the pastoral councils of parishes and dioceses, or even in positions of governance"* (SA DF 101). This need exists not only in the local Churches of the Amazon but in all of Latin America and the Caribbean.





31. The Synod of the Amazon pointed out more new ways to encourage greater participation of women in various ecclesial spheres that are also very relevant for the Church in our region: think creatively about new ministries such as, for example, an instituted ministry of the “woman community leader” (SA DF 102). In many Christian communities of the Catholic Church women, especially religious, are already providing this non-ordained ministry. It was therefore requested at the Synod that this ministry be formally recognized as such. Pope Francis welcomed this request in *Dear Amazonia*, recalling that “ecclesial services, that do not entail Holy Orders [...] entail stability, public recognition and a commission from the bishop” (103). During the Synod, the need was expressed at different times to provide more women with a solid formation in Bible and theology, also at the

academic level, and to include a greater number of women with corresponding qualifications in the theological, spiritual and integral formation of seminarians and priests, as well as in theological teaching, research and publications in theological faculties and other ecclesial fields. The Pope also responded to the Synod’s request to continue studying the question of the diaconate for women by installing the new Study Commission on the female diaconate. Another important step was that in January of this year he established in a “*motu proprio*” that from now on the ministries of Lector and Acolyte are also open to women, in a stable and institutionalized way. In practice this is already happening in many communities, and for this reason it is significant that these ministries are already institutionalized.

## f) Sexual abuse in the Church.

32. In several countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, not only in society but also in the Catholic Church, there have been numerous reports of sexual abuse of minors, as well as of adults of both sexes. In particular, the profound affectation of the dignity of minors and vulnerable persons pains us greatly. In our Church, the abuses were committed by priests and consecrated persons in ecclesial environments. Most of the cases were not adequately addressed, or there has not been an effective and transparent procedure to clarify what happened and ensure justice for the victims. This has profoundly affected confidence in the Church and its credibility. This shocking sign requires a decisive response in order to proclaim with credibility, in words and deeds, God who cares for the life of all people, particularly the most vulnerable and defenseless.

33. It is an encouraging sign that, in many dioceses, Episcopal Conferences, Conferences of Religious, ecclesial and educational institutions at the national and regional levels, there is true repentance and a perceived need for a profound conversion. Significant steps have been taken to break the silences and networks of complicity that led to the cover-up of the facts; protocols have been drawn up for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons, as well as detailed procedures to be followed when receiving complaints and investigating alleged sexual abuse. Studies on the causes of abuse have been carried out in several countries. The results are being taken into account in developing training programs and creating a culture of protection and care for children and vulnerable persons. Several dioceses have already established centers for listening to victims. We are challenged to continue along the paths of conversion already begun.



## g) Clericalism, a major obstacle for a synodal Church

34. Clericalism is not a new phenomenon in our Church in Latin America and the Caribbean, rather it is one of its strongest deformations, as stated by Pope Francis who considers it as *“a constant temptation on the part of priests who see the ministry they have received as a power to be exercised, rather than a free and generous service to be offered”* (CV 98). For the Pope, clericalism is the root of many evils in the Church and a major obstacle on the road to a synodal Church, because it leads to forgetting the truth that we all share the grace of baptism and the gift of the Spirit and, therefore, we are all members of the People of God. It is worth remembering that *“we all enter the Church as laypeople”*, since the first sacrament we receive and which *“seals our identity forever is baptism”* (CV 98).

35. As emphasized at the Synod of the Amazon, by fully recognizing synodality as a constitutive dimension of the Church, we are urged to make a journey of conversion

in order to *“overcome clericalism and arbitrary impositions”* (SA DF 88). In this way we prevent a possible damage that it can cause, that is, to extinguish little by little *“the prophetic fire that the whole Church is called to witness in the hearts of her people”* (SA DF 88). All the members of the People of God are called to undertake paths of conversion, because clericalism is not only a temptation for priests, but also for bishops, as well as for religious men and women, lay men and women. To the bishops, the Pope explicitly calls them to flee from clericalism and reminds them that saying no to abuses, whether of power or of any other kind, means to say ‘no’, with determination, to all types of clericalism. At the same time, he repeatedly emphasized in his speeches to lay men and women that they too must be very careful of this temptation. Let us accept then the call of the Spirit to convert ourselves to the synodal experience and living in this time of grace that is the Ecclesial Assembly and its preparation process.

**IT IS WORTH REMEMBERING THAT “WE ALL ENTER THE CHURCH AS LAYPEOPLE”, SINCE THE FIRST SACRAMENT WE RECEIVE AND WHICH “SEALS OUR IDENTITY FOREVER IS BAPTISM” (CV 98).**



## h) Towards an itinerant and synodal Church, walking along new paths.

36. There is a growing desire to grow in synodality, because it means walking together in a co-responsible way with the future of our Church. There are many signs that invite us to an authentic pastoral conversion that opens ways of greater participation of all the People of God in the common vocation of taking charge of the life and mission of our Church.

37. For this, as missionary disciples, we need “a conversion to the synodal experience” (SA DF, 87). It requires the willingness of all to “strengthen a culture of dialogue, reciprocal listening, spiritual discernment, consensus

and communion in order to find areas and ways of joint decision-making” (SA DF 87). In this way we will move “can move towards a participatory and co-responsible Church, one capable of appreciating its own rich variety, gratefully accepting the contributions of the lay faithful, including young people and women, consecrated persons, as well as groups, associations and movements” (CV 206). In the practice of synodality we enrich and encourage one another in faith, “learning from one another” (CV 206). In this way “we can better reflect that wonderful multifaceted reality that Christ’s Church is meant to be” (CV 207).



## II. THE ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS CHRIST ENLIGHTENS THE LIFE OF OUR PEOPLES. (JUDGE/ENLIGHTEN).

### A. We read the signs of the times as missionary disciples.



38. A fundamental axis of the discipleship and missionary proposal is the proclamation of the New Life in Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God (Cfr. DA 367) under the perspective of an “*integral evangelization*” (DA 176). Witnessing and announcing the Good News is not an action that aims only to deliver a spiritual or religious message, but also implies an option for all dimensions of life so that all may have it and in abundance (cf. Jn. 10:10).

39. *Aparecida*, centered its pastoral proposal on missionary discipleship, taking as its foundation that the condition of discipleship springs from Jesus Christ as its source, through faith and baptism, and grows in the Church (Cfr. DA 184).

40. The call to be a disciple implies being summoned to be intimately united with Jesus (cf. DA 131). The beginning of discipleship, then, is in a person, Jesus Christ, who goes out to meet men and women to be known, to give an integral horizon to life and to reveal the fullness of divine and human love. When the person arrives at this encounter of faith (cf. DA 243), at the vital understanding of this personal love “to the end”, “he cannot fail to respond to this love with a similar love: “I will follow you wherever you go” (*Lk 9:57*) (DA 243).

41. The disciple’s life project is concretized in the practice of the new commandment of love, witnessed by Jesus who, being God

*“worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice(23) and loved with a human heart (...) He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin” (GS 22). This is the distinctive sign of every follower and also of the Church, whose witness of fraternal charity*

*will be the first and foremost proclamation (cf. DA 138). As Vatican II affirms, “whoever follows after Christ, the perfect man, becomes himself more of a man” (GS 41). Discipleship, then, is a path of knowledge of Christ and of existential realization, whose fruit is a new way of seeing, being and living.*



## 1. To grow in the following of Jesus.

42. In 2007, the horizon of the V Episcopal Conference was clear: to encourage Christians, of any state or condition, to grow in the following of Jesus Christ through a path of integral formation that allows the develop-

ment of their missionary dimension. This impulse finds its motivations in the intention of strengthening the identity of the disciple in a plural context of *“pervasive discontent”* (Cfr. DA 10), in which every Christian person is con-

fronted daily to discern and renew his option for Jesus Christ (Cfr. DA 14).

43. The discipleship, however, also supposes an invitation to conversion, understood as a permanent and integral process (cf. DA 382). Certainly there is a first and fundamental conversion, but this must be accompanied by “successive conversions” that renew the life of the disciple starting from an ever deeper and more vital encounter with Jesus Christ. Hence, this path of conversion to the Lord and to his Kingdom project (cf. DA 226a) gradually translates into a rupture with “what came before” and into a strengthening of

Christian praxis, that is, of “doing” like Jesus (cf. DA 491). It is not enough to call oneself Christian, to know the doctrine and to fulfill the fundamental religious or charitable practices, if this does not translate into a personal effort to grow in fidelity to the person of Jesus, to his lifestyle, to his work and to his justice.

44. In short, the disciple of Jesus Christ shows himself authentically as such when he assumes the mission and destiny of the Master, communicating his Life and placing himself at the service of it in the integrality of what it means.



**IN 2007, THE HORIZON OF THE V EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE WAS CLEAR: TO ENCOURAGE CHRISTIANS, OF ANY STATE OR CONDITION, TO GROW IN THE FOLLOWING OF JESUS CHRIST**

## **B. As missionary disciples we are at the service of life.**

45. The proposal of *Aparecida* is guided by a joyful, hopeful and “going out” sense, where the missionary proclamation is the simple and inevitable communication of the newness of Jesus Christ, leaving one’s own comfort and daring to reach all the peripheries that need the light of the Gospel (Cfr. EG 20). In this sense, the missionary

proposal of Jesus Christ is to communicate “a full life for all” (DA 361) and the mission of those who follow him will be to deliver this gift with their words and witness. This implies an ever greater identification of the disciples with Christ in order to be able to say with the words of Paul: “It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).



46. The Life offered by Christ, which includes the fullness of human existence in its personal, family, spiritual, social and cultural dimensions (cf. DA 13), is concretized in a preferential option for the poor, in facing the challenge of misery, the excluded and the transformation *“of structures, especially those that create injustice”* (DI 4); in a commitment to care for

but first and foremost from a response to the command of Jesus Christ (cf. Mt. 28:18-20) and because the disciples, out of an overflow of gratitude and joy, want to share the life that springs from the encounter with Christ, they want to give the greatest treasure they have so that all can participate in that full life that has a supernatural horizon.

## 2. The mission, a movement “on the way out”.

48. The mission is therefore a movement “of going forth” in the service of life. It is the outgoingness of that experience which initiates the discipleship, which has transformed the existence of the disciple and which impels him to go out to meet the people of the world. to meet individuals, families, communities and peoples to communicate and share Christ, who has

filled their lives with meaning, truth and love, joy and hope (Cfr. DA 548).

49. Together with this irreplaceable step, the *Aparecida* proposal emphasizes other elements inherent to missionary action, related to the integral proclamation of the Gospel, such as: the attraction to the encounter with Christ and to discipleship,

marriage and the family (cf. DA 431-475) and for the evangelization of the diverse cultures of our peoples (cf. DA 476-480).

47. The mission, therefore, does not arise from a proselytizing or propagandist zeal, nor from a dialectic of the saved and the condemned, nor from a desire to arouse faithful adherents to a system or an institution,

with the joy and happiness of faith, *“to provide a profound witness entailing close affection, listening, humility, solidarity, compassion, dialogue, reconciliation, commitment to social justice, and ability to share, as Jesus did”* (DA 363); another element is the explicit proclamation of a life of dignity for all, being promoters of liberation from all slavery and protagonists of the “globalization of dignity”, so that the excluded may pass to more humane conditions and finally, there is the concrete work for the transformation of structures in view of the Kingdom of God, seeking *“to illuminate through the power of the Gospel, mankind’s criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in*

*contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation”* (N 19).

50. Thus, all that is human has resonance in the heart of the followers of Jesus. For this reason, we understand that the integral evangelization of all peoples is on the horizon of the mission. The Church, and each one of her disciples (cf. DA 358), are called to proclaim the Kingdom by radiating in her teachings, in her ethical orientations, in her norms and in all her activity, *the “attractive offer of a more worthy life in Christ to shine through for each man and each woman in Latin America and the Caribbean”* (DA 361), which entails a dynamism toward conversion, humanization, reconciliation and social insertion (cf. DA 359).



### 3. Evangelization, human promotion and authentic liberation.



this perspective, unfolds in a path of liberation in which at least three levels that must be simultaneous are recognized: a religious one, the deepest, which aims at liberation from sin, which breaks friendship with God and isolates from others (level

51. Evangelization *“has always been linked to human promotion and authentic Christian liberation”* (DI 3), because faith *“light up the life of society by placing all events in relation to the origin and destiny of everything in the Father who loves us”* (LF 55). With this premise, the mission of communicating Life is oriented towards a true integral liberation of all the oppressed, that is, of sinners, the poor, the excluded and, in general, of all those crucified on this earth. The mission, from

of reconciliation); an anthropological one, which refers to the liberation from the agents that produce cultural alienation (level of humanization); and a socioeconomic and political one, which seeks liberation from the causes that generate oppression (level of social reintegration) (Cfr. DA 359).

52. The preferential option for the poor expresses that solidarity that is proper and distinctive of the Latin American physiognomy



**EVANGELIZATION “HAS ALWAYS BEEN LINKED TO HUMAN PROMOTION AND AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIBERATION” (DI 3)**

## PROCLAMATION AND DENUNCIATION ARE NOT ENOUGH IF THEY ARE NOT ACCOMPANIED, ACCORDING TO THE REALITIES AND POSSIBILITIES, BY A CONCRETE OFFER OF CREATION OR TRANSFORMATION



(Cfr. DA 391). *Aparecida*, in continuity with the other Conferences, and following the line traced by the Pontiff, affirms that this option arises out of “our faith in Jesus Christ, God made man, who has become our brother” (DA 392) and that it vitally witnesses to a priority love for the poorest. At the same time, it opens the window, widening and diversifying this option by referring to the “new faces” of the poor using the category “excluded”. Among the latter are, for example, migrants (cf. DA 411), children subjected to violence and forced to live and work on the streets (cf. DA 429), drug addicts (cf. DA 422), prisoners held in inhumane conditions (cf. DA 427) and those excluded because of their technological illiteracy (cf. DA 402).

53. From *Aparecida*, some traits emerge that allow us to identify when a structure is healthy or just. It is understood as one that helps to consolidate a social, economic and political order in which there is no inequity and where there are possibilities

for all (Cfr. DA 358), one that promotes authentic human coexistence (Cfr. DA 384) and facilitates constructive dialogue (Cfr. DA 384), one that manifests a clear option for the poorest and neediest (Cfr. DA 446e), one that is inclusive (Cfr. DA 484) and, finally, one that is at the service of full life (Cfr. DA 537).

54. In this context, and in view of the fact that the disciple can effectively serve a dignified and full life for all and in all its dimensions (cf. DA 358), the challenge and mission of developing more just structures and transmitting the social values of the Gospel arises. Indeed, the disciples, preferably laypeople, who carry out their mission in their daily work in the world, with their witness and activity, must contribute to the creation of structures, according to the criteria of the Gospel (Cfr. DA 210). Proclamation and denunciation are not enough if they are not accompanied, according to the realities and possibilities, by a concrete offer of creation or transformation

# III. ON THE WAY TO PERSONAL, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL CONVERSION (ACT).

## A. As missionary disciples we are called to take new paths.

55. The Full Life that is given to us in Jesus Christ; Full Life of and for our peoples, and in the missionary disciples, is the central theme of the *Aparecida* Final Document since *“the proper and specific mission of the Church is to communicate the life of Jesus Christ to all people”* (DA 386). It is urgent to do it (Cfr. DA 389) from the missionary and evangelizing being of the

Church (Cfr. EN 14), expressed in an integral and integrating pastoral service that *“must permeate all ecclesial structures and all pastoral plans (...) No community should excuse itself from entering decidedly with all its might into the ongoing processes of missionary renewal and from giving up outdated structures that are no longer helpful for handing on the faith.”* (DA 365).

### 1. The call for an integral ecology.

56. This evangelizing process does not leave aside creation as a gift of God to be cared for, and where we must *“to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home”* (LS 3). We must give thanks to God for the gift of creation, for the biodiversity and socio-diversity that spring from it; its capacity to generate life; but we must also protect it, giving priority to the indigenous peoples and their cultural riches, promoting the recognition and legalization of their territories (Cfr. DA 86), as well as denouncing

everything that mistreats and attempts against their life. Today more than ever, we missionary disciples must live together with our peoples the ecological conversion *“to discover the gift of creation, knowing how to contemplate and care for it as home of all living beings and source of the planet’s life”* (DA 474a).

57. As missionary disciples, inspired by faith, we must generate harmony in our relationship with our neighbor and with the



**AS MISSIONARY DISCIPLES, INSPIRED BY FAITH, WE MUST GENERATE HARMONY IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR NEIGHBOR AND WITH THE EARTH.**



earth. This is done through the promotion of an integral ecology since everything is intimately related, particularly “nature and society”, so that “*we are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental*” (LS 139); in this way integral ecology embraces daily life, the economic, the cultural and the social, by building a new paradigm of justice

and the common good on the logic of giving (Cfr. LS 157- 159). The care of creation depends on a personal conversion of each human being. Pope Francis tells us in this regard that “*there will not be a healthy and sustainable ecology, capable of transforming something, if people do not change, if they are not encouraged to opt for another lifestyle, less voracious, more serene, more respectful, less anxious, more fraternal*” (QA 58).

## **2. Towards an economy based on solidarity, sustainable and at the service of the common good.**

58. Our peoples will only be able to develop from an economy with a “human face” and solidarity, which places the human being

and his dignity at the center and not profit or gain as it has been until now, where efficiency and productivity have been absolutized as

*“values that regulate all human relations”* (DA 61). Pope Francis has said: *“No to an economy of exclusion and inequality. This economy kills”* (EG 53); neither is an economy that prioritizes maximum profit at the expense of many people and nature; an economy that stimulates unbridled consumption and thus seriously affects fragile ecological balances. It thus contributes to the increasingly rapid advance of climate change and its disastrous impacts, especially on the lives of the most impoverished and vulnerable. It is necessary to *“promote a just regulation of the economy, finance and world trade”* (DA 406c), in such a way as to build the global common good based on an ethic of economic relations that promotes opportunities for all, especially for the most dispossessed. This implies at the same time the care of our common home.

59. As missionary disciples, we are called to accompany in solidarity the numerous communities affected by extractive practices, manifested in mining, hydrocarbon,



hydroelectric and agro-industrial projects throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, so that the above-mentioned principles are respected by the States and the companies. An important part of our mission is to work together with other actors to open spaces for dialogue on equal terms, on the conceptions of development and progress, in the light of an integral ecology. We are called upon in Latin America and the Caribbean to reaffirm our commitment to be allies of the peoples and communities in their peaceful struggles to safeguard their territories with their forests, rivers and other sources of water, as well as for just, supportive and sustainable development.

### 3. Disciples committed to a culture of peace.

60. As missionary disciples of Jesus, we cannot remain indifferent to these different kinds of violence that affect especially the most defenseless and unprotected people. There is a great risk in our societies that we become “adapted” to high levels of violence and that we are no longer outraged by them. In his video message for the prayer intention for the month of February 2021, the Pope denounces “*the psychological violence, verbal violence, physical violence, sexual violence*” to which many women are exposed, and states categorically that these

forms of violence are “*a cowardice and degradation for all humanity*”. In the face of the different types of violence, following Jesus, we are called to work with greater strength in the prevention and peaceful management of conflicts, in mediations between the parties in conflict and in an education for peace and active nonviolence. All this requires a greater awareness in our societies of “*how much a human being is worth, how much a person is worth, always and everywhere*” (FT 108). This is a fundamental dimension of our mission.



#### 4. New technologies, their great contributions and their risks.

61. We missionary disciples make culture and live in the midst of today's culture, which is why *Aparecida* reflected on globalization as an integral phenomenon. In addition to this, today it is essential to refer to the new technological advances, mainly in the field of communication. This development allows us to be aware of what is happening in real time, and this instantaneous perception is not always accompanied by adequate discernment. The consequence of this is that, without being fully aware of it, we are exposed to a true cultural colonization that touches all aspects of our life (Cfr. DA 46).

62. In the age of globalization, we are witnessing an increase in disorientation, loneliness and loss of meaning. For this reason, the challenge of knowing how to dialogue, discern and act in order to make the Gospel message visible, also making use of the digital media. The Church is becoming more and more present in the virtual space, for example, accompanying processes of mourning, nourishing faith and hope in difficult times with the celebration of Eucharists, prayers and reflections, motivating mutual care. The continuity of formation in faith and in pastoral and social work has been made possible by the media through courses, panels and conversations where diverse realities are

brought together on a single screen; in this way the screens are transformed into spaces of social friendship with global commitment. At the same time, this reality reveals economic and social asymmetries that are manifested in the ease or difficulty of access to these media.

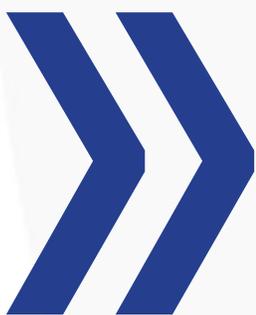


## 5. Towards greater interculturality and inculturation.

63. It is necessary to promote and move towards interculturality, *“where diversity does not mean threat, and does not justify hierarchies of power of some over others, but dialogue between different cultural visions, of celebration, of interrelationship, and of revival of hope”* (DA 97). Our faith calls to *“sit around the common table, a place of conversation and of shared hopes. In this way our differences, which could seem like a banner or a wall, can become a bridge”* (QA 37). This leads us to consider *“a culture of sharing at all levels”* (DA 540), a pastoral care that goes out to the encounter, or as Pope Francis expresses it well, *“a culture of encounter”* to feel with the other, going out of

oneself to give oneself to the most needy, particularly in the existential peripheries, with migrants and with the faces of those who suffer (Cfr. DA 402; 65; 393).

64. In connection with the above, there is the growing challenge of inculturation that invites us to recognize the plurality of realities and, at the same time, to recognize that *“a monocultural and monotonous Christianity”* (QA 69) does not harmonize with the logic of the incarnation. Faith becomes culture in many cultures, and in them it is capable of expressing itself in different ways without losing the essential unity that makes it the same faith, but accepted and expressed in different peoples.



**WE MISSIONARY DISCIPLES MAKE CULTURE AND LIVE IN THE MIDST OF TODAY'S CULTURE, WHICH IS WHY APARECIDA REFLECTED ON GLOBALIZATION AS AN INTEGRAL PHENOMENON.**

## 6. Watching over democracy, still fragile in our countries.

65. In spite of the advances in political and social participation, in our region *“harmonious and peaceful coexistence is deteriorating very seriously in many countries”* (DA 78), violence is growing, institutionalism is being

lost, there is a flagrant violation of human rights and *“some parliaments or legislative congresses pass unjust laws spurning human rights and the popular will”*. (DA 79).

66. We must become aware of the need to “rehabilitate politics” because it is “a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good” (FT 180). Politics cannot be above the people but at the service of them, of their interests and needs, hence the importance of living political charity, which implies openness to all and where tenderness has a privileged place, which will help to overcome an instrumental vision of politics, to enter into the union of “love with hope and with

*confidence in the reserves of goodness present in human hearts*” (FT 196).

67. Participation in revitalizing the social texture is proper to Christians inasmuch as we are co-responsible for the common good. Therefore, it is an urgent task for us to take part in and work for the maturing of the political and social systems of our peoples, contributing with the sap of the Gospel so that political systems are truly at the service of people and their integral development.



## 7. Towards an ecclesial renewal.

68. It is worth remembering here that *Aparecida* poses the need to enter into a profound pastoral renewal in order to “confirm, renew and revitalize the newness of the Gospel rooted in our history, out of a personal and communitarian encounter with Jesus Christ, which gives rise to

*missionary disciples*” (DA 11). This conversion implies making the necessary “spiritual, pastoral and also institutional reforms” (DA 367), in such a way that we move from “a pastoral ministry of mere preservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry” (DA 370). In many cases this will require us to

## A SYNODAL CHURCH IS OPEN TO FEELING OR SENSING THE FAITH (SENSUS FIDEI)

open ourselves to new forms and structures that facilitate a greater communication and interconnection, as well as a greater missionary dynamism.

69. The missionary disciples must live in communion (Cfr. DA 154-163) and synodal openness, which implies living in relationship with others, because “*God attracts us by taking into account the complex interweaving of personal relationships entailed in the life of a human community.*” (EG 113). He asks us to walk together, assuming ecclesial responsibilities, mainly in the area of mission, where “*all the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of*

*evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients*” (EG 120). This implies that all the People of God is called to announce the Gospel, for a “*comprehensive evangelization.*” (DA 176).

70. A synodal Church is open to feeling or sensing the faith (*sensus fidei*), which is a kind of spiritual instinct that allows us to feel with the Church and discern what is in accordance with the apostolic faith and the spirit of the Gospel. Pope Francis expressed it well in his address to the Latin American Episcopal Council on July 13, 2013: “*the flock possesses its own ‘sense’ to discern the new*

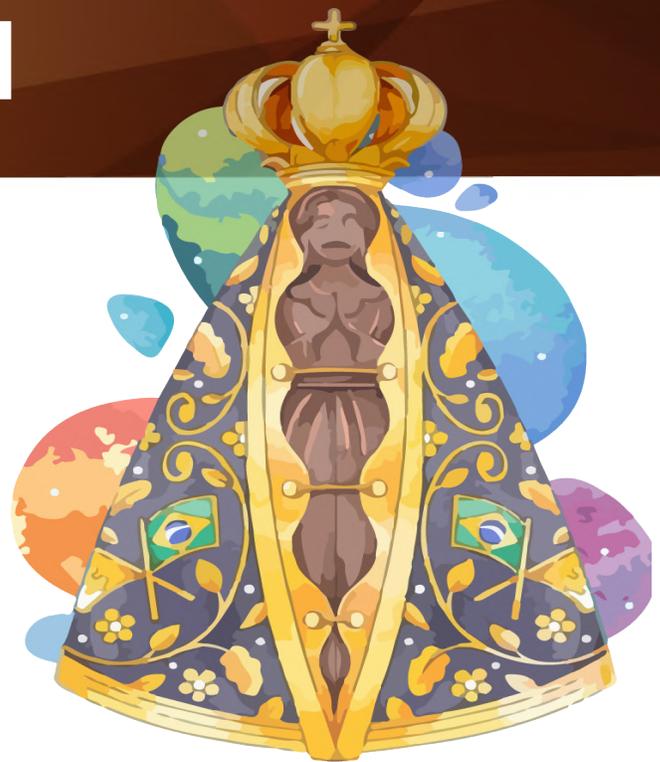
*roads that the Lord reveals to the church*”. Ecclesial synodality is a sign of the co-responsibility of all the People of God in the building of his Kingdom, through a Church going forth as “*a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice*” (EG 24).



# CONCLUSION

71. Today, more than ever, it is vital that, as the People of God, we discern new paths through encounter and community dialogue. We invite you to walk together as missionary disciples knowing that: *“There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit; there are different services, but the same Lord; there are different workings, but the same God who works all in all. To each one God grants the manifestation of the Spirit for some benefit”* (1 Cor. 12:4-7). We encourage you to contribute with the richness of your gifts, with your reflections, observations and innovative proposals to the common discernment, exercising co-responsibility as members of the People of God so that our peoples may have life. We open ourselves to listen to the Spirit who invites us to personal and community conversion, to discern new ways for the presence of the Church and its missionary renewal (Cfr. DA 365 and 372). Let us keep in mind that this journey has consequences for our ways of understanding and putting pastoral care into practice, opening ourselves to new criteria, methods and approaches.

72. As we discern together the new paths, it is not enough to make good resolutions, which are certainly important, but we must also reflect on what means we need to put in place and what concrete steps we need to take to put



our resolutions into practice. Jesus reminds us of the importance of this in his image of the construction of the tower (cf. Lk. 14:28): we must foresee the means and plan with a sense of common responsibility so that not only do we lay a solid foundation but, with God’s grace, we can also complete the construction we have begun.

73. Let us have full confidence in the audacity of the Spirit who urges us to walk along new paths to transform ourselves more and more into missionary disciples going forth. Let us walk as the People of God towards the Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean, finding ways and moments to celebrate the presence of God in our lives.

Our Lady of Aparecida, pray for us.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us.



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