



**V GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE BISHOPS OF
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

Disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that our
Peoples may have life in Him

"I am the Way and the Truth and the life"(Jn 16:4)

Concluding Document

Aparecida, 13-31 May 2007



**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

To my Brothers in the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean

Last 13 May, I opened with great joy the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences at the foot of the Blessed Virgin, *Nossa Senhora Aparecida*, in Brazil.

I have vivid and grateful memories of this Meeting, in which I was united with you in the same affection for your beloved peoples and the same concern to help them to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ so that they may have life in him.

At the same time, as I express my gratitude for their love for Christ and his Church and for the spirit of communion which marked the above-mentioned General Conference, I authorize the publication of the Final Document.

I ask the Lord to grant that in communion with the Holy See and with the proper respect for the responsibility of each Bishop in his own particular Church, it may be a source of enlightenment and encouragement to them for fruitful pastoral and evangelizing work in the years to come.

This document contains an abundance of timely pastoral guidelines, explained in a wealth of reflections in the light of faith and of the contemporary social context.

Among other things, I read with special appreciation the words urging that priority attention be given to the Eucharist and to the sanctification of the Lord's Day in your pastoral programmes (cf. nn. 251-252), and likewise, those which express your desire to strengthen the Christian formation of the faithful in general and of pastoral workers in particular.

In this regard, it was a cause of joy for me to know of the desire to launch a "Continental Mission" which the Bishops' Conferences and each Diocese are called to examine and carry out, convoking for it all the living forces so that in setting out from Christ they will seek his Face (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 29).

As I invoke the protection of the Virgin Most Holy under her titles of "Aparecida" as Patroness of Brazil and of "Our Lady of Guadalupe" as Patroness of America and Star of Evangelization, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you with affection.

From the Vatican, 29 June, Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul.

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

**INAUGURAL SESSION OF THE FIFTH GENERAL CONFERENCE
OF THE BISHOPS OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Conference Hall, Shrine of Aparecida
Sunday, 13 May 2007*

*Dear Brother Bishops, beloved priests, religious men and women and laypeople,
Dear observers from other religious confessions:*

It gives me great joy to be here today with you to inaugurate the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, which is being held close to the Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, Patroness of Brazil. I would like to begin with words of thanksgiving and praise to God for the great gift of the Christian faith to the peoples of this Continent. Likewise, I am most grateful for the kind words of Cardinal Francisco Javier Errázuriz Ossa, Archbishop of Santiago and President of CELAM, spoken in his own name, on behalf of the other two Presidents and for all the participants in this General Conference.

1. The Christian faith in Latin America

Faith in God has animated the life and culture of these nations for more than five centuries. From the encounter between that faith and the indigenous peoples, there has emerged the rich Christian culture of this Continent, expressed in art, music, literature, and above all, in the religious traditions and in the peoples' whole way of being, united as they are by a shared history and a shared creed that give rise to a great underlying harmony, despite the diversity of cultures and languages. At present, this same faith has some serious challenges to address, because the harmonious development of society and the Catholic identity of these peoples are in jeopardy. In this regard, the Fifth General Conference is preparing to reflect upon this situation, in order to help the Christian faithful to live their faith with joy and coherence, to deepen their awareness of being disciples and missionaries of Christ, sent by him into the world to proclaim and to bear witness to our faith and love.

Yet what did the acceptance of the Christian faith mean for the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean? For them, it meant knowing and welcoming Christ, the unknown God whom their ancestors were seeking, without realizing it, in their rich religious traditions. Christ is the Saviour for whom they were silently longing. It also meant that they received, in the waters of Baptism, the divine life that made them children of God by adoption; moreover, they received the Holy Spirit who came to make their cultures fruitful, purifying them and developing the numerous seeds that the incarnate Word had planted in them, thereby guiding them along the paths of the Gospel. In effect, the proclamation of Jesus and of his Gospel did not at any point involve an alienation of the pre-Columbian cultures, nor was it the imposition of a foreign culture. Authentic cultures are not closed in upon themselves, nor are they set in stone at a particular point in history, but they are open, or better still, they are seeking an encounter with other cultures, hoping to reach universality through encounter and dialogue with other ways of life and with

elements that can lead to a new synthesis, in which the diversity of expressions is always respected as well as the diversity of their particular cultural embodiment.

Ultimately, it is only the truth that can bring unity, and the proof of this is love. That is why Christ, being in truth the incarnate *Logos*, “love to the end”, is not alien to any culture, nor to any person; on the contrary, the response that he seeks in the heart of cultures is what gives them their ultimate identity, uniting humanity and at the same time respecting the wealth of diversity, opening people everywhere to growth in genuine humanity, in authentic progress. The Word of God, in becoming flesh in Jesus Christ, also became history and culture.

The Utopia of going back to breathe life into the pre-Columbian religions, separating them from Christ and from the universal Church, would not be a step forward: indeed, it would be a step back. In reality, it would be a retreat towards a stage in history anchored in the past.

The wisdom of the indigenous peoples fortunately led them to form a synthesis between their cultures and the Christian faith which the missionaries were offering them. Hence the rich and profound popular religiosity, in which we see the soul of the Latin American peoples:

- love for the suffering Christ, the God of compassion, pardon and reconciliation; the God who loved us to the point of handing himself over for us;
- love for the Lord present in the Eucharist, the incarnate God, dead and risen in order to be the bread of life;
- the God who is close to the poor and to those who suffer;
- the profound devotion to the most holy Virgin of Guadalupe, the *Aparecida*, the Virgin invoked under various national and local titles. When the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to the native Indian Saint Juan Diego, she spoke these important words to him: “*Am I not your mother? Are you not under my shadow and my gaze? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not sheltered underneath my mantle, under the embrace of my arms?*” (Nican Mopohua, nos. 118-119).
- This religiosity is also expressed in devotion to the saints with their patronal feasts, in love for the Pope and the other Pastors, and in love for the universal Church as the great family of God, that neither can nor ever should leave her children alone or destitute. All this forms the great mosaic of popular piety which is the precious treasure of the Catholic Church in Latin America, and must be protected, promoted and, when necessary, purified.

2. Continuity with the other Conferences

This Fifth General Conference is being celebrated in continuity with the other four that preceded it: in Rio de Janeiro, Medellín, Puebla and Santo Domingo. With the same spirit that was at work there, the Bishops now wish to give a new impetus to evangelization, so that these peoples may continue to grow and mature in their faith in order to be the light of the world and witnesses to Jesus Christ with their own lives.

After the Fourth General Conference, in Santo Domingo, many changes took place in society. The Church which shares in the achievements and the hopes, the sufferings and the joys of her children, wishes to walk alongside them at this challenging time, so as to inspire them always with hope and comfort (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 1).

Today's world experiences the phenomenon of globalization as a network of relationships extending over the whole planet. Although from certain points of view this benefits the great family of humanity, and is a sign of its profound aspiration towards unity, nevertheless it also undoubtedly brings with it the risk of vast monopolies and of treating profit as the supreme value. As in all areas of human activity, globalization too must be led by ethics, placing everything at the service of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in other regions, there has been notable progress towards democracy, although there are grounds for concern in the face of authoritarian forms of government and regimes wedded to certain ideologies that we thought had been superseded, and which do not correspond to the Christian vision of man and society as taught by the Social Doctrine of the Church. On the other side of the coin, the liberal economy of some Latin American countries must take account of equity, because of the ever increasing sectors of society that find themselves oppressed by immense poverty or even despoiled of their own natural resources.

In the ecclesial communities of Latin America there is a notable degree of maturity in faith among the many active lay men and women devoted to the Lord, and there are also many generous catechists, many young people, new ecclesial movements and recently established Institutes of consecrated life. Many Catholic educational, charitable or housing initiatives have proved essential. Yet it is true that one can detect a certain weakening of Christian life in society overall and of participation in the life of the Catholic Church, due to secularism, hedonism, indifferentism and proselytism by numerous sects, animist religions and new pseudo-religious phenomena.

All of this constitutes a new situation which will be analyzed here at Aparecida. Faced with new and difficult choices, the faithful are looking to this Fifth Conference for renewal and revitalization of their faith in Christ, our one Teacher and Saviour, who has revealed to us the unique experience of the infinite love of God the Father for mankind. From this source, new paths and creative pastoral plans will be able to emerge, capable of instilling a firm hope for living out the faith joyfully and responsibly, and thus spreading it in one's own surroundings.

3. Disciples and Missionaries

This General Conference has as its theme: "Disciples and Missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that our peoples may have life in him".

The Church has the great task of guarding and nourishing the faith of the People of God, and reminding the faithful of this Continent that, by virtue of their Baptism, they are called to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ. This implies following him, living in intimacy with him, imitating his example and bearing witness. Every baptized person receives from Christ, like the Apostles, the missionary mandate: "*Go into all the world*

and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized, will be saved” (Mk 16:15). To be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ and to seek life “in him” presupposes being deeply rooted in him.

What does Christ actually give us? Why do we want to be disciples of Christ? The answer is: because, in communion with him, we hope to find life, the true life that is worthy of the name, and thus we want to make him known to others, to communicate to them the gift that we have found in him. But is it really so? Are we really convinced that Christ is the way, the truth and the life?

In the face of the priority of faith in Christ and of life “in him”, formulated in the title of this Fifth Conference, a further question could arise: could this priority not perhaps be a flight towards emotionalism, towards religious individualism, an abandonment of the urgent reality of the great economic, social and political problems of Latin America and the world, and a flight from reality towards a spiritual world?

As a first step, we can respond to this question with another: what is this “reality”? What is real? Are only material goods, social, economic and political problems “reality”? This was precisely the great error of the dominant tendencies of the last century, a most destructive error, as we can see from the results of both Marxist and capitalist systems. They falsify the notion of reality by detaching it from the foundational and decisive reality which is God. Anyone who excludes God from his horizons falsifies the notion of “reality” and, in consequence, can only end up in blind alleys or with recipes for destruction.

The first basic point to affirm, then, is the following: only those who recognize God know reality and are able to respond to it adequately and in a truly human manner. The truth of this thesis becomes evident in the face of the collapse of all the systems that marginalize God.

Yet here a further question immediately arises: who knows God? How can we know him? We cannot enter here into a complex discussion of this fundamental issue. For a Christian, the nucleus of the reply is simple: only God knows God, only his Son who is God from God, true God, knows him. And he “who is nearest to the Father’s heart has made him known” (Jn 1:18). Hence the unique and irreplaceable importance of Christ for us, for humanity. If we do not know God in and with Christ, all of reality is transformed into an indecipherable enigma; there is no way, and without a way, there is neither life nor truth.

God is the foundational reality, not a God who is merely imagined or hypothetical, but God with a human face; he is God-with-us, the God who loves even to the Cross. When the disciple arrives at an understanding of this love of Christ “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).

We can ask ourselves a further question: what does faith in this God give us? The first response is: it gives us a family, the universal family of God in the Catholic Church. Faith releases us from the isolation of the “I”, because it leads us to communion: the encounter with God is, in itself and as such, an encounter with our brothers and sisters, an act of convocation, of unification, of responsibility towards the other and towards others. In this

sense, the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty (cf. *2 Cor* 8:9).

Yet before we consider what is entailed by the realism of our faith in the God who became man, we must explore the question more deeply: how can we truly know Christ so as to be able to follow him and live with him, so as to find life in him and to communicate that life to others, to society and to the world? First and foremost, Christ makes his person, his life and his teaching known to us through the word of God. At the beginning of this new phase that the missionary Church of Latin America and the Caribbean is preparing to enter, starting with this Fifth General Conference in Aparecida, an indispensable pre-condition is profound knowledge of the word of God.

To achieve this, we must train people to read and meditate on the word of God: this must become their staple diet, so that, through their own experience, the faithful will see that the words of Jesus are spirit and life (cf. *Jn* 6:63). Otherwise, how could they proclaim a message whose content and spirit they do not know thoroughly? We must build our missionary commitment and the whole of our lives on the rock of the word of God. For this reason, I encourage the Bishops to strive to make it known.

An important way of introducing the People of God to the mystery of Christ is through *catechesis*. Here, the message of Christ is transmitted in a simple and substantial form. It is therefore necessary to intensify the catechesis and the faith formation not only of children but also of young people and adults. Mature reflection on faith is a light for the path of life and a source of strength for witnessing to Christ. Most valuable tools with which to achieve this are the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and its abridged version, the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

In this area, we must not limit ourselves solely to homilies, lectures, Bible courses or theology courses, but we must have recourse also to the communications media: press, radio and television, websites, forums and many other methods for effectively communicating the message of Christ to a large number of people.

In this effort to come to know the message of Christ and to make it a guide for our own lives, we must remember that evangelization has always developed alongside the promotion of the human person and authentic Christian liberation. “Love of God and love of neighbour have become one; in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God” (Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, 15). For the same reason, there will also need to be social catechesis and a sufficient formation in the social teaching of the Church, for which a very useful tool is the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. The Christian life is not expressed solely in personal virtues, but also in social and political virtues.

The disciple, founded in this way upon the rock of God’s word, feels driven to bring the Good News of salvation to his brothers and sisters. *Discipleship and mission* are like the two sides of a single coin: when the disciple is in love with Christ, he cannot stop proclaiming to the world that only in him do we find salvation (cf. *Acts* 4:12). In effect, the disciple knows that without Christ there is no light, no hope, no love, no future.

4. “So that in him they may have life”

The peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean have the right to a full life, proper to the children of God, under conditions that are more human: free from the threat of hunger and from every form of violence. For these peoples, their Bishops must promote a culture of life which can permit, in the words of my predecessor Paul VI, “the passage from misery towards the possession of necessities ... the acquisition of culture ... cooperation for the common good ... the acknowledgement by man of supreme values, and of God, their source and their finality” (*Populorum Progressio*, 21).

In this context I am pleased to recall the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, the fortieth anniversary of which we celebrate this year. This Papal document emphasizes that authentic development must be integral, that is, directed to the promotion of the whole person and of all people (cf. no. 14), and it invites all to overcome grave social inequalities and the enormous differences in access to goods. These peoples are yearning, above all, for the fullness of life that Christ brought us: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (*Jn* 10:10). With this divine life, human existence is likewise developed to the full, in its personal, family, social and cultural dimensions.

In order to form the disciple and sustain the missionary in his great task, the Church offers him, in addition to the bread of the word, the bread of the Eucharist. In this regard, we find inspiration and illumination in the passage from the Gospel about the disciples on the road to Emmaus. When they sit at table and receive from Jesus Christ the bread that has been blessed and broken, their eyes are opened and they discover the face of the Risen Lord, they feel in their hearts that everything he said and did was the truth, and that the redemption of the world has already begun to unfold. Every Sunday and every Eucharist is a personal encounter with Christ. Listening to God’s word, our hearts burn because it is he who is explaining and proclaiming it. When we break the bread at the Eucharist, it is he whom we receive personally. The Eucharist is indispensable nourishment for the life of the disciple and missionary of Christ.

Sunday Mass, Centre of Christian life

Hence the need to give priority in pastoral programmes to appreciation of the importance of Sunday Mass. We must motivate Christians to take an active part in it, and if possible, to bring their families, which is even better. The participation of parents with their children at Sunday Mass is an effective way of teaching the faith and it is a close bond that maintains their unity with one another. Sunday, throughout the Church’s life, has been the privileged moment of the community’s encounter with the risen Lord.

Christians should be aware that they are not following a character from past history, but the living Christ, present in the *today* and the *now* of their lives. He is the living one who walks alongside us, revealing to us the meaning of events, of suffering and death, of rejoicing and feasting, entering our homes and remaining there, feeding us with the bread that gives life. For this reason Sunday Mass must be the centre of Christian life.

The encounter with Christ in the Eucharist calls forth a commitment to evangelization and an impulse towards solidarity; it awakens in the Christian a strong desire to proclaim the Gospel and to bear witness to it in the world so as to build a more just and humane society. From the Eucharist, in the course of the centuries, an immense wealth of charity has sprung forth, of sharing in the difficulties of others, of love and of justice. Only from the Eucharist will the civilization of love spring forth which will transform Latin America and the Caribbean, making them not only the Continent of Hope, but also the Continent of Love!

Social and Political problems

Having arrived at this point, we can ask ourselves a question: how can the Church contribute to the solution of urgent social and political problems, and respond to the great challenge of poverty and destitution? The problems of Latin America and the Caribbean, like those of today's world, are multifaceted and complex, and they cannot be dealt with through generic programmes. Undoubtedly, the fundamental question about the way that the Church, illuminated by faith in Christ, should react to these challenges, is one that concerns us all. In this context, we inevitably speak of the problem of structures, especially those which create injustice. In truth, just structures are a condition without which a just order in society is not possible. But how do they arise? How do they function? Both capitalism and Marxism promised to point out the path for the creation of just structures, and they declared that these, once established, would function by themselves; they declared that not only would they have no need of any prior individual morality, but that they would promote a communal morality. And this ideological promise has been proved false. The facts have clearly demonstrated it. The Marxist system, where it found its way into government, not only left a sad heritage of economic and ecological destruction, but also a painful oppression of souls. And we can also see the same thing happening in the West, where the distance between rich and poor is growing constantly, and giving rise to a worrying degradation of personal dignity through drugs, alcohol and deceptive illusions of happiness.

Just structures are, as I have said, an indispensable condition for a just society, but they neither arise nor function without a moral consensus in society on fundamental values, and on the need to live these values with the necessary sacrifices, even if this goes against personal interest.

Where God is absent—God with the human face of Jesus Christ—these values fail to show themselves with their full force, nor does a consensus arise concerning them. I do not mean that non-believers cannot live a lofty and exemplary morality; I am only saying that a society in which God is absent will not find the necessary consensus on moral values or the strength to live according to the model of these values, even when they are in conflict with private interests.

On the other hand, just structures must be sought and elaborated in the light of fundamental values, with the full engagement of political, economic and social reasoning. They are a question of *recta ratio* and they do not arise from ideologies nor from their premises. Certainly there exists a great wealth of political experience and expertise on

social and economic problems that can highlight the fundamental elements of a just state and the paths that must be avoided. But in different cultural and political situations, amid constant developments in technology and changes in the historical reality of the world, adequate answers must be sought in a rational manner, and a consensus must be created—with the necessary commitments—on the structures that must be established.

This political task is not the immediate competence of the Church. Respect for a healthy secularity—including the pluralism of political opinions—is essential in the Christian tradition. If the Church were to start transforming herself into a directly political subject, she would do less, not more, for the poor and for justice, because she would lose her independence and her moral authority, identifying herself with a single political path and with debatable partisan positions. The Church is the advocate of justice and of the poor, precisely because she does not identify with politicians nor with partisan interests. Only by remaining independent can she teach the great criteria and inalienable values, guide consciences and offer a life choice that goes beyond the political sphere. To form consciences, to be the advocate of justice and truth, to educate in individual and political virtues: that is the fundamental vocation of the Church in this area. And lay Catholics must be aware of their responsibilities in public life; they must be present in the formation of the necessary consensus and in opposition to injustice.

Just structures will never be complete in a definitive way. As history continues to evolve, they must be constantly renewed and updated; they must always be imbued with a political and humane *ethos*—and we have to work hard to ensure its presence and effectiveness. In other words, the presence of God, friendship with the incarnate Son of God, the light of his word: these are always fundamental conditions for the presence and efficacy of justice and love in our societies.

This being a Continent of baptized Christians, it is time to overcome the notable absence—in the political sphere, in the world of the media and in the universities—of the voices and initiatives of Catholic leaders with strong personalities and generous dedication, who are coherent in their ethical and religious convictions. The ecclesial movements have plenty of room here to remind the laity of their responsibility and their mission to bring the light of the Gospel into public life, into culture, economics and politics.

5. Other priority areas

In order to bring about this renewal of the Church that has been entrusted to your care in these lands, let me draw your attention to some areas that I consider priorities for this new phase.

The family

The family, the “patrimony of humanity”, constitutes one of the most important treasures of Latin American countries. The family was and is the school of faith, the training-ground for human and civil values, the hearth in which human life is born and is generously and responsibly welcomed. Undoubtedly, it is currently suffering a degree of adversity caused by secularism and by ethical relativism, by movements of population internally and externally, by poverty, by social instability and by civil legislation opposed

to marriage which, by supporting contraception and abortion, is threatening the future of peoples.

In some families in Latin America there still unfortunately persists a chauvinist mentality that ignores the “newness” of Christianity, in which the equal dignity and responsibility of women relative to men is acknowledged and affirmed.

The family is irreplaceable for the personal serenity it provides and for the upbringing of children. Mothers who wish to dedicate themselves fully to bringing up their children and to the service of their family must enjoy conditions that make this possible, and for this they have the right to count on the support of the State. In effect, the role of the mother is fundamental for the future of society.

The father, for his part, has the duty to be a true father, fulfilling his indispensable responsibility and cooperating in bringing up the children. The children, for their integral growth, have a right to be able to count on their father and mother, who take care of them and accompany them on their way towards the fullness of life. Consequently there has to be intense and vigorous pastoral care of families. Moreover, it is indispensable to promote authentic family policies corresponding to the rights of the family as an essential subject in society. The family constitutes part of the good of peoples and of the whole of humanity.

Priests

The first promoters of discipleship and mission are those who have been called “to be with Jesus and to be sent out to preach” (cf. *Mk* 3:14), that is, *the priests*. They must receive preferential attention and paternal care from their Bishops, because they are the primary instigators of authentic renewal of Christian life among the People of God. I should like to offer them a word of paternal affection, hoping that “the Lord will be their portion and cup” (cf. *Ps* 16:5). If the priest has God as the foundation and centre of his life, he will experience the joy and the fruitfulness of his vocation. The priest must be above all a “man of God” (*1 Tim* 6:11) who knows God directly, who has a profound personal friendship with Jesus, who shares with others the same sentiments that Christ has (cf. *Phil* 2:5). Only in this way will the priest be capable of leading men to God, incarnate in Jesus Christ, and of being the representative of his love. In order to accomplish his lofty task, the priest must have a solid spiritual formation, and the whole of his life must be imbued with faith, hope and charity. Like Jesus, he must be one who seeks, through prayer, the face and the will of God, and he must be attentive to his cultural and intellectual preparation.

Dear priests of this Continent, and those of you who have come here to work as missionaries, the Pope accompanies you in your pastoral work and wants you to be full of joy and hope; above all he prays for you.

Religious men and women and consecrated persons

I now want to address the religious men and women and consecrated members of the lay faithful. Latin American and Caribbean society needs your witness: in a world that so often gives priority to seeking well-being, wealth and pleasure as the goal of life, exalting

freedom to the point where it takes the place of the truth of man created by God, you are witnesses that there is another meaningful way to live; remind your brothers and sisters that the Kingdom of God has already arrived; that justice and truth are possible if we open ourselves to the loving presence of God our Father, of Christ our brother and Lord, and of the Holy Spirit, our Comforter. With generosity and with heroism, you must continue working to ensure that society is ruled by love, justice, goodness, service and solidarity in conformity with the charism of your founders. With profound joy, embrace your consecration, which is an instrument of sanctification for you and of redemption for your brothers and sisters.

The Church in Latin America thanks you for the great work that you have accomplished over the centuries for the Gospel of Christ in favour of your brothers and sisters, especially the poorest and most deprived. I invite you always to work together with the Bishops and to work in unity with them, since they are the ones responsible for pastoral action. I exhort you also to sincere obedience towards the authority of the Church. Set yourselves no other goal than holiness, as you have learned from your founders.

The lay faithful

At this time when the Church of this Continent is committing herself whole-heartedly to her missionary vocation, I remind the lay faithful that they too are the Church, the assembly called together by Christ so as to bring his witness to the whole world. All baptized men and women must become aware that they have been configured to Christ, the Priest, Prophet and Shepherd, by means of the common priesthood of the People of God. They must consider themselves jointly responsible for building society according to the criteria of the Gospel, with enthusiasm and boldness, in communion with their Pastors.

There are many of you here who belong to ecclesial movements, in which we can see signs of the varied presence and sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in today's society. You are called to bring to the world the testimony of Jesus Christ, and to be a leaven of God's love among others.

Young people and pastoral care of vocations

In Latin America the majority of the population is made up of young people. In this regard, we must remind them that their vocation is to be Christ's friends, his disciples. Young people are not afraid of sacrifice, but of a meaningless life. They are sensitive to Christ's call inviting them to follow him. They can respond to that call as priests, as consecrated men and women, or as fathers and mothers of families, totally dedicated to serving their brothers and sisters with all their time and capacity for dedication: with their whole lives. Young people must treat life as a continual discovery, never allowing themselves to be ensnared by current fashions or mentalities, but proceeding with a profound curiosity over the meaning of life and the mystery of God, the Creator and Father, and his Son, our Redeemer, within the human family. They must also commit themselves to a constant renewal of the world in the light of the Gospel. More still, they must oppose the facile illusions of instant happiness and the deceptive paradise offered by drugs, pleasure, and alcohol, and they must oppose every form of violence.

6. “Stay with us”

The deliberations of this Fifth General Conference lead us to make the plea of the disciples on the road to Emmaus our own: “Stay with us, for it is towards evening, and the day is now far spent” (Lk 24:29).

Stay with us, Lord, keep us company, even though we have not always recognized you. Stay with us, because all around us the shadows are deepening, and you are the Light; discouragement is eating its way into our hearts: make them burn with the certainty of Easter. We are tired of the journey, but you comfort us in the breaking of bread, so that we are able to proclaim to our brothers and sisters that you have truly risen and have entrusted us with the mission of being witnesses of your resurrection.

Stay with us, Lord, when mists of doubt, weariness or difficulty rise up around our Catholic faith; you are Truth itself, you are the one who reveals the Father to us: enlighten our minds with your word, and help us to experience the beauty of believing in you.

Remain in our families, enlighten them in their doubts, sustain them in their difficulties, console them in their sufferings and in their daily labours, when around them shadows build up which threaten their unity and their natural identity. You are Life itself: remain in our homes, so that they may continue to be nests where human life is generously born, where life is welcomed, loved and respected from conception to natural death.

Remain, Lord, with those in our societies who are most vulnerable; remain with the poor and the lowly, with indigenous peoples and Afro-Americans, who have not always found space and support to express the richness of their culture and the wisdom of their identity. Remain, Lord, with our children and with our young people, who are the hope and the treasure of our Continent, protect them from so many snares that attack their innocence and their legitimate hopes. O Good Shepherd, remain with our elderly and with our sick. Strengthen them all in faith, so that they may be your disciples and missionaries!

Conclusion

As I conclude my stay among you, I wish to invoke the protection of the Mother of God and Mother of the Church on you and on the whole of Latin America and the Caribbean. I beseech Our Lady in particular, under the title of Guadalupe, Patroness of America, and under the title of Aparecida, Patroness of Brazil, to accompany you in your exciting and demanding pastoral task. To her I entrust the People of God at this stage of the third Christian millennium. I also ask her to guide the deliberations and reflections of this General Conference and I ask her to bless with copious gifts the beloved peoples of this Continent.

Before I return to Rome I should like to leave a gift with the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, to accompany and inspire them. It is this magnificent triptych from Cuzco, Peru, representing the Lord shortly before his

Ascension into Heaven, as he is entrusting to his followers the mission to make disciples of all nations. The images evoke the close relationship linking Jesus Christ with his disciples and missionaries for the life of the world. The last panel represents Saint Juan Diego proclaiming the Gospel, with the image of the Virgin Mary on his cloak and the Bible in his hand. The history of the Church teaches us that the truth of the Gospel, when our eyes take in its beauty and our minds and hearts receive it with faith, helps us to contemplate the dimensions of mystery that call forth our wonder and our adherence.

As I depart, I greet all of you most warmly and with firm hope in the Lord. Thank you very much!

MESSAGE OF THE FIFTH GENERAL CONFERENCE TO THE PEOPLES OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARRIBEAN

Gathered in the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Conception Aparecida, in Brazil, we greet in the love of the Lord all the People of God and all men and women of good will.

From the 13th to the 31st of May of 2007, we were gathered in the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, inaugurated with the presence and the words of the Holy Father Benedict XVI.

In our works, developed in an environment of fervent prayer, fraternity and affective communion, we have sought to give continuity to the path of renewal that the Catholic Church undertook since the II Vatican Council and in the four prior General Conferences of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean.

At the conclusion of this Fifth Conference we announce that we have embraced the challenge of working to give a new impulse and vigor to our mission in and from Latin America and the Caribbean.

1. Jesus the Way, the Truth and the Life

“I am the Way and the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6)

In the face of the challenges presented by this new time in which we are immersed, we renew our faith, proclaiming with joy to all men and women of our continent: we are loved and redeemed in Jesus, Son of God, the Risen One who is alive in our midst; through Him we can be free of sin, of all slavery and live in justice and fraternity. Jesus is the way that allows us to discover the truth and to achieve the total fulfillment of our life!

2. Called to the Following of Jesus

“So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with Him” (Jn 1:39)

The first invitation that Jesus makes to every person who has lived an encounter with Him, is to be His disciple, so as to follow in His footsteps and to be part of His community. Our greatest joy is that of being His disciples! He calls each one by name, knowing our history in depth (cf. Jn 10:3), so that we may share our lives with Him and be sent forth to continue His mission (cf. Mk 3:14-15).

Let us follow Jesus! The disciple is the one who after having responded to this calling, follows Him step by step through the paths of the Gospel. As we follow Him, we hear and see the happening of the Kingdom of God, the conversion of each person, starting point for the transformation of society, at the same time that the paths to eternal life are opened to us. In the school of Jesus we learn a “new life”, moved by the dynamism brought by the Holy Spirit and reflected upon the values of the Kingdom.

Identified with the Master, our life is moved by the impulse of love and in the service to others. This love implies a continuous option and discernment to follow the path of the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-26). Let us not be afraid of the cross, intrinsic in the faithful following of Jesus, because it is illuminated by the light of the Resurrection. In

this way, as disciples, we open paths of life and hope to our peoples who suffer from sin and all kinds of injustice.

The calling to be disciples-missionaries demands from us a clear option for Jesus and His Gospel, coherence between faith and life, embodiment of the values of the Kingdom, insertion in the community and to be a sign of contradiction and novelty in a world that promotes consumerism and disfigures the values that dignify the human being. In a world that is closed to the God of love, we are a community of love, not of the world but in the world and for the world! (cf. Jn 15:19; 17:14-16).

3. Missionary Discipleship in the Church's Ministry

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19)

We see how the path of missionary discipleship is a source of renewal of our ministry in the Continent and a new starting point for the New Evangelization of our peoples.

A Church that Becomes a Disciple Herself

In the parable of the Good Shepherd we learn to be disciples who are nourished from the Word: “The sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice” (Jn 10:4). May the Word of Life (cf. Jn 6:63), tasted in Prayerful Reading and in the celebration and living of the gift of the Eucharist, transform and reveal to us the living presence of the Risen One who walks with us and acts in history (cf. Lk 24:13-35).

With firmness and decision, we will continue to exercise our prophetic task, discerning where the way for the truth and the life is; raising our voices in the social spheres of our peoples and cities, and especially in favor of those who are excluded in society. We want to stimulate the formation of Christian politicians and legislators, so that they may contribute in the building of a society more just and fraternal according to the principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church.

A Church which Forms Disciples

Everyone in the Church is called to be disciples and missionaries. It is a duty to form ourselves and to form all of God's People in order to fulfill this task with responsibility and boldness.

The joy of being disciples and missionaries can be seen in a special way in the places where we create fraternal communities. We are called to be a Church with open arms, who knows how to welcome and value each one of her members. Therefore, we encourage the efforts made in the parishes to become “home and school of communion”, animating and forming small communities and basic church communities, as well as in the lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities.

We commit to strengthen our presence and proximity. Thus, in our pastoral service we invite to dedicate more time to each person, to listen to them, to be with them in the important events of their lives, and with them, to help seeking the solutions for their needs. Let us bring about that everyone, in feeling valued, may also experience the Church as their own home.

As we reaffirm the commitment with the formation of disciples and missionaries, this Conference decided to pay closer attention to the stages of the first announcement, of Christian Initiation and of growth in the faith. With the reinforcement of Christian identity, let us help each brother and sister to discover the service that the Lord asks of them in the Church and in society.

In a world thirsty for spirituality and aware of the centrality of the relationship with the Lord in our life as disciples, we want to be a Church who learns to pray and teaches how to pray. A prayer that springs from our life and heart, and which is the starting point for lively and participative celebrations which animate and nourish the faith.

4. Missionary Discipleship to the Service of Life

“I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10).

From the cenacle of Aparecida we commit to begin a new stage in our pastoral journey, declaring ourselves **in permanent mission**. With the fire of the Spirit we will inflame our Continent with love: “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

In Faithfulness to the Missionary Commandment

Jesus invites all to participate of His mission. May no one stay with crossed arms! To be a missionary is to announce the Kingdom with creativity and boldness in every place where the Gospel has not been sufficiently announced or welcomed, especially in the difficult or forgotten environments and beyond our borders.

As Leaven in the Dough

Let us be missionaries of the Gospel not only in word, but also with our own lives, giving it in service, even to the point of martyrdom.

Jesus began His mission by forming a community of missionary disciples, the Church, which is the beginning of the Kingdom. His community was also part of His announcement. Inserted in society, we must make visible our love and fraternal solidarity (cf. Jn 13:35) and let us promote the dialogue with the different social and religious agents. In an ever more pluralistic society, let us integrate forces in the building of a world with more justice, reconciliation and solidarity.

Servers of a Shared Table

The acute differences between rich and poor invite us to work with greater effort in being disciples who know how to share the table of life, the table of all the sons and daughters of the Father, an open table, inclusive, in which no one is left behind. Therefore, we reinforce our preferential and evangelical option for the poor.

We commit to defend those who are weak, especially the children, the ill, the disabled, the at-risk youth, the elderly, the imprisoned, the migrants. We watch over for the respect to the right that the peoples have, “defending and promoting the underlying values in all social levels, especially in the indigenous peoples” (Benedict XVI, Speech in Guarulhos, n. 4). We want to contribute so that dignified living conditions, in which the needs such as food, education, housing and work are guaranteed for all.

Faithfulness to Jesus demands from us to fight against the evils that harm or destroy life, such as abortion, wars, kidnapping, armed violence, terrorism, sexual exploitation and drug dealing.

We invite all the leaders of our nations to defend the truth and to watch over the inviolable and sacred right to life and dignity of the human person, from conception until natural death.

We make available to our countries the pastoral efforts of the Church to contribute in the promotion of a culture of honesty that will heal the root of all forms of violence, illegal enrichment and generalized corruption.

Coherent with the project of the Father who is the Creator, we call upon all living forces of society to take care of our common house, the earth threatened of destruction. We want to favor a human and sustainable development based upon a just distribution of wealth and the communion of goods among all peoples.

5. Towards a Continent of Life, Love and Peace

“This is how all will know that you are my disciples” (Jn 13:35)

We, participants of the Fifth General Conference in Aparecida, and with the entire Church, “community of love”, want to embrace all the continent to transmit to it the love of God and our own. We hope that this embrace will also reach out to the whole world.

At the closing of this Conference of Aparecida, in the vigor of the Holy Spirit, we summon all our brothers and sisters so that united, with enthusiasm, we may carry out the **Great Continental Mission**. It will be a new Pentecost that impels us to go, in a special way, in search of the fallen away Catholics, and of those who know little or nothing about Jesus Christ, so that we may joyfully form the community of love of God our Father. A mission that must reach everyone, be permanent and profound.

With the fire of the Holy Spirit, let us move forward, building with hope our history of salvation in the path of evangelization, surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses (cf. Hb 12:1), the martyrs, saints and blessed of our continent. With their witness, they have shown us that faithfulness is worthwhile and possible up to the end.

United to all prayerful peoples, we entrust to Mary, Mother of God and Our Mother, first disciple and missionary at the service of life, love and peace, called upon under the titles of Our Lady of Aparecida and Our Lady of Guadalupe, the new impulse that springs from this day onwards, in all Latin America and the Caribbean, under the breath of a new Pentecost for our Church, from this Fifth Conference which we have celebrated here.

In Medellin and Puebla we concluded by saying “WE BELIEVE”. In Aparecida, as we did in Santo Domingo, we proclaim with all our strength: WE BELIEVE AND WE HOPE.

We hope...

- a) *To be a lively Church, faithful and credible, which is nourished from the Word of God and the Eucharist.*
- b) *To live our being Christians with joy and conviction as disciples-missionaries of Jesus Christ.*
- c) *To form lively communities that nourish the faith and encourage missionary action.*
- d) *To value the diverse ecclesial organizations in a spirit of communion.*
- e) *To promote a mature laity, steward in the mission of announcing and making visible the Kingdom of God.*
- f) *To impel the active participation of women in society and in the Church.*
- g) *To maintain our preferential and evangelical option for the poor with a renewed effort.*
- h) *To accompany the youth in their formation and search for identity, vocation and mission, renewing our option for them.*
- i) *To work with all the people of good will in the building of the Kingdom.*
- j) *To strengthen with audacity Family and Respect Life Ministries.*
- k) *To value and respect our Indigenous and Afro-American peoples.*
- l) *To advance in the ecumenical dialogue “so that all may be one”, as well as in the inter-religious dialogue.*
- m) *To make of this continent a model of reconciliation, justice and peace.*
- n) *To be stewards of creation, home of all, in fidelity to the project of God.*
- o) *To collaborate in the integration of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean.*

May this Continent of hope also become the Continent of love, life and peace!

Aparecida – Brazil, May 29, 2007

CONCLUDING DOCUMENT

INTRODUCTION

1. In the light of the risen Lord and with the power of the Holy Spirit, we Bishops of the Americas met in Aparecida, Brazil, to hold the Fifth General Conference of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean. We have done so as pastors who want to continue to advance the evangelizing action of the Church, which is called to make all its members disciples and missionaries of Christ, Way, Truth, and Life, so our peoples may have life in Him. We do so in communion with all the particular churches in the Americas. Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ and of his disciples, has been very close to us, has taken us in, cared for us and our labors, sheltering us, like Juan Diego and our peoples, in the folds of her mantle, under her motherly protection. We have asked her as Mother, perfect disciple, and pedagogue of evangelization, to teach us to be sons and daughters in her Son and to do what He tells us (cf. Jn 2.5).
2. We were joyfully gathered together with the Successor of Peter, Head of the College of Bishops. His Holiness Benedict XVI has confirmed us in the primacy of faith in God, in his truth and love, for the good of individuals and peoples. We are grateful for all his teachings, especially in his Inaugural Address, which were light and sure guidance for our work. The grateful memory of recent popes, and especially their rich magisterium, which has been very present in our work, merits special remembrance and gratitude.
3. We have felt accompanied by the prayer of our believing Catholic people, visibly represented by the presence of the Shepherd and the faithful for the Church of God in Aparecida, and by the multitude of pilgrims to the shrine from all of Brazil and other countries of the Americas, who edified and evangelized us. In the communion of saints, we were mindful of all those who have preceded us as disciples and missionaries in the Lord's vineyard, and especially our Latin American saints, including Saint Toribio de Mogrovejo, patron of the Latin American episcopacy.
4. The Gospel reached our lands as part of a dramatic and unequal encounter of peoples and cultures. The "seeds of the Word,"¹ present in the native cultures, made it easier for our indigenous brothers and sisters to find in the Gospel life-giving responses to their deepest aspirations: "Christ is the Savior for whom they were silently longing."² The appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe was a decisive event for the proclamation and recognition of her Son, a lesson and sign of inculturation of the faith, manifestation and renewed missionary impetus for spreading the Gospel.³

¹ Cf. *Puebla*, 401.

² Benedict XVI, *Inaugural Address of the Fifth Conference, Aparecida*, no. 1. Henceforth cited as IA.

³ Cf. SD 15.

5. From the initial evangelization to recent times, the Church has experienced lights and shadows.⁴ It wrote pages of our history with great wisdom and holiness. It also suffered difficult times, both because of attacks and persecutions, and because of the weaknesses, worldly compromises and inconsistencies, in other words, because of the sin of its children, who obscured the newness of the Gospel, the splendor of the truth, and the practice of justice and charity. Nevertheless, what is most decisive in the Church is always the holy action of its Lord.
6. Therefore, we especially give thanks to God and praise him for everything that has been bestowed on us. We accept the entire reality of our continent as gift: the beauty and fertility of its lands, the richness of humanity expressed in the individuals, families, peoples, and cultures of the continent. Above all, we have been given Jesus Christ, the fullness of God's Revelation, a priceless treasure, the "precious pearl" (cf. Mt 13: 45-46), the Word of God made flesh, Way, Truth and Life of men and women, to whom he opens a destiny of utter justice and happiness. He is the sole Liberator and Savior, who with his death and resurrection broke the oppressive chains of sin and death, and who reveals the merciful Love of the Father, and the vocation, dignity, and destiny of the human person.
7. Faith in God who is Love and the Catholic tradition in the life and culture of our peoples are their greatest wealth. It is manifested in the mature faith of many of the baptized and in popular piety, which expresses

*love for the suffering Christ, the God of compassion, pardon and reconciliation ... love for the Lord present in the Eucharist, ... the God who is close to the poor and to those who suffer; the profound devotion to the most holy Virgin of Guadalupe, the Aparecida, the Virgin invoked under various national and local titles.*⁵

It is also expressed in the charity that everywhere inspires deeds, projects, and journeys of solidarity with the most needy and defenseless. It is also at work in consciousness of the dignity of the person, wisdom about life, passion for justice, hope against all hope, and the joy of living even under many difficult conditions that move the hearts of our peoples. The Catholic roots remain in their art, language, traditions, and way of life, at once dramatic and celebratory, in facing reality. Hence, the Holy Father further charged us as Church, with "the great task of guarding and nourishing the faith of the people of God."⁶

⁴ Benedict XVI, General Audience, Wednesday May 23, 2007. "Certainly the memory of a glorious past cannot ignore the shadows that accompanied the work of evangelization of the Latin American continent: the sufferings and injustices that the colonizers inflicted on the indigenous populations, often trampling their human rights, cannot be forgotten. But the obligatory mention of these unjustifiable crimes—which were indeed condemned by missionaries like Bartolome de las Casas and theologians like Francisco de Vitoria of the University of Salamanca—should not hinder grateful acknowledgement of the admirable work carried out by divine grace among these peoples over these centuries."

⁵ IA 1.

⁶ *Ibid.* 3.

8. The gift of Catholic tradition is a foundation stone of Latin American and Caribbean identity, originality, and unity: a historical-cultural reality marked by the Gospel of Christ, a reality abounding in sin—disregard for God, wicked behavior, oppression, violence, ingratitude, and misery--but where the grace of the paschal victory abounds even more. Despite its weaknesses and human failings, our Church enjoys a high degree of trust and credibility among the people. It is the dwelling place of people bound together as family and home of the poor.
9. The Fifth General Conference of Latin American and Caribbean Bishops is a new step in the Church's journey, especially since the ecumenical council Vatican II. It gives continuity to and recapitulates the path of fidelity, renewal, and evangelization of the Latin American Church at the service of its peoples, which was expressed appositely in the previous general conferences of the episcopacy (Rio, 1955; Medellin, 1968; Puebla, 1979; Santo Domingo, 1992). Through them all, we recognize the action of the Spirit. We also bear in mind the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for America (1997).
10. This Fifth Conference sets before itself "the great task of guarding and nourishing the faith of the people of God, and also of reminding the faithful of this continent that by virtue of their baptism, they are called to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ."⁷ A new period in history is opening up, with challenges and demands, characterized by pervasive discontent which is spread by new social and political turbulence, by the expansion of a culture distant from or hostile to Christian tradition, and by the emergence of varied religious offerings which try to respond as best they can to the manifest thirst for God of our peoples.
11. The church is called to a deep and profound rethinking of its mission and relaunch it with fidelity and boldness in the new circumstances of Latin America and the world. It cannot retreat in response to those who see only confusion, dangers, and threats, or those who seek to cloak the variety and complexity of situations with a mantle of worn-out ideological slogans, or irresponsible attacks. What is required is confirming, renewing, and revitalizing the newness of the Gospel rooted in our history, out of a personal and community encounter with Jesus Christ that raises up disciples and missionaries. That depends not so much on grand programs and structures, but rather on new men and women who incarnate that tradition and newness, as disciples of Jesus Christ and missionaries of his Kingdom, protagonists of new life for a Latin America that seeks to be rediscovered with the light and power of the Spirit.
12. A Catholic faith reduced to mere baggage, to a collection of rules and prohibitions, to fragmented devotional practices, to selective and partial adherence to the truths of the faith, to occasional participation in some sacraments, to the repetition of doctrinal principles, to bland or nervous

⁷ *Ibid.*

moralizing, that does not convert the life of the baptized would not withstand the trials of time. Our greatest danger is

*the gray pragmatism of the daily life of the church in which everything apparently continues normally, but in reality the faith is being consumed and falling into meanness.*⁸

We must all start again from Christ,⁹ recognizing that

*being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.*¹⁰

13. In Latin America and the Caribbean, at a time when many of our peoples are preparing to celebrate the bicentenary of their independence, we find ourselves facing the challenge of revitalizing our way of being Catholic and our personal options for the Lord, so that Christian faith may become more deeply rooted in the heart of Latin American individuals and peoples as founding event and living encounter with Christ. He reveals himself as newness of life and mission in all dimensions of personal and social existence. This requires, on the basis of our Catholic identity, a much more missionary evangelization, in dialogue with all Christians and at the service of all people. Otherwise, “the rich treasure of the American Continent ... its most valuable patrimony: faith in God who is love”¹¹ risks being increasingly eroded and diluted in various sectors of the population. Today a choice must be made between paths that lead to life and paths that lead to death (cf. Dt 30: 15). Paths of death are those that lead to squandering the goods received from God through those who preceded us in the faith. They are paths that mark a culture without God and without his commandments, or even against God, driven by the idols of power, wealth, and momentary pleasure, which end up being a culture against the human being and against the good of Latin American peoples. Paths of true and full life for all, paths of eternal life, are those traced by the faith which lead to “the fullness of life that Christ has brought us: with this divine life there also develops the fullness of human existence in its personal, family, social and cultural dimension.”¹² This is the life that God shares with us out of his gratuitous love, for “it is the love that gives life.”¹³ These paths of life bear fruit in the gifts of truth and love that have been given to us in Christ in the communion of the Lord’s disciples and missionaries, so that Latin America and

⁸ J. Ratzinger, *Situación actual de la fe y la teología*. Conference given at the Meeting of Presidents of Bishops Commissions of Latin America for the doctrine of the faith, held in Guadalajara (Mexico), 1996. Published in *L’Ossevatore Romano*, November 1, 1996.

⁹ Cf. NMI 28-29,

¹⁰ DCE 1.

¹¹ Benedict XIV, *Homily in the Eucharist inaugurating the Fifth General Conference of Latin American Bishops* (May 13, 2007), Aparecida Brazil.

¹² IA 4.

¹³ Benedict XIV, *Homily in the Eucharist inaugurating the Fifth General Conference of Latin American Bishops* (May 13, 2007), Aparecida Brazil.

the Caribbean may indeed be a continent in which faith, hope and love renew the life of persons and transform the cultures of peoples.

14. The Lord tells us: “Do not be afraid” (Mt 28:5). As with the women on the morning of the Resurrection, he repeats to us: “Why do you seek the living one among the dead?” (Lk 24:5). We are encouraged by signs of the victory of the risen Christ, while we plead for the grace of conversion and keep alive the hope that does not deceive. What defines us is not the harsh dramatic living conditions, nor the challenges of society, nor the tasks that we must undertake, but above all the love received from the Father through Jesus Christ by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This fundamental priority is what has guided all our endeavors, and we offer them to God, to our church, to our people, to each and every Latin American, while we lift our confident entreaty to the Holy Spirit so we may rediscover the beauty and joy of being Christians. Here lies the fundamental challenge that we face: to show the church’s capacity to promote and form disciples and missionaries who respond to the calling received and to communicate everywhere, in an outpouring of gratitude and joy, the gift of the encounter with Jesus Christ. We have no other treasure but that. We have no other happiness, no other priority, but to be instruments of the Spirit of God, as Church, so that Jesus Christ may be known, followed, loved, adored, announced, and communicated to all, despite difficulties and resistances. This is the best service—his service!—that the church has to offer people and nations.¹⁴
15. At this moment when we renew hope, we want to make our own the words of His Holiness Benedict XVI at the outset of his pontificate, echoing his predecessor, the Servant of God, John Paul II, and proclaim them to all of Latin America:

*Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors for Christ! ... If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation. . . . Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life.*¹⁵
16. *This Fifth General Conference is being celebrated in continuity with the other four that preceded it: in Rio de Janeiro, Medellin, Puebla and Santo Domingo. With the same spirit that was at work there, the Bishops now wish to give a new impetus to evangelization, so that these peoples may continue to grow and mature in their faith in order to be the light of the world and witnesses to Jesus Christ with their own lives.*¹⁶

¹⁴ Cf. EN 1.

¹⁵ Benedict XVI Homily for the Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome, April 24, 2005.

¹⁶ IA 2

As pastors of the church we are conscious that

after the Fourth General Conference, in Santo Domingo, many changes took place in society. The Church which shares in the achievements and the hopes, the sufferings and the joys of her children, wishes to walk alongside them at this challenging time, so as to inspire them always with hope and comfort¹⁷

17. Thus, our joy is based on the love of the Father in sharing the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, who through the Holy Spirit brings us from death to life, from sadness to joy, from absurdity to the deep meaning of existence, from discouragement to the hope that does not deceive. This happiness is not a feeling artificially generated or a passing sentiment. The Father's love has been revealed in Christ who has us invited us to enter into his kingdom. He has taught us to pray, saying, "Abba, Father" (Rm 8:15; cf. Mt 6:9).
18. Knowing Jesus Christ by faith is our joy; following him is a grace, and passing on this treasure to others is a task entrusted to us by the Lord, in calling and choosing us. With eyes enlightened by the light of the risen Jesus Christ, we are able and intend to examine the world, history, and all our peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, and each and every one of their inhabitants.

¹⁷ IA 3

Part One
THE LIFE OF
OUR PEOPLE TODAY

19. In continuity with the previous general conferences of Latin American Bishops, this document utilizes the see-judge-act method. 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, which is sown on this earth and fully bears fruit in Heaven. Many voices from the entire continent, offered contributions and suggestions along these lines, stating that this method has been helpful for living our calling and mission in the church with more dedication and intensity. It has enriched theological and pastoral work and in general it has been helpful in motivating us to take on our responsibilities toward the actual situations in our continent. This method enables us to combine systematically, a faithful perspective for viewing reality; incorporating criterions from faith and reason for discerning and appraising it critically; and accordingly acting as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. Believing, joyful, and trusting adherence to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and involvement in the church are preconditions for assuring the effectiveness of this method.¹⁸

¹⁸ Cf. CELAM, *Synthesis of contributions received for the Fifth General Conference of Latin American Bishops* 34-35.

MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

20. Our reflection on the journey of the churches of Latin America and the Caribbean takes place in the midst of the lights and shadows of our age. We are afflicted but not dismayed by the great changes we are experiencing. We have received priceless gifts that help us view reality as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.
21. The daily hope-filled presence of countless pilgrims has reminded us of the first followers of Jesus Christ who went to the Jordan, where John was baptizing, with the hope of meeting the Messiah (cf. Mk 1:5). Those who felt attracted by the wisdom of his words, the kindness of his manner, the power of his miracles, and the stunning impact of his person, accepted the gift of faith and went on to be disciples of Jesus. In emerging from the darkness and shadows of death (cf. Lk 1:79), their lives acquired extraordinary fullness: that of having been enriched with the gift of the Father. They experienced the history of their people and their age and traveled over the roads of the Roman Empire, without ever forgetting the most important and decisive encounter of their lives, which had filled them with light, strength, and hope: the encounter with Jesus, their rock, their peace, their life.
22. The same thing happens to us when we look at the reality of our peoples and our church, with their values, their limitations, their anxieties and hopes. While we suffer and rejoice, we remain in the love of Christ viewing our world, we try to discern its paths with the joyful hope and indescribable gratitude of believing in Jesus Christ. He is the true Son of God, the true Savior of humankind. The unique and irreplaceable importance of Christ for us, for humankind, means that Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. “If we do not know God in and with Christ, all of reality is transformed into an indecipherable enigma; there is no way, and without a way, there is neither life nor truth.”¹⁹ In the relativistic cultural climate that surrounds us, it is ever more important and urgent to root and bring to maturity in the entire ecclesial body the certainty that Christ, the God with a human face, is our true and sole savior.

1.1. GIVING THANKS TO GOD

23. Blessed be God, Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every kind of blessing in the person of Christ (cf. Eph 1:3). The God of the Covenant, rich in mercy, has loved us first; he has loved each one of us regardless of merit; thus we bless him, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, the life-giving Spirit, soul and life of the Church. Poured forth in our hearts, he groans and intercedes for us and strengthens us with his gifts on our journey as disciples and missionaries.
24. We bless God in gratitude because he has called us to be instruments of his Kingdom of love and life, and of justice and peace, for which so many sacrificed themselves. He himself has entrusted to us the work of his hands to care for it and

¹⁹ Cf. IA.

- put it at the service of all. We thank God for having made us his collaborators so that we may be in solidarity with his creation for which we are stewards. We bless God who has given us created nature, his first book, enabling him to be known, and us to inhabit it as our home.
25. We give thanks to God who has given us the gift of speech, with which we can communicate with Him through his Son, who is his Word (cf. Jn 1:1), and among ourselves. We give thanks to Him who by his great love has spoken to us as friends (cf. Jn 15:14-15). We bless God who gives himself to us in the celebration of faith, especially in the Eucharist, bread of eternal life. Thanksgiving to God for the many and marvelous gifts that He has granted us culminates in the Church's central celebration, which is the Eucharist, vital nourishment of disciples and missionaries, and likewise for the Sacrament of the Forgiveness that Christ has attained for us on the cross. We praise the Lord Jesus for the gift of his Most Holy Mother, Mother of God and Mother of the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean, star of renewed evangelization, first disciple and great missionary of our peoples.
 26. In the light of Christ, suffering, injustice, and the cross challenge us to live as Samaritan church (cf. Lk 10: 25-37), recalling that "evangelization has always developed alongside the promotion of the human person and authentic Christian liberation."²⁰ We give thanks to God and we rejoice at the characteristic faith, solidarity, and joy of our peoples passed down over the years by grandmothers and grandfathers, mothers and fathers, catechists, prayer leaders, and countless anonymous people whose charity has kept hope alive in the midst of injustices and adversities.
 27. The Bible repeatedly shows that when God created the world with his Word, he expressed satisfaction, saying that it was "good" (Gn 1:21), and when he created the human being, man and woman, with the breath of his mouth, he said that it "was very good" (Gn 1:31). The world created by God is beautiful. We proceed from a divine design of wisdom and love. But this original beauty was blemished and this goodness was wounded. Through our Lord Jesus Christ and his paschal mystery, God has recreated man making him his child, and has given it the assurance of a new heaven and a new earth (cf. Rev. 21:1). We bear the image of the first Adam, but we are also called from the beginning to embody the image of Jesus Christ, new Adam (cf. 1 Cor 15: 45). Creation bears the mark of the creator and desires to be liberated and "share in the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rm 8:21).
- 1.2 THE JOY OF BEING DISCIPLES AND MISSIONARIES OF JESUS CHRIST**
28. In the encounter with Christ we want to express the joy of being disciples of the Lord and of having been sent with the treasure of the Gospel. Being Christian is

²⁰ IA 3.

not a burden but a gift: God the Father has blessed us in Jesus Christ his Son, Savior of the world.

29. We want the joy that we have received in the encounter with Jesus Christ, whom we recognize as Son of God incarnate and redeemer, to reach all men and women wounded by adversities; we want the good news of the Kingdom of God, of Jesus Christ victorious over sin and death, to reach all who lie along the roadside, asking for alms and compassion (cf. Lk 10: 29-37; 18:25-43). The disciple's joy serves as remedy for a world fearful of the future and overwhelmed by violence and hatred. The disciple's joy is not a feeling of selfish well-being, but a certainty that springs from faith, that soothes the heart and provides the ability to proclaim the good news of God's love. Knowing Jesus is the best gift that any person can receive; that we have encountered Him is the best thing that has happened in our lives, and making him known by our word and deeds is our joy.

1.3 THE CHURCH'S MISSION IS TO EVANGELIZE

30. The history of humankind, which God never abandons, unfolds under his compassionate gaze. God has so loved our world that he has given us his Son. He proclaims the good news of the Kingdom to the poor and sinners. Hence, as disciples of Jesus and missionaries, we want to and must proclaim the Gospel, which is Christ himself.. We announce to our peoples that God loves us, that his existence is not a threat to the human being, that he is near us with the saving and liberating power of his Kingdom, which accompanies us in tribulation, that he constantly sustains our hope in the midst of all trials. We Christians are bearers of good news for humankind, not prophets of doom.
31. The church must fulfill its mission by following the footsteps of Jesus and adopting his attitudes (cf. Mat 9:35-36). Though he was Lord, he made himself servant and obedient even to death on the cross (cf. Phil 2:8); though he was rich, he chose to be poor for us (cf. 2 Cor 8:9), showing us the path of our calling as disciples and missionaries. In the Gospel we learn the sublime lesson of being poor following Jesus, himself poor (cf. Lk 6:20; 9:58), and that of proclaiming the Gospel of peace with no purse or staff, placing our trust neither in money nor in the power of this world (cf. Lk 1:4 ff). God's generosity is manifested in the generosity of missionaries; the gratuitous character of the gospel is shown in the gratuitousness of apostles.
32. In the face of Jesus Christ, dead and risen, bruised for our sins and glorified by the Father, in this suffering and glorious face,²¹ we can see with the eyes of faith the humiliated face of so many men and women of our peoples, and at the same time, their calling to the freedom of the children of God, to the full realization of their personal dignity and to brotherhood among all. The Church is at the service of all human beings, sons and daughters of God.

²¹ NMI 25 and 28.

**THE VIEW OF REALITY
BY MISSIONARY DISCIPLES**

2.1 THE REALITY THAT CONFRONTS US AS DISCIPLES AND MISSIONARIES

33. The peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean are now experiencing a reality marked by great changes that profoundly affect their lives. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we feel challenged to discern the “signs of the times” in the light of the Holy Spirit, to place ourselves at the service of the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus who came so that all might have life and “and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10).
34. The novelty of these changes, unlike those that have taken place in other ages, is that they have a global reach which, with variations and nuances, affects the entire world. They are usually described as the phenomenon of globalization. A decisive factor in these changes is science and technology, with their ability to manipulate genetically the very life of living beings, and with their capacity to create a worldwide communications network, both public and private, to interact in real time, that is, simultaneously, regardless of geographical distances. As is often said, history itself has accelerated, and the changes themselves become dizzying, because they spread ever so quickly to every corner of the planet.
35. This new worldwide scale of the human phenomenon entails consequences in every sphere of social life, impacting culture, economics, politics, the sciences, education, sports, the arts, and of course religion as well. As pastors of the Church we are concerned about how this phenomenon affects the life of our peoples and the religious and ethical sense of our brothers and sisters who untiringly seek the face of God. Yet they must now do so while challenged by new languages - of technical domain - that do not always reveal but indeed may conceal the divine meaning of human life redeemed in Christ. Without a clear perception of the mystery of God, the loving paternal design of a worthy life for all human beings is obscured.
36. In this new social setting, reality has become ever more opaque and complex for human beings. This means that individual persons always need more information, if they wish to exercise the stewardship over reality to which they are called by vocation. This has taught us to look at reality more humbly, knowing that it is greater and more complex than the simplistic ways in which we used to look at it in the not very distant past which often introduced conflicts into society, leaving many wounds that have still not been able to heal. It has also become difficult to perceive the unity of all the dispersed fragments deriving from the information that we collect. It frequently happens that some want to look at reality one-sidedly based on economic information, others on political or scientific information, others on entertainment and spectacle. However, none of these partial criteria can provide us with a coherent meaning for everything that exists. When people

- perceive this fragmentation and limitation, they tend to feel frustrated, anxious, and anguished. Social reality turns out to be too big for an individual mind that, aware of its lack of knowledge and information, easily regards itself as insignificant, with no real impact on events, even when adding its voice to other voices that seek one another for mutual aid.
37. That is the reason why many who study our age have claimed that the overall reality has brought with it a crisis of meaning. They have in mind not the multiple partial meanings that individuals can find in the everyday actions that they perform, but the meaning that gives unity to everything that exists and happens to us in experience, which we believers call the religious sense. This sense usually comes to us through our cultural traditions which provide the framework with which each human being can look at the world in which he or she lives. In our Latin American and Caribbean culture we are familiar with the very noble and guiding role that popular religiosity has played, especially in Marian devotion, which has helped make us more conscious of our common condition as children of God and of our common dignity in His eyes, despite social or ethnic differences or those of any other kind.
 38. However, we must admit that this precious tradition is beginning to erode. Most of the mass media now present us with new, attractive, fantasy-filled images, which, although everyone knows that they cannot show the unifying meaning of all aspects of reality, at least offer the consolation of being transmitted in real time, live and direct, and with up to date information. Far from filling the void produced in our consciousness by the lack of a unifying sense of life, the information transmitted by the media often only distracts us. Lack of information is only remedied with more information, reinforcing the anxiety of those who feel that they are in an opaque world that they do not understand.
 39. This phenomenon perhaps explains one of the most disconcerting and new facts that we are now experiencing. Our cultural traditions are no longer handed on from one generation to the next with the same ease as in the past. That even affects that deepest core of each culture, constituted by religious experience, which is now likewise difficult to hand on through education and the beauty of cultural expressions. It even reaches into the family itself, which, as a place of dialogue and intergenerational solidarity, had been one of the most important vehicles for handing on the faith. The mass media have invaded every space and every conversation, making its way also into the intimacy of the home. Now standing alongside with the wisdom of traditions, in competition, is up-to-the-minute news, distraction, entertainment, the images of the successful who have been able to use for their advantage the technological tools and the expectations of social prestige and esteem. The result is that people seek over and over an experience of meaning that would fill the requirements of their vocation in places where they will never be able to find it.
 40. Among the premises that weaken and undermine family life, we find the ideology of gender, according to which each everyone can chose his or her sexual

orientation, without taking into account the differences set to them by human nature. This has led to legislative changes that gravely injure the dignity of marriage, respect for the right to life, and the identity of the family.²²

41. Hence, we Christians must start over from Christ, from contemplation of Him who has revealed to us in his mystery, the complete fulfillment of the human vocation and its meaning. We need to become docile disciples, to learn from Him, in following him, the dignity and fullness of life. We likewise need to be consumed by missionary zeal, to bring to the heart of the culture of our time that unifying and full meaning of human life that neither science, nor politics, nor economics, nor the media can provide. In Christ the Word, God's Wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30), culture can again find its center and depth, from which reality may be viewed with all its aspects together, discerning them in the light of the Gospel and granting to each its place and proper dimension.
42. As the Pope told us in his inaugural address: "only those who recognize God know reality and are able to respond to it adequately and in a truly human manner."²³ Society, which coordinates its activities only through an enormous variety of information, believes that it can actually operate as if God did not exist. But the effectiveness of procedures brought about through information, even using the most developed technologies, is incapable of satisfying the yearning for dignity engraved in the depths of the human heart. Hence, it is not enough to assume that mere diversity of viewpoints, options and ultimately information, which is commonly called pluriculturalism or multiculturalism, will remedy the absence of an integrated meaning for everything that exists. The human person in its very essence is that place in nature where the variety of meanings converge on a single vocation of meaning. People are not frightened of diversity; what shocks them is rather being unable to combine the totality of all these meanings of reality into an integrated understanding that enables them to exercise their freedom with discernment and responsibility. Human persons are ever seeking the truth of their being, for it is that truth that sheds light on reality so that it can develop in it with freedom and happiness, with joy and hope.

2.1.1 Sociocultural situation

43. Accordingly, social reality, which in its contemporary thrust we describe with the word "globalization," impacts more than any other dimension our culture and the way in which we become part of it and draw from it. The variety and wealth of Latin American cultures, ranging from those that are more indigenous to those that with the movement of history and racial mixing of its peoples, have gradually been settling in nations, families, social groups, educational institutions, and shared civic life, constitutes a fact that is quite obvious to us and one that we value as a singular treasure. What is at stake today is not this diversity that the

²² Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World*, (May 31, 2004), 2, which cites the Pontifical Council for the Family, *Family, Marriage, and "de facto unions,"* (November 21, 2000), 8.

²³ IA 3.

mass media can individualize and record. What is lacking is rather the possibility of this diversity converging into a synthesis, which, encompassing the variety of meanings, can project it toward a common historic destiny. Therein lies the incomparable value of the Marian spirit of our popular religiosity, which under different names, has been able to merge different Latin American histories into a shared history: one that which leads to Christ, Lord of life, in whom the highest dignity of our human vocation is achieved.

44. We are living through a change of epoch, the deepest level of which is cultural. The all-embracing conception of the human being, in relationship with the world and with God is vanishing:

This was precisely the great error of the dominant tendencies of the last century . . . Anyone who excludes God from his horizons falsifies the notion of “reality” and, in consequence, can only end up in blind alleys or with recipes for destruction.²⁴

Today an overvaluing of individual subjectivity is very much to the fore. The freedom and dignity of the person are acknowledged, regardless of the form they take. Individualism weakens community bonds and proposes a radical transformation of time and space, granting a primary role to imagination. Social, economic, and technological phenomena are at the foundation of the deep experience of time which is conceived as riveted on the present, thereby implying notions of insubstantiality and instability. Concern for the common good is set aside to make way for the immediate satisfaction of the desires of individuals, to the creation of new, and often arbitrary individual rights, to problems of sexuality, the family, diseases, and death.

45. When science and technology are placed solely at the service of the market and profitability and what is functional are the sole criterion of effectiveness, they create a new vision of reality. Thus, through the use of the mass media, an esthetic sense, a vision of happiness, a perception of relationship and even a language have been making inroads, and the aim is that it be imposed as an authentic culture. The result is the destruction of what is truly human in the processes of cultural construction that emerge from personal and collective exchange.
46. On a mass level, one may note a kind of new cultural colonization by the imposition of artificial cultures, spurning local cultures and tending to impose a uniform culture in all realms. This culture is characterized by the self-reference of the individual, which leads to indifference toward the other, whom one does not need and for whom one does not feel responsible. There is a tendency to live day by day, with no long-term designs, and no personal, family, and community attachments. Human relations are regarded as consumption goods, leading to emotional relations without responsible and final commitment.

²⁴ Ibid.

47. One may likewise note a tendency toward extreme affirmation of individual and subjective rights. This search is pragmatic and limited to the moment with no concern for ethical criteria. Claiming individual and subjective rights, without a similar effort to guarantee social, cultural, and solidarity rights undermines the dignity of all, especially the poorest and most vulnerable.
48. At this time in Latin America and the Caribbean, there must be greater awareness of the difficult situation affecting the dignity of many women. Some are subjected to many forms of violence, even as children and adolescents in the home and elsewhere: trafficking, rape, servitude, and sexual harassment; inequalities in the workplace, politics, and the economy; exploitive advertising by many social means of communications which regard them as a means of profit.
49. Cultural changes have modified the traditional roles of men and women, who are seeking to develop new attitudes and styles of their respective identities, empowering all their human dimensions in everyday shared life, in the family and in society, sometimes along erroneous paths.
50. The greed of the market unleashes the desires of children, youth, and adults. Advertising creates the illusion of distant make-believe worlds where every desire can be satisfied by products that are of an effective, ephemeral, and even messianic nature. The notion that desires should turn into happiness is condoned. Since only the here-and-now is needed, happiness is sought through economic well-being and hedonistic satisfaction.
51. The younger generations are those most affected by this consumer culture in their deep personal aspirations. They grow up under the thrust of a pragmatic and narcissistic individualism, which arouses in them special imaginary worlds of freedom and equality. They affirm the present because the past ceased being relevant in the face of so much social political, and economic exclusion. For them, the future is uncertain. They likewise participate in the logic of life as spectacle, and regard the body as focal point of their present reality. They have a new addiction to sensations, and most of them grow up without regard for values and religious occasions. New actors are emerging in within this situation of cultural change, with new lifestyles, ways of thinking, feeling, and perceiving, and with new ways of relating. They are authors and agents of the new culture.
52. Among the positive aspects of this cultural change is the fundamental value of the person, his or her conscience and experience, the search for the meaning of life and transcendence. The failure of the reigning ideologies to respond to the deepest search for the meaning of life has allowed simplicity and recognition in what is weak and unpretentious in life to emerge as a value, with a great scope and potential that cannot be underestimated. This emphasis on appreciation of the person opens new horizons, where the Christian tradition acquires renewed value, especially when it is recognized in the incarnate Word born in a manger who takes on a humble condition, as one who is poor.

53. The need to shape one's own destiny and the yearning to find reasons for existence can set in motion the desire to be together with others and share lived experience as one way of responding. This is an affirmation of personal freedom, and hence of the need to question oneself in the depth of one's own convictions and options.
54. But along with the emphasis on individual responsibility, in the midst of societies that promote access to goods through the media, paradoxically, access to those goods is denied to the vast majority, including goods that are basic and essential for living as persons.
55. The emphasis on personal and lived experience leads us to regard testimony as a key component in living the faith. Deeds are valued insofar as they are meaningful to the person. It is in the language of giving testimony that we can find a point of contact with the persons who comprise society and of them with each other.
56. Moreover, the cultural wealth and diversity of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean are obvious. In our region there are different indigenous, Afro-American, *mestizo*, rural, urban, and peripheral-urban cultures. Indigenous cultures are especially notable for their deep attachment to the earth and community life, and for a certain search for God. Characteristic features of Afro-American cultures include bodily expressiveness, family-rootedness, and sense of God. Rural culture revolves around the agricultural cycle. Throughout history and in the midst of contradictions, *mestizo* culture, which is the most widespread among many peoples in the region, has sought to combine these multiple original cultural sources, facilitating the dialogue of their respective worldviews, and enabling them to converge into a shared history. To this cultural complexity would also have to be added that of the many European immigrants who settled in the countries of our region.
57. These cultures coexist under unequal conditions alongside the so-called globalized culture. They demand recognition and offer values that constitute a response to the negative values of the culture that is imposed through the mass media: community-orientation, appreciation for the family, openness to transcendence and solidarity. These cultures are dynamic and are in ongoing interaction with each other and with the various cultural offerings.
58. Urban culture is hybrid, dynamic, and changing, because it combines multiple forms, values, and lifestyles, and affects all groups. Peripheral-urban culture is the result of the huge migrations of generally poor people who settled around cities in peripheries of extreme poverty. In these cultures, the problems of identity and belonging, relationship, living space and home are increasingly complex.
59. There are also communities of migrants who have contributed the cultures and traditions brought from the lands of origin, whether Christian or of other religions. This diversity furthermore includes communities that have been formed by the arrival of different Christian denominations and other religious groups. Accepting

cultural diversity, which is now imperative, entails overcoming approaches that seek to create a uniformed culture with approaches based on their own unique models.

2.1.2 Economic situation

60. In his Inaugural Address, the pope views globalization as a phenomenon “of relationships extending over the whole planet,” and considers it an “achievement of the human family” because it favors access to new technologies, markets, and financing. The high growth rates of our regional economy, and particularly its urban development would not be possible without opening to international trade, access to cutting-edge technologies, the participation of our scientists and technicians in the international development of knowledge, and the high investment in electronic media. All this also entails the rise of a technologically literate middle class. Globalization likewise expresses the deep aspiration of the human race for unity. Despite these advances, the pope also points out that globalization “brings with it the risk of vast monopolies and of treating profit as the supreme value.” Hence, Benedict XVI stresses that

*as in all areas of human activity, globalization too must be led by ethics, placing everything at the service of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God.*²⁵

61. Globalization is a complex phenomenon with various dimensions (economic, political, cultural, communicational, etc). Correctly appraising it requires an analytical and nuanced understanding, allowing both its positive and negative aspects to be detected. Unfortunately, the most widespread and successful face of globalization is its economic dimension, which becomes paramount and conditions the other dimensions of human life. In globalization, market forces easily absolutize efficacy and productivity as values regulating all human relations. This peculiar character makes globalization a process that fosters many inequities and injustices. In its current form, globalization is incapable of interpreting and reacting in response to objective values that transcend the market and that constitute what is most important in human life: truth, justice, love, and most especially, the dignity and rights of all, even those not included in the market.
62. Led by a tendency that prizes profit and stimulates competition, globalization entails a process of concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few, not only of physical and monetary resources, but especially of information and human resources. The upshot is the exclusion of all those not sufficiently trained and informed, thereby augmenting the inequalities that sadly characterizes our continent and that keep large numbers of people in poverty. Today poverty means poverty of knowledge and of use of, and access to, new technologies. Hence, business people must take on their responsibility of creating more sources of employment and investing in overcoming this new poverty.

²⁵ IA 2.

63. Certainly the prevalence of this tendency does not eliminate the possibility of setting up small and medium businesses which enter into the export sector of the economy, provide it with complementary services, or take advantage of specific niches in the internal market. However, their economic and financial frailty, and the small scale at which they operate makes them extremely vulnerable to interest rates, exchange-rate risk, benefit costs, and shifting prices of their raw materials. The vulnerability of these companies goes hand in hand with the insecurity of the employment that they are able to offer. Without a specific State policy to protect them, the risk is that the economies of scale of large consortiums will ultimately prevail as the sole decisive form of economic dynamism.
64. Hence, faced with this type of globalization, we feel a strong call to promote a different globalization, one characterized by solidarity, justice, and respect for human rights, making Latin America and the Caribbean not only the continent of hope but the continent of love, as Benedict XVI proposed in the Inaugural Address of this Conference.
65. This should lead us to contemplate the faces of those who suffer. Among them are the indigenous and Afro-American communities, which often are not treated with dignity and equality of conditions; many women who are excluded because of their sex, race, or socioeconomic situation; young people who receive a poor education and have no opportunities to advance in their studies or to enter into the labor market so as to move ahead and establish a family; many poor people, unemployed, migrants, displaced, landless peasants, who seek to survive on the informal market; boys and girls subjected to child prostitution, often linked to sex tourism; also children victims of abortion. Millions of people and families live in dire poverty and even go hungry. We are also concerned about those addicted to drugs, differently-abled people, bearers and victims of serious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV-AIDS, who suffer from loneliness, and are excluded from family and community life. Nor do we forget those who are kidnapped and the victims of violence, terrorism, armed conflicts, and public insecurity; likewise the elderly, who, in addition to feeling excluded from the production system, often find themselves rejected by their family as people who are a nuisance and useless. Finally, we are pained by the inhuman situation of the vast majority of prisoners, who also need us to stand with them and provide fraternal aid. A globalization without solidarity has a negative impact on the poorest groups. It is no longer simply the phenomenon of exploitation and oppression, but something new: social exclusion. What is affected is the very root of belonging to the society in which one lives, because one is no longer on the bottom, on the margins, or powerless, but rather one is living outside. The excluded are not simply “exploited” but “surplus” and “disposable.”
66. Financial institutions and transnational companies are becoming stronger to the point that local economies are subordinated, especially weakening the local States, which seem ever more powerless to carry out development projects at the service of their populations, especially when it involves long-term investments with no immediate dividends. International extractive industries and agribusiness

- often do not respect the economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights of the local populations, and do not assume their responsibilities. Preserving nature is very often subordinated to economic development, with damage to biodiversity, exhaustion of water reserves and other natural resources, air pollution, and climate change. The possibilities and potential problems of producing biofuels should be studied so that the value of human persons and their survival needs prevail. Latin America has the most abundant aquifers on the planet, along with vast extensions of forest lands which are humanity's lungs. The world thus receives free of charge environmental services, benefits that are not recognized economically. The region is affected by the warming of the earth and climate change caused primarily by the unsustainable way of life of industrialized countries.
67. Globalization has frequently led to the signing of free trade agreements between countries with asymmetrical economies, which do not always benefit the poorer countries. At the same time, the countries of the region are pressured from the outside with excessive demands in the area of intellectual property, to the point where patenting rights over life in all its forms is allowed. In addition, the use of genetically manipulated organisms shows that globalization does not always contribute to combating against hunger or sustainable rural development.
68. Although a great deal of progress has been made in controlling inflation and in the macroeconomic stability of the countries of the region, many governments are severely limited in financing their public budgets by the high costs of the foreign and domestic debt,²⁶ and yet, at the same time, they do not have truly efficient, progressive, and equitable tax systems.
69. The current concentration of income and wealth occurs primarily through the mechanisms of the financial system. The freedom granted to financial investments favors speculative capital, which has no incentives to make long-term productive investments, but rather seeks immediate profit in transactions with public bonds, currencies, and derivatives. However, according to the Social Doctrine of the Church,

The economy has as its object the development of wealth and its progressive increase, not only in quantity but also in quality; this is morally correct if it is directed to man's overall development in solidarity and to that of the society in which people live and work. Development, in fact, cannot be reduced to a mere process of accumulating goods and services. On the contrary, accumulation by itself, even were it for the common good, is not a sufficient condition for bringing about authentic human happiness.²⁷

²⁶ Cf. TMA 51; Benedict XVI, *Letter to the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Angela Merkel*, December 12, 2006.

²⁷ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 334.

- Business is called to make a greater contribution in society, assuming from this perspective, what is known as social-business responsibility.
70. Likewise alarming is the level of corruption in economies, involving the public and private sector alike, compounded by a notable lack of transparency and accountability to the citizenry. Corruption is often connected to the scourge of drug trafficking or drug financed businesses which is indeed destroying the social and economic fabric in entire regions.
 71. The economically active population of the region is affected by underemployment (42%) and unemployment (9%), while almost half is employed in informal work. Formal work is subject to insecure employment conditions and to the constant pressure of subcontracting, which brings lower wages and lack of protection in the area of social security, preventing many from leading a decent life. In this context, labor unions lose their possibility to defend workers' rights. On the other hand, positive and creative responses for confronting this situation can be observed among those affected, who have been undertaking a variety of initiatives, such as microlending, local economic support networks, and fair trade practices.
 72. Most small farmers suffer from poverty, made worse by the fact that they do not have access to land of their own. Yet there are large landholdings in the hands of a few. In some countries this situation has led the people to demand an agrarian reform, while being mindful of the evils that free trade agreements, manipulation by drugs, and other factors may bring upon them.
 73. One of the most important phenomena in our countries is the process of human mobility, in its twofold expression of migration and itinerancy, in which millions of people migrate or find themselves forced to migrate inside or beyond their respective countries. The causes are diverse and are related to the economic situation, violence in its various forms, the poverty affecting people, and lack of opportunities for research and professional development. In many cases the consequences are extremely serious at the personal, family, and cultural level. The loss of the human capital of millions of people, trained professionals, researchers, and extensive small farming sectors, is impoverishing us more every day. In some instances, exploitation of labor actually creates conditions of real slavery. There is also a shameful trafficking in persons, including prostitution, even of minors. The plight of refugees merits special mention, and challenges the capacity for hospitality of society and the churches. Nevertheless, remittances in foreign currency from emigrants to their countries of origin have become an important and sometimes irreplaceable source of resources for various countries in the region, promoting the welfare and increased social mobility of those who are able to participate successfully in this process.

2.1.3 Socio-political dimension

74. We note a certain democratic progress which is evident in various electoral processes. However, we view with concern the rapid advance of various kinds of

- authoritarian regression by democratic means which sometimes lead to regimes of a neo-populist type. This indicates that a purely formal democracy founded on fair election procedures is not enough, but rather that what is required is a participatory democracy based on promoting and respecting human rights. A democracy without values, such as those just mentioned, easily becomes a dictatorship and ultimately betrays the people.
75. Participatory democracy is growing stronger with the more assertive presence of civil society, and the emergence of new social actors, such as indigenous people, Afro-Americans, women, professionals, a broad middle class, and organized poor people, and more room for political participation is being created. These groups are becoming aware of the power they hold in their hands and of the possibility of bringing about major changes for achieving more just government policies, which will reverse their situation of exclusion. In this regard, a growing influence of United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations is evident, although their recommendations are not always in line with ethical criteria. Their actions sometimes radicalize positions, foster extreme confrontation polarization, and place this potential at the service of interests foreign to their own. In the long run their hopes could be frustrated and negated.
 76. After a period in which States apparatus were weakened by the application of structural adjustments in the economy proposed by international financial agencies, currently there is a notable effort by States to enact and implement public policies in areas of health, education, food security, social security, access to land and housing, effective improvement of the economy to create jobs and laws encouraging community support organizations. All this indicates that there cannot be true and stable democracy without social justice, without real separation of powers, and unless the rule of law is upheld.²⁸
 77. A major negative factor observable in much of the region is the intensification of corruption in society and the State involving the legislative and executive branches at all levels. It also extends to the judicial system, which in its ruling often sides with the powerful and fosters impunity, thereby jeopardizing the credibility of government institutions and increasing the mistrust of the people. That phenomenon goes hand in hand with a deep contempt for legality. Broad sectors of the population, especially young people, are increasingly disenchanted with politics, particularly with democracy, because the promises of a better and more just life were not fulfilled, or were fulfilled only partially. Thus it is forgotten that democracy and political participation are fruit of the formation that becomes a reality only when citizens are conscious of their fundamental rights and of their corresponding duties.
 78. Social life, in harmonious and peaceful coexistence, is deteriorating very seriously in many Latin American and Caribbean countries, due to the rise in violence, which takes the form of robberies, muggings, kidnappings, and even more

²⁸ Cf. ChAM 56.

- seriously, murders, which every day destroy more human lives and fill families and all of society with sorrow. Violence takes on various forms and has different agents: organized crime and drug trafficking, paramilitary groups, common crime, especially on the outskirts of large cities, violence of youth gangs, and growing domestic violence. The causes are many: worship of money, the advance of an individualistic and utilitarian ideology, disrespect for the dignity of each person, a deterioration of the social fabric, corruption even of law-enforcement entities, and lack of government policies of social justice.
79. Some parliaments or legislative congresses pass unjust laws spurning human rights and the popular will, precisely because they are not close to their constituents and do not know how to listen and dialogue with citizens, but also out of ignorance, for failure to accompany them, and because many citizens abdicate their duty of participating in public life.
 80. In some states, there has been a rise in repression and the violation of human rights, even of the right of religious freedom, freedom of expression, and freedom of teaching, as well as disrespect for conscientious objection.
 81. While peace agreements have been achieved in some countries and longstanding conflicts have been resolved, in others armed conflict with all its consequences (violent deaths, human rights violations, threats, child soldiers, kidnappings, etc.) continues and no short-term solutions are in sight. The influence of drug trafficking in these groups further hinders possible solutions.
 82. In Latin America and the Caribbean there is a growing desire for regional integration through multilateral agreements, involving a growing number of countries that establish their own regulations in the fields of trade, services, and patents. Common origin combines with culture, language and religion, and so integration involves not only of markets, but civil institutions and, above all, persons. Similarly positive is the globalization of justice in the field of human rights and of crimes against humanity, which will enable all gradually to live under equal norms, intended to protect their dignity, integrity, and life.

2.1.4 Biodiversity, ecology, the Amazon, and the Antarctic

83. Latin American is the Continent that holds one of the greatest biodiversities on the planet and a rich socio-diversity represented by its peoples and cultures. Those peoples have a great store of traditional knowledge of the sustainable use of natural resources, and of the medicinal value of plants and other living organisms, many of which form the base of their economy. Such knowledge is currently being subjected to unlawful intellectual appropriation, when it is patented by pharmaceutical and biogenetics industries, generating vulnerability to the farmers and their families who depend on these resources for their survival.
84. The traditional communities have been practically excluded from decisions on the wealth of biodiversity and nature. Nature has been, and continues to be, assaulted. The land has been plundered. Water is being treated as though it were merchandise that could be traded by companies, and has been transformed into a

- good for which powerful nations compete. A major example of this situation is the Amazon.²⁹
85. In his address to youth in Pacaembu Stadium in Sao Paulo, Pope Benedict XVI drew attention to the “environmental devastation to the Amazon and the threats to the human dignity of its peoples,”³⁰ and asked the young people for “greater commitment and the broadest areas of action”³¹.
 86. The growing assault on the environment may serve as a pretext for proposals to internationalize the Amazon, which only serve the economic interests of transnational corporations. Pan-Amazon society is multiethnic, multicultural, and multireligious. The dispute over the occupation of the land is intensifying more and more. The traditional communities of the region want their lands to be recognized and legalized.
 87. We likewise note the shrinking of ice fields throughout the world: dwindling ice in the Arctic, whose impact is now being observed in the flora and fauna of that ecosystem; global warming can also be felt in the thundering crackle of blocks of Antarctic ice that are reducing the glacier coverage of the continent which regulates world climate. Twenty years ago speaking from the tip of the Americas, John Paul II pointed out prophetically:

*From the Southern Cone of the American Continent and facing the limitless spaces of the Antarctic, I issue a cry to all those responsible for our planet to protect and preserve nature created by God: Let us not allow our world to be an ever more degraded and degrading land.*³²

2.1.5 Presence of indigenous and Afro-American peoples in the Church

88. The indigenous people comprise the continent’s oldest population. They are the primary root of Latin American and Caribbean identity. Afro-Americans constitute another root, one that was uprooted from Africa and brought here as enslaved people. The third root is the poor people who migrated from Europe since the sixteenth century in search of better living conditions, and the great flow of immigrants from the whole world since the mid-nineteenth century. These groups and their respective cultures formed the racial mix that is the social and cultural foundation of our Latin American and Caribbean peoples, as was recognized by the III General Conference of Latin American Bishops held in Puebla (Mexico).³³

²⁹ The Pan-American Amazon occupies an area of approximately 7.01 million square kilometers, and constitutes 5% of the earth’s surface, 40% of South America. It has 29% of available non-frozen fresh water. It encompasses 34% of worldwide forest reserves and a huge mineral reserve. Its biological diversity of ecosystems is the richest on the planet. Thirty percent of all species of the world’s flora and fauna are located in this region.

³⁰ Benedict XVI, *Message to Youth in Pacaembu 2*; Brazil, May 10, 2007.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² John Paul II, *Homily in the Celebration of the Word for the faithful of southern Chile*; Punta Arenas, April 4, 1987.

³³ PD 307, 409.

89. The indigenous and Afro-Americans, are particularly different “others,” who demand respect and recognition. Society tends to look down on them, ignoring their uniqueness. Their social situation is marked by exclusion and poverty. The Church accompanies the indigenous and Afro-Americans as they struggle for their legitimate rights.
90. Today indigenous and Afro peoples are threatened in their physical, cultural, and spiritual existence; in their ways of life, their identities, and their diversity; in their lands and projects. Some indigenous communities are away from their lands because those lands have been invaded and degraded, or they do not have enough land to develop their cultures. They suffer very serious assaults on their identity and survival, because economic and cultural globalization jeopardizes their very existence as different peoples. Their gradual cultural transformation leads to rapid disappearance of some languages and cultures. Migration compelled by poverty is deeply influencing change of customs, of relationships, and even of religion.
91. Indigenous people and Afro-Americans are now taking their place in society and the Church. This is a *kairos* for deepening the Church’s encounter with these sectors of society who are demanding the 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.
92. In Santo Domingo we pastors recognized that “the indigenous peoples of today cherish very important human values”;³⁴ values that “the church defends ... as they confront the overwhelming power of the structures of sin manifested in modern society”;³⁵ “they are bearers of a host of cultural riches that are the basis of our present culture”;³⁶ and from the standpoint of the faith, “those values and convictions derive from ‘the seeds of the Word,’ which were already present at work in their ancestors.”³⁷
93. Among those values we may note:
- Openness to God’s action, the sense of gratitude for the fruits of the earth, the sacred character of human life and esteem for the family, the sense of solidarity and stewardship for work performed in common, the importance of worship, belief in a life beyond this earth.*³⁸
- Today the people have enriched these values extensively through evangelization and have developed them in many forms of authentic popular religiosity.
94. As Church embracing the cause of the poor, we encourage the participation of the indigenous and Afro-Americans in church life. We view with hope the inculturation process discerned in the light of the magisterium. It is crucial that

³⁴ SD 245.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 243.

³⁶ *Message of the Fourth Conference to the Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean*, 38.

³⁷ SD 245.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 17.

- Catholic translations of the bible and the liturgical texts be made into their languages. More must likewise be done to promote vocations and ordained ministries from these cultures.
95. Our pastoral service to the full life of indigenous peoples requires proclaiming Jesus Christ and the Good News of the Kingdom of God, denouncing sinful situations, structures of death, violence and internal and external injustices, and fostering intercultural, interreligious and ecumenical dialogue. Jesus Christ is the fullness of revelation for all peoples, and the fundamental reference point for discerning the values and deficiencies of all cultures, including indigenous cultures. Hence, the greatest treasure that we can offer them is that they come to the encounter with Jesus Christ Risen, our Savior. The indigenous people who have already received the Gospel are called, as disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ, to live their Christianity with great joy, to give the reason for their faith within their communities, and to collaborate actively so that no indigenous people of Latin America will abandon its Christian faith, but on the contrary will feel that in Christ they find the full meaning of their existence.
 96. Present throughout the history of Afro-Americans has been social, economic, political, and especially racial, exclusion, where ethnic identity is a factor in social subordination. Today they suffer discrimination in getting work, in the quality and content of school training, and in their everyday relations. Moreover, their values, history, culture, and religious expressions are systematically repressed. In some cases there still exists a mindset and a certain way of looking down on indigenous and Afro-Americans. Hence, the decolonizing of minds and knowledge, recovery of historic memory, and enhancement of intercultural spaces and relationships are conditions for affirming the full citizenship of these peoples.
 97. Latin America has very vibrant Afro-American communities which contribute and participate actively and creatively in building this continent. Movements for the recovery of identities, for citizen rights and against racism, alternative solidarity income-generating groups are enabling black women and men to be architects of their own history, a new history that is taking shape in Latin America and the Caribbean today. This new reality is based on intercultural relations 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.

2.2. SITUATION OF OUR CHURCH AT THIS HISTORIC TIME OF CHALLENGES

98. The Catholic Church in Latin America and the Caribbean, despite the flaws and ambiguities of some of its members, has witnessed to Christ, proclaimed his Gospel, and provided its service of charity, particularly to the poorest, striving to promote their dignity, and promote human development in the fields of health, solidarity economy, education, labor, access to land, culture, housing, assistance, among others. By speaking out together with other national and world institutions, it has helped give prudent guidelines and to promote justice human rights and

reconciliation of peoples. The church has accordingly often been socially recognized as an entity of trust and credibility. Its effort on behalf of the poorest and its struggle for the dignity of each human being has often led to persecution and even the death of some of its members, whom we regard as witnesses of the faith. We wish to recall the courageous testimony of our men and women saints, and of those who, even though not canonized, have lived out the gospel radically, and have offered their life for Christ, for the Church, and for their people.

99. Pastoral efforts aimed at the encounter with the living Jesus Christ have produced and are still producing fruits. Among them, we highlight the following:
- a) Due to the biblical inspiration of pastoral work, knowledge of God's Word and love for it is growing. Thanks to assimilation of the Church's magisterium and better training of generous catechists, the renewal of catechesis has produced fruitful results throughout the continent, and has even reached countries in North America, Europe, and Asia, where many Latin Americans and Caribbean have emigrated.
 - b) The liturgical renewal emphasized the celebratory and festive dimension of the Christian faith centered on the paschal mystery of Christ the Savior, and the Eucharist in particular. Manifestations of popular religiosity are growing, especially eucharistic piety and Marian devotion. Some efforts have been made to inculturate the liturgy within indigenous and Afro-American peoples. The risks of reducing the Church to a political actor have been gradually overcome, with better discernment of the seductive influence of ideologies. Responsibility and vigilance over the truths of the faith have been enhanced, gaining in depth and serenity of communion.
 - c) Our people have held priests in high esteem. They recognize the holiness of many of them, as well as the testimony of their life, their missionary work and pastoral creativity, particularly of those who are in remote places or more difficult settings. Many of our Churches have priestly ministry and concrete experiences of shared life and a just remuneration of the clergy. The permanent diaconate has been developed in some churches, along with ministries entrusted to lay people and other pastoral services, such as delegates of the word, lay parish leaders and of small communities, including church base communities, ecclesial movements, and a large number of specific pastoral ministries. A major effort is being made toward improving the formation in our seminaries, in houses of formation for religious life, and in schools for the permanent diaconate. The witness of religious life, its contribution to pastoral activities, and its presence in situations of poverty, risk, and on the border is significant. The increase of vocations to the male and female contemplative life is encouraging.
 - d) The selfless commitment of so many men and women missionaries is striking. To this day they are performing an invaluable work in evangelization and promotion of human development in all our peoples through an array of works and services. Likewise noteworthy are the many priests, religious women and

men, laywomen and laymen from our continent who are involved in the mission *ad gentes*.

- e) Efforts at pastoral renewal in parishes are growing, fostering an encounter with the living Christ through various methods of new evangelization, becoming a community of evangelized and missionary communities. In some places church base communities are seen to be flowering, according to the criterion of preceding General Conferences, in communion with the bishops and faithful to the church's magisterium.³⁹ The presence and growth of ecclesial movements and new communities that spread their charismatic, educational, and evangelizing wealth is appreciated. The importance of family, childhood, and youth ministries is now recognized.
- f) The Social Doctrine of the Church constitutes a priceless treasure, which has inspired the testimony and action in solidarity of lay men and women, who are ever more concerned for their own theological formation, as true missionaries of charity, and who strive to effectively transform the world according to Christ. Countless lay initiatives in the social, cultural, economic, and political realm, now draw inspiration from the permanent principles, the criteria for judgment, and the guidelines for action from the Church's Social Doctrine. The development of social ministry, as well as the work of Caritas on its various levels, and the wealth of volunteer work in a wide range of apostolates with social impact, are appreciated. The ministry of communications has developed, and the Church has more means than ever for evangelizing culture, thereby partly offsetting groups that are constantly gaining adherents by shrewd use of radio and television. We have radio stations, television, film, print media, Internet, web pages and RIIAL, [Multimedia Network of the Church in Latin America – *Red Informática de la Iglesia en América Latina*] which make us hopeful.
- g) The diversification of ecclesial organization, with the creation of many communities, and new jurisdictions and pastoral organisms has enabled many local churches to make progress in establishing collaborative ministry to better serve the needs of the faithful. Likewise interreligious dialogue, when it follows the norms of the magisterium, can enrich the participants in different encounters.⁴⁰ In other places schools of ecumenism have been created or ecumenical collaboration has taken place in social matters and other initiatives. A search for spirituality, prayer, and mysticism, in reaction to materialism, is evident and expresses hunger and thirst for God. Moreover, appreciation for ethics is a sign of the times that indicates the need to overcome hedonism, corruption, and the absence of values. We further rejoice at the deep feeling of solidarity that characterizes our peoples and the practice of stewardship and mutual aid.

³⁹ Cf. *Puebla*, 162, 617, 731d 049; *Santo Domingo* 61.

⁴⁰ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, article commenting on the Notification about the book of Fr. Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, March 12, 2001.

100. Despite the positive aspects at which we rejoice in hope, we note shadows, among which we mention the following:
- a) Latin America and the Caribbean are very important to the Catholic church, given their ecclesial dynamism, their creativity, and the fact that 43% of all the faithful live here; however, we note that the percentage growth of the Church has not kept pace with population growth. On average, the increase of the clergy, and especially of religious women, is falling behind population growth in our region.⁴¹
 - b) We regret some efforts to return to a certain type of ecclesiology and spirituality contrary to the Vatican II renewal⁴² and some reductionist interpretations and applications of the conciliar renewal; we regret the absence of authentic obedience and evangelical exercise of authority, infidelities in doctrine, morality, and communion, the shortcomings of our living out the preferential option for the poor, and significant numbers of secularizing lapses in consecrated life under the influence of a merely sociological rather than evangelical anthropology. As the Holy Father stated in his Inaugural address to our conference, “one can detect a certain weakening of Christian life in society overall and of participation in the life of the Catholic Church.”⁴³
 - c) We observe how little lay people are accompanied in their tasks of service to society, particularly when they take on responsibilities in the various structures of the temporal order. We note an evangelization with little ardor that does not use new methods of expressions, an emphasis on ritualism without the proper formative itinerary, neglecting other pastoral tasks. An individualistic spirituality concerns us. We likewise find a relativistic mentality in the ethical and religious realm, failure to apply creatively the rich wealth contained in the Church’s social doctrine, and sometimes a limited understanding of the secular character that constitutes the proper and specific identity of the lay faithful.
 - d) Evangelization, catechesis, and pastoral ministry as a whole, are still speaking languages that mean little to contemporary culture, and to young people in particular. Often the language used seems to ignore the change of existentially relevant codes in societies influenced by postmodernity and marked by broad social and cultural pluralism. Cultural changes hamper the transmission of the faith by the family and society. The Church does not seem to be responding with a significant involvement in shaping culture, especially in the university environment and the mass media communications.

⁴¹ Whereas the Latin American population grew almost 80% in the 1974-2000 period, priests grew by 44.1% and religious women by only 8%. (Cf. *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae*.)

⁴² Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Address to Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, and Higher Prelates of the Roman Curia*, Thursday, December 22, 2005.

⁴³ IA 2.

- e) The insufficient number of priests and their inequitable distribution mean that many communities cannot participate regularly in the celebration of the Eucharist. Recalling that the Eucharist makes the church, we are concerned at the situation of thousands of these communities deprived of the Sunday Eucharist for long periods of time. Compounding the situation is the relative scarcity of vocations to the ministry and to the consecrated life. Members of the clergy lack a missionary spirit, even during their formation. Many Catholics live and die without the assistance of the Church to which they belong by baptism. Impediments are encountered in taking on economic support for pastoral structures. Solidarity in the spirit of good Stewardship is lacking in the sharing of resources within the local churches and between them. In many of our churches prison ministry is not adequately covered, nor is ministry to youthful offenders or at-risk youth. Pastoral accompaniment of migrants and itinerants is insufficient. Some ecclesial movements do not properly integrate into parish and diocesan ministry; by the same token, some church structures are not sufficiently open to welcome them.
- f) In recent decades we are concerned to see that on the one hand, many people are losing the transcendent sense of their lives and are giving up religious practices, and on the other hand, significant numbers of Catholics are abandoning the Church and going over to other religious groups. While this is a real problem in all Latin American and Caribbean countries, its magnitude and diversity varies.
- g) Within the new religious pluralism in our continent, a sufficient distinction has not been made between believers who belong to other churches or ecclesial communities, both by their doctrine and by their attitudes, from those that form part of the great diversity of Christian (including pseudo-Christian) groups that have installed themselves up in our midst, because it is not appropriate to encompass all of them in a single category of analysis. Ecumenical dialogue with Christian groups that persistently attack the Catholic church is often not easy.
- h) We recognize that some Catholics have occasionally strayed from the Gospel, which requires a way of life more faithful to truth and charity, more simple, austere, and in solidarity, while we too have lacked the courage, persistence, and docility to grace to follow the renewal begun by Vatican II, faithful to the perennial Church, under the impulse of the previous General Conferences, and to affirm the Latin American and Caribbean face of our Church. We acknowledge that we are a community of poor sinners, imploring God's mercy, gathered, reconciled, united, and sent forth by the power of the resurrection of his Son and the grace of conversion of the Holy Spirit.

Part Two

**THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST
IN MISSIONARY DISCIPLES**

**THE JOY OF BEING MISSIONARY DISCIPLES
TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST**

101. At this time, with uncertainties in our heart, we ask with Thomas: “How can we know the way?” (Jn 14:5). Jesus answers us with a provocative proposal: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). He is the true way to the Father who so loved the world that He gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life (cf. Jn 3:16). This is eternal life: “that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ” (Jn 17:3). Faith in Jesus as the Son of the Father is the entry door to Life. We disciples of Jesus confess our faith with Peter’s words: “You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68); “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16).
102. Jesus is the Son of God, the Word made flesh (cf. Jn 1:14), true God and true man, proof of God’s love for human beings. His life is a radical surrender of himself for all persons, definitively consummated in his death and resurrection. Because he is the Lamb of God, He is the savior. His passion, death, and resurrection make possible the overcoming of sin and new life for all humankind. In Him the Father becomes present, because whoever knows the Son knows the Father (cf. Jn 14:7).
103. We disciples of Jesus recognize that He is the first and greatest evangelizer sent by God (cf. Rom 1:3), and at the same time the Gospel of God (cf. Rom 1:3). We believe and proclaim “the good news of Jesus, Messiah, Son of God” (Mk 1:1). As children obedient to the Father’s voice, we want to listen to Jesus (cf. Lk 9:3) because He is the only Master (cf. Mt 23:8). As his disciples, we know that his words are Spirit and Life (cf. Jn 6:63, 688). With the joy of faith, we are missionaries to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, and in Him, the Good News of human dignity, life, the family, work, science, and solidarity with creation.

3.1 THE GOOD NEWS OF HUMAN DIGNITY

104. We bless God for the dignity of the human person, created in his image and likeness. He has created us free and made us subjects of rights and duties in the midst of creation. We thank him for associating us with the advancement of the world, by giving us intelligence and the ability to love; for the dignity that we also receive and which we must as a task, protect, cultivate, and promote. We bless Him for the gift of faith that enables us to live in covenant with Him until we share eternal life. We bless him for making us his daughters and sons in Christ, for having redeemed us with the price of his blood and for the permanent relationship that he establishes with us, which is the source of our absolute, non-negotiable, and inviolable dignity. If sin has weakened the image of God in human beings and wounded their condition, the Good News, which is Christ, has redeemed and reestablished it in grace (cf. Rom 5: 12-21).

105. We praise God for the men and women of Latin America and the Caribbean who, impelled by their faith, have worked untiringly in defense of the human person, especially the poor and outcast. In their testimony, taken to the point of total commitment, the dignity of the human being shines forth.

3.2 THE GOOD NEWS OF LIFE

106. We praise God for the marvelous gift of life and for those who honor it and dignify it by placing it at the service of others; for the joyful spirit of our peoples who love music, dance, poetry, art, and sports, and cultivate firm hope in the midst of problems and struggles. We praise God because, while even while we were sinners, he showed us his love by reconciling us with himself through the death of his Son on the cross. We praise him because he now continues pouring out his love on us through the Holy Spirit, and nourishing us with the Eucharist, bread of life (cf. Jn 6:35). John Paul II's encyclical "Gospel of Life" sheds light on the great value of human life, which we must safeguard, and for which we continually praise God.
107. We bless God for the gift of his Son Jesus Christ, "human face of God and divine face of man."⁴⁴

*The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. Christ, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme vocation clear.*⁴⁵

108. We bless God the Father because all human beings sincerely open to truth and goodness, even amidst difficulties and uncertainties, can come to the point of discovering in the natural law written in their hearts (cf. Rom 2:14-15) the sacred value of human life from its beginning to its natural end, and affirm the right of every human being to have this fundamental personal good fully respected. "Every human interaction and the political community itself are founded"⁴⁶ on the recognition of this right.
109. In the face of a meaningless life, Jesus reveals to us the inner life of God in its most elevated mystery, Trinitarian communion. Such is the love of God who makes the human being, pilgrim in this world, his dwelling place: "We will come to him and make our dwelling with him" (Jn 14:23). In the face of the despair of a godless world that sees in death only the final end of existence, Jesus offers us the resurrection and eternal life in which God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28). In the face of the idolatry of earthly goods, Jesus presents life in God as the supreme value: "What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (Mk 8:36).⁴⁷

⁴⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *Prayer for the Fifth Conference*.

⁴⁵ GS 22.

⁴⁶ EV 2.

⁴⁷ Cf. EN 8.

110. In the face of hedonistic subjectivism, Jesus proposes surrendering life in order to gain it, for “whoever loves life loses it” (Jn 12:25). Christ’s disciples characteristically spend their lives as salt of the earth and light of the world. In the face of individualism, Jesus issues a call to live and journey together. Christian life deepens and develops only in fraternal communion. Jesus tells us, “You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers” (Mt. 23:8). In the face of depersonalization, Jesus helps build integrated identities.
111. One’s own vocation, one’s own freedom, and one’s own originality are gifts of God for plenitude and serving the world.
112. In the face of exclusion, Jesus defends the rights of the weak and a decent life for every human being. From their Master the disciples have learned to struggle against every form of contempt for life and exploitation of the human person.⁴⁸ Only the Lord is author and master of life. Human beings, his living image, are always sacred, from their conception until their natural death, in all circumstances and conditions of their life. In the face of the structures of death, Jesus makes full life present. “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10). Hence, he heals the sick, expels demons, and commits the disciples to promoting human dignity and to social relations based on justice.
113. In the face of nature under threat, Jesus, who was familiar with the Father’s care for the creatures that He feeds and beautifies (cf. Lk 12:28), calls us to care for the earth so that it may provide shelter and sustenance to all human beings (cf. Gen 1:29; 2:15).

3.3 THE GOOD NEWS OF THE FAMILY

114. We proclaim with joy the value of the family in Latin America and the Caribbean. Pope Benedict XVI states that the family
- the patrimony of humanity, constitutes one of the most important treasures of Latin American countries. The family was and is the school of faith, the training-ground for human and civil values, the hearth in which human life is born and is generously and responsibly welcomed. . . . The family is irreplaceable for the personal serenity it provides and for the upbringing of children.*⁴⁹
115. We thank Christ who reveals to us that “God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion.”⁵⁰ By choosing to live in family in our midst he elevates it to the dignity of “domestic church.”
116. We bless God for having created the human being man and woman, although today some would seek to confuse this truth: “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them” (Gn 1:27). It

⁴⁸ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Message for Lent, 2007*.

⁴⁹ IA 5.

⁵⁰ Cf. FC 11.

- is part of human nature that man and woman seek their reciprocity and complementarity in one another.⁵¹
117. Being loved by God fills us with joy. Human love finds its fullness when it shares in the divine love, in the love of Jesus who surrendered himself in solidarity for us in his total love to the end (cf. Jn 13:1; 15:9). Conjugal love is reciprocal giving between a man and a woman, the spouses: it is faithful and exclusive to death, and fruitful, open to life and to educating children, resembling the fruitful love of the Blessed Trinity.⁵² Conjugal love is assumed in the sacrament of marriage to signify the union of Christ with his Church, and hence in the grace of Jesus Christ it finds its purification, nourishment, and fullness (cf. Eph 5:25-33).
 118. It is within a family that a person discovers the reasons for, and the path to, belonging to the family of God. From it we receive life and the first experience of love and faith. The great treasure of educating children in the faith consists of the experience of a family life that receives faith, preserves it, celebrates it, passes it on, and gives testimony. Parents must take on a new awareness of their joyful and unrelinquishable responsibility for the integral formation of their children.
 119. God loves our families, despite so many wounds and divisions. The presence of Christ invoked through family prayer helps us overcome problems, heal wounds, and open up paths of hope. Many inadequacies in the home can be offset by services provided by the ecclesial community, family of families.

3.4 THE GOOD NEWS OF HUMAN ACTIVITY

3.4.1 Work

120. We praise God because in the beauty of creation, the work of his hands, there shines the meaning of work as participating in his creative task and as service to brothers and sisters. Jesus, the carpenter (cf. Mk 6:3), honored work and workers, and reminds us that work is not a mere appendage to life, but that it “constitutes one of the fundamental dimensions of man’s existence on earth,”⁵³ by which man and woman fulfill themselves as human beings.⁵⁴ Work guarantees the dignity and freedom of the human being, and is probably “the essential key to the whole ‘social question.’”⁵⁵
121. We give thanks to God because his word teaches us that despite the weariness that often accompanies work, the Christian knows that, combined with prayer, it serves not only earthly progress but also personal sanctification and the building of the Kingdom of God.⁵⁶ Unemployment, unjust pay for work, and unwillingness to work are contrary to God’s design. Responding to this design, the disciple and

⁵¹ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*, May 31, 2004.

⁵² HV 9.

⁵³ Cf. LE 4.

⁵⁴ Cf. LE 9.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 27; 2 Thes 3:10.

- the missionary promote the dignity of the worker and of labor, and just recognition of their rights and duties, develop the culture of work, and denounce all injustice. Safeguarding Sunday as a day of rest, family, and worship of the Lord assures a balance between work and rest. The community should create structures to offer work to less-abled people according to their possibilities.⁵⁷
122. We praise God for the talents, study, and decision of men and women to promote initiatives and projects that generate work and production, and elevate the human condition and the well-being of society. Business entrepreneurship is good and necessary when it respects the dignity of workers and concern for the environment, and is ordered to the common good. It is perverted when, seeking only profit, it violates the rights of workers and justice.

3.2.4 Science and technology

123. We praise God for those who cultivate the sciences and technology, offering a great number of goods and cultural values whose contributions include helping to extend life expectancy and the quality of life. Nevertheless, science and technology do not have the answers to the great questions of human life. The ultimate answer to the human being's fundamental question can only come from integral reason and ethics enlightened by God's revelation. When truth, good, and beauty are separated, and when human persons and their fundamental exigencies do not constitute the ethical criterion, science and technology turn against the human being who has created them.
124. Today the boundaries drawn between the sciences are disappearing. This way of understanding dialogue suggests the idea that no knowledge is completely autonomous. This situation opens to theology a terrain of opportunities for interacting with the social sciences.

3.5 THE GOOD NEWS OF THE UNIVERSAL DESTINY OF GOODS AND ECOLOGY

125. With the native peoples of the Americas, we praise the Lord who created the universe as the realm of life and the shared existence of all his sons and daughters, and left it to us as sign of his goodness and his beauty. Creation is also the manifestation of God's provident love; it has been entrusted to us so that we may care for it and transform it as a source of decent life for all. Although a greater valorization of nature has become more widespread today, we clearly see how many ways human beings threaten and are still destroying their habitat. "Our sister, mother earth"⁵⁸ is our common home and the place of God's covenant with human beings and with all creation. To disregard the mutual relationships and balance that God himself established among created realities is an offense against the Creator, an attack on biodiversity and ultimately against life. The missionary disciple to whom God has entrusted creation must contemplate it, care for it, and use it, while always respecting the order given it by the Creator.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 22.

⁵⁸ ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI, *Canticle of All Creatures*, 9.

126. The best way to respect nature is to promote a human ecology open to transcendence, which, while respecting the person and the family, environments and cities, follows Paul's urging to recapitulate all things in Christ and praise the Father with Him (cf. 1 Cor 3:21-23). The Lord has entrusted the world to all, to members of present and future generations. The universal destiny of goods demands solidarity with both the present and future generations. Because resources are ever more limited, their use must be regulated according to a principle of distributive justice, while respecting sustainable development.

3.6 THE CONTINENT OF HOPE AND LOVE

127. We thank God as disciples and missionaries because most Latin American and Caribbean people are baptized. God's providence has entrusted to us the precious legacy of belonging to the Church by the gift of baptism, which has made us members of the Body of Christ, pilgrim people of God in American lands, for over five hundred years. Our hope is stirred by the multitude of our children, the ideals of our young people, and the heroism of many of our families, which despite increasing difficulties, remain faithful to love. We thank God for the religiosity of our peoples, which shines forth in devotion to the suffering Christ and to his blessed Mother, in veneration to the saints with their patron feast days, in love for the pope and other shepherds, in love for the universal Church as great family of God which can never and must never leave its children alone or in misery.⁵⁹
128. We recognize the gift of the vitality of the pilgrim Church in Latin America and the Caribbean, its option for the poor, its parishes, its communities, its associations, its ecclesial movements, its new communities, and its many social and educational services. We praise the Lord because he has made of this continent a place of communion and communication of peoples and indigenous cultures. We are also grateful for the active role being taken by sectors that were formerly cast aside: women, indigenous, Afro-Americans, small farmers, and those living on the outskirts of large cities. The entire life of our peoples founded on Christ and redeemed by Him, can look to the future with hope and joy, accepting Pope Benedict XVI's call: "Only from the Eucharist will the civilization of love spring forth which will transform Latin America and the Caribbean, making them not only the Continent of Hope, but also the Continent of Love!"⁶⁰

⁵⁹ IA 1.

⁶⁰ IA 4.

THE VOCATION OF MISSIONARY DISCIPLES TO HOLINESS

4.1 CALLED TO FOLLOW JESUS CHRIST

129. God the Father goes out of himself, as it were, to call us to share in his life and glory. Through Israel, a people he makes his own, God reveals to us his project of life. Whenever Israel sought and needed its God, especially in national calamities, it had a singular experience of communion with Him who had led it to share in his truth, his life, and his holiness. Hence, it did not hesitate to attest that its God—unlike the idols—is the “living God” (Dt 5:25) who liberates it from oppressors (cf. Ex 3:7-10), who untiringly forgives it (cf. Ex 34:6; Sir 2:11), and who restores the salvation lost when the people, caught “in the snares of Sheol” (Ps 116:3), address Him in prayer (cf. Is 38:16). Jesus will say of this God—who is his Father—that he “is not God of the dead but of the living” (Mk 12:27).
130. In these last days, he has spoken through Jesus his Son (Heb 1 ff), with whom the fullness of time arrives (cf. Gal 4:4). God who is Holy and loves us, calls us through Jesus to be holy (cf. Eph 1:4-5).
131. The call issued by Jesus, the Master, brings with it something very new. In antiquity, masters invited their disciples to be bound to something transcendent, and the masters of the Law proposed adherence to the Law of Moses. Jesus invites us to encounter Him and to bind ourselves closely to Him, for He is the source of life (cf. Jn 15:5-15) and He alone has the words of eternal life (cf. Jn 6:68). In daily shared life with Jesus and in confrontation with followers of other masters, the disciples soon discover two completely original things about Jesus. First, it was not they who chose their master; it was Christ who chose them. Second, they were not chosen for something (e.g., to be purified, learn the Law) but for Someone, chosen to be closely bound up with his Person (cf. Mk 1:17; 2:14). Jesus chose them so that “they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach” (Mk 3:14), so that they could follow him in order to “be His” and be part “of his own” and share in his mission. The disciple experiences that the close bond with Jesus in the group of his own means participating in the Life that comes from the bosom of the Father; it means being formed to take on his own style of life and his same motivations (cf. Lk 6:40b), sharing his lot and taking on his mission of making all things new.
132. With the parable of the vine and the branches (cf. Jn 15:1-8) Jesus reveals the type of bond that He offers and that he expects of his own. He does not want a bond as “servants” (cf. Jn 8:33-36), because “a servant does not know what his master is doing” (Jn 15:15). The servant does not have entry to his master’s house, let alone to his life. Jesus wants his disciple to be bound to Him as “friend” and as “brother.” “Friends” enter into his Life, making it their own. Friends listen to Jesus, know the Father and make his Life (Jesus Christ) flow into their own existence (cf. Jn 15:14), marking the relationship with all (cf. Jn 15:12). A

- “brother” of Jesus (cf. Jn 20:17) shares in the life of the Risen One, Son of the heavenly Father, and hence Jesus and his disciple share the same life that comes from the Father, although Jesus does so by nature (cf. Jn 5:26; 10:30) and the disciple by participation (cf. Jn 10:10). The immediate consequence of this type of bond is the condition of brothers and sisters acquired by the members of his community.
133. Jesus makes them his family members, because he shares the same life that comes from the Father and asks of them, as disciples, intimate union with Him, obedience to the Word of the Father, so as to produce fruits of love in abundance. So attests St. John in the prologue to his Gospel: “he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name,” and they are children of God who “were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God” (Jn 1:12-13).
134. As disciples and missionaries, we are called to intensify our response of faith and to proclaim that Christ has redeemed all the sins and evils of humankind,
- All the harshness of the paradox can be heard in Jesus' seemingly desperate cry of pain on the Cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is not the cry of anguish of a man without hope, but the prayer of the Son who offers his life to the Father in love, for the salvation of all.⁶¹*
135. Responding to his call requires entering into the dynamic of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:29-37), who gives us the imperative of becoming neighbors, especially to those who suffer, and bringing about a society where no one is excluded, following the practice of Jesus who eats with publicans and sinners (cf. Lk 5:29-32), who welcomes the little ones and children (cf. Mk 10:13-16), who heals lepers (cf. Mk 1:40-45), who forgives and frees the sinful woman (cf. Lk 7:36-49; Jn 8:1-11), and who talks with the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4:1-26).

4.2 CONFIGURED TO THE MASTER

136. Admiration for the person of Jesus, his call and his loving gaze, seek to evoke a conscious and free response from the innermost heart of the disciple, and commitment of the whole person, upon knowing that Christ calls him by name (cf. Jn 10:3). It is a “yes” that radically commits the disciple’s freedom to self-surrender to Jesus Christ, Way, Truth, and Life (cf. Jn 14:6). It is a loving response to the one who first loved the disciple “to the end” (cf. Jn 13:1). The disciple’s response matures in this love of Jesus: “I will follow you wherever you go” (Lk 9:57).
137. The Holy Spirit, gift to us by the Father, identifies us with Jesus-Way, opening to us the mystery of salvation so that we may be his children and brothers and sisters of one another; he identifies us with Jesus-Truth, teaching us to give up our lies and our own ambitions; and he identifies us with Jesus-Life, enabling us to

⁶¹ NMI 25-26.

- embrace his plan of love and surrender ourselves so that others “may have life in Him.”
138. To be truly configured to the Master, the centrality of the commandment of love, which he expressly called his own new commandment, must be accepted: “love one another as I love you.” (Jn 15:12). This love, with Jesus’ own measure of complete gift of self, besides being the distinguishing feature of each Christian, cannot but be the characteristic of his Church, disciple-community of Christ, whose witness of fraternal charity will be the first and primary proclamation, “This is how all will know that you are my disciples” (Jn 13:35).
 139. In following Jesus Christ, we learn and practice the beatitudes of the Kingdom, Jesus Christ’s own style of life: his love and filial obedience to the Father, his tender compassion in the face of human suffering, his closeness to the poor and the insignificant, his fidelity to the mission entrusted to him, his servant love to the point of giving his own life. Today we contemplate Jesus Christ as the gospels transmit him to us so we may know what He did and to discern what we must do in present-day circumstances.
 140. Being identified with Jesus Christ means also sharing his fate: “where I am, there also will my servant be” (Jn 12:26). The lot of the Christian is the same as that of the Lord, even to the cross: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Mk 8:34). We are encouraged by the testimony of so many missionaries and martyrs of yesterday and today among our peoples who have gone to the point of sharing the cross of Christ and even surrendering their life.
 141. The Virgin Mary is a splendid image of configuration to the Trinitarian project, which is fulfilled in Christ. From her Immaculate Conception to her Assumption, she reminds us that the beauty of the human being is entirely in the bond of love with the Trinity, and that the fullness of our freedom is in the positive response that we give it.
 142. Numerous Christians in Latin America and the Caribbean seek to be configured to the Lord and to find Him in prayerfully listening to the Word, receiving his forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and his life in the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments, in personal commitment in solidarity to the most needy brothers and sisters and in the life of many communities that joyfully recognize the Lord in their midst.

4.3 SENT TO ANNOUNCE THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM OF LIFE

143. With words and actions, and with his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ, true man and true God, inaugurates in our midst the Father’s Kingdom of life, which will attain its fullness there where there will be no more “death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away” (Rev 21:4). During his life and his death on the cross, Jesus remains faithful to his Father and to his will (cf. Lk 22:42). During his ministry, the disciples were not capable of understanding that the meaning of his life sealed the meaning of his death. Much less could they

- understand that, by the Father’s design, the Son’s death was the source of fruitful life for all (cf. Jn 12:23-24). The paschal mystery of Jesus is the act of obedience and love for the Father and of surrender for all his brothers and sisters, by which the Messiah fully bestows that life that he was offering on the roads and in the villages of Palestine. By his voluntary sacrifice, the Lamb of God places his life as an offering in the hands of the Father (cf. Lk 23:46), who makes it salvation “for us” (1 Cor 1:30). By the paschal mystery, the Father seals the new covenant and generates a new people, founded on his gratuitous love as saving Father.
144. In calling his own to follow him, he gives them a very precise mandate: to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom to all nations (cf. Mt 23:19; Lk 24:46-48). Hence, every disciple is missionary, for Jesus makes him participate in his mission, while also binding him to himself as friend and brother. Thus, as He is witness to the mystery of the Father, so the disciples are witnesses to the Lord’s death and resurrection until He returns. Fulfilling this duty is not an optional task, but an integral part of Christian identity, because it is the witnessing extension of the calling itself.
145. When awareness of belonging to Christ grows by reason of the gratitude and joy that it produces, the eagerness to communicate the gift of this encounter to all also grows. The mission is not limited to a program or project, but it is sharing the experience of the event of the encounter with Christ, witnessing it and announcing it from person to person, from community to community, and from the Church to the ends of the earth (cf. Acts 1:8).
146. Benedict XVI reminds us that:
- The disciple, founded in this way upon the rock of God’s word, feels driven to bring the Good News of salvation to his brothers and sisters. Discipleship and mission are like the two sides of a single coin: when the disciple is in love with Christ, he cannot stop proclaiming to the world that only in him do we find salvation (cf. Acts 4:12). In effect, the disciple knows that without Christ there is no light, no hope, no love, no future.*⁶²
- This is the essential task of evangelization, which includes the preferential option for the poor, integral human promotion, and authentic Christian liberation.
147. Jesus went out to meet people in very different situations—men and women, poor and rich, Jews and foreigners, the just and sinners—and invited all to follow Him. Today he is still issuing the invitation to find in Him the Father’s love. Accordingly, the missionary disciple must be a man or a woman who makes the Father’s merciful love visible, especially to the poor and sinners.
148. In sharing this mission the disciples journey toward holiness. Living it in mission leads them into the heart of the world. Hence, holiness is not a flight toward self-absorption or toward religious individualism, nor does it mean abandoning the urgent reality of the enormous economic, social, and political problems of Latin

⁶² IA 3.

America and the world, let alone a flight from reality toward an exclusively spiritual world.⁶³

4.4. ENLIVENED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

149. At the outset of his public life, after his baptism, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit to the desert to prepare for his mission (cf. Mk 1:12-13), and with prayer and fasting, he discerned the will of the Father and overcame the temptations of following other paths. This same Spirit accompanied Jesus during his whole life (cf. Acts 10:38). After his resurrection, he communicated his life-giving Spirit to his own (cf. Acts 2:33).
150. Starting at Pentecost, the Church immediately experiences the fruitful interventions of the Spirit, divine vitality expressed in different gifts and charisms (cf. 1 Cor. 12:1-11) and varied offices that build up the church and serve evangelization (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28-29). By these gifts of the Spirit, the community extends the saving ministry of the Lord until He again is manifested at the end of time (cf. 1 Cor. 1:6-7). The Spirit in the Church shapes firm and courageous missionaries like Peter (cf. Acts 4:13) and Paul (cf. Acts 13:9), indicates the places that must be evangelized, and chooses those who must do so (cf. Acts 13:2).
151. The Church as marked and sealed “with Holy Spirit and fire” (Mt 3:11), continues the work of the Messiah, opening the gates of salvation for the believer (cf. 1 Cor 6:11). Paul states it as follows: “you are ... a letter of Christ administered by us, written not in ink but by the Spirit of the living God” (2 Cor. 3:3). The same and only Spirit guides and strengthens the Church in the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of faith, and the service of charity, until the Body of Christ attains the stature of its Head (cf. Eph 4:15-16). Thus, through the effective presence of his Spirit, God assures until the parousia his offer of life for men and women of all times and places, pressing forward the transformation of history and its dynamisms. Hence, today the Lord continues to pour out his Life through the work of the Church, which with “the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (1 Pet 1:12) continues the mission that Jesus Christ received from his Father (cf. Jn 20:21).
152. Jesus transmitted to us the words of His Father, and it is the Spirit who keeps the Church mindful of Christ’s words (cf. Jn 14:26). From the beginning, the disciples had been formed by Jesus in the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:2); in the Church, the Spirit is the inner Master who leads to the knowledge of all truth, forming disciples and missionaries. That is why the followers of Jesus should let themselves be constantly guided by the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:25), and become impassioned for the Father and the Kingdom: proclaiming the Good News to the poor, healing the sick, consoling the sorrowful, freeing the captives, and proclaiming to all the Lord’s year of grace (cf. Lk 4:18-19).

⁶³ IA 3.

153. This reality becomes present in our life by the work of the Holy Spirit, who also gives us light and life through the sacraments. By virtue of Baptism and Confirmation we are called to be missionary disciples of Jesus Christ and we enter into trinitarian communion in the Church, culminating in the Eucharist, which is fountain and project for the mission of the Christian. “The Holy Eucharist, then, brings Christian initiation to completion and represents the center and goal of all sacramental life.”⁶⁴

⁶⁴ SCa 17.

**THE COMMUNION OF THE MISSIONARY DISCIPLES
IN THE CHURCH**

5.1 CALLED TO LIVE IN COMMUNION

154. At the outset of his ministry, Jesus chooses the Twelve to live in communion with him (cf. Mk 3:14). To foster communion and evaluate the mission, Jesus asks them: “Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while” (Mk 6:31-32). On other occasions he will be with them to explain the mystery of the Kingdom to them (cf. Mk 4:11; 33-34). He does the same with the group of seventy-two disciples (cf. Lk 10: 17-20). It would seem that being alone with them means that Jesus wants to speak to the heart (cf. Hos 2:14). Likewise today the disciples’ encounter with Jesus in intimacy is indispensable for nourishing community life and missionary activity.
155. The disciples of Jesus are called to live in communion with the Father (1 Jn 1:3) and with his dead and risen Son, in “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 13:13). The mystery of the Trinity is the source, model, and goal of the mystery of the Church: “A people united by the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” called in Christ “like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”⁶⁵ The communion of the faithful and of the particular churches in the people of God is based on communion with the Trinity.
156. The vocation to missionary discipleship is con-vocation to communion in their church. There is no discipleship without communion. Given the temptation, very common in contemporary culture, of being churchless Christians and the tendency for new individualistic spiritual searches, we declare that faith in Jesus Christ reached us through ecclesial communion and that it “gives us a family, the universal family of God in the Catholic Church. Faith releases us from the isolation of the ‘Me’, because it leads us to communion.”⁶⁶ This means that a constitutive dimension of the Christian event is belonging to a concrete communion in which we can be part of an ongoing experience of discipleship and communion with the successors of the apostles and with the successor of Peter.
157. Upon receiving faith and Baptism, we Christians accept the action of the Holy Spirit who leads to confessing Jesus as Son of God and calling God “Abba.” “By means of the common priesthood of the People of God,”⁶⁷ all of us who are baptized in Latin America are called to live and transmit communion with the Trinity, for “evangelization is a calling to participate in the communion of the Trinity.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ LG 1.

⁶⁶ IA 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 5.

⁶⁸ PD 218.

158. Like the early communities of Christians, today we gather assiduously to hear the “teaching of the apostles and for the communal life, the breaking of the bread, and to the prayers” (Acts 2:42). The Church’s communion is nourished with the Bread of God’s Word and with the Bread of the Body of Christ. The Eucharist, sharing of all in the same bread of life and the same chalice of salvation, makes us members of the same body (cf. 1 Cor. 10:17). It is the source and culmination of Christian life,⁶⁹ its most perfect expression and food of life in communion. The new gospel relationships that arise from being sons and daughters of the Father and brothers and sisters in Christ are nourished in the Eucharist. The church celebrating is “home and school of communion,”⁷⁰ where the disciples share the same faith, hope, and love at the service of the mission of evangelization.
159. The Church, as “community of love,”⁷¹ is called to reflect the glory of God’s love, and thus attract persons and peoples to Christ. In practicing the unity desired by Jesus, the men and women of our time feel they are invited as they undertake the marvelous adventure of faith. “That they also may be in us, that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21). The church grows not by proselytizing but “by ‘attraction’: as Christ ‘attracts all to himself’ with the power of his love.”⁷² The church “attracts” when it lives in communion, for the disciples of Jesus will be recognized if they love one another as He loved us (cf. Rom 12:4-13; Jn 13:34).
160. The pilgrim Church lives in anticipation the beauty of love, which will be achieved at the end of time in perfect communion with God and human beings.⁷³ Its riches consist of living already now the “communion of saints,” that is, communion in divine goods among all the members of the church, particularly between those still on pilgrimage and those who already enjoy glory.⁷⁴ We find that there are many Catholics who express their faith and their belonging to the Church sporadically, especially through piety to Jesus Christ and to the Virgin, and their devotion to the saints. We invite them to deepen their faith and participate more fully in the life of their church, reminding them that “by virtue of their Baptism, they are called to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ.”⁷⁵
161. The church is communion in love. This is its essence and the sign by which it is called to be recognized as follower of Christ and servant of humankind. The new commandment is what unites the disciples to one another, recognizing one another as brothers and sisters, obedient to the same Master, members united to the same Head, and hence called to care for one another (1 Cor 13; Col 3:12-14).

⁶⁹ Cf. LG 11.

⁷⁰ NMI 43.

⁷¹ DCE 19.

⁷² BENEDICT XVI, *Homily at the Eucharist inaugurating the Fifth General Conference of Latin American Bishops*, May 13, 2007, Aparecida, Brazil.

⁷³ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Cf. LG 49.

⁷⁵ IA 3.

162. The diversity of charisms, ministries, and services opens the horizon to the everyday exercise of communion, through which the gifts of the Spirit are made available to others so that charity may abound (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-12). Each baptized person in effect bears gifts that he or she must develop in unity and complementarity with those of others so as to form the one Body of Christ, given up for the life of the world. Practical recognition of the organic unity and diversity of functions will assure greater missionary vitality and will be a sign and instrument of reconciliation and peace for our peoples. Each community is called to discover and integrate the silent hidden talents that the Spirit bestows as a gift on the faithful.
163. In the people of God, “Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other ... Communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion.”⁷⁶ In the particular churches, all of us members of the people of God are called to holiness in communion and mission, according to our specific vocations.

5.2 ECCLESIAL PLACES FOR COMMUNION

5.2.1 The diocese, privileged place of communion

164. Life in community is essential to the Christian vocation. Discipleship and mission always entail belonging to a community. God did not intend to save us in isolation, but by making us a People.⁷⁷ This is an aspect that sets apart living the Christian vocation from a mere individual religious feeling. Hence, the experience of faith is always lived in a particular church.
165. Gathered and fed by the Word and the Eucharist, the Catholic Church exists and is made manifest in each particular church, in communion with the Bishop of Rome.⁷⁸ As the Council says, it is “a portion of the people of God which is entrusted to a bishop to be shepherded by him with the cooperation of the presbytery.”⁷⁹
166. The particular church is fully church, but it is not the whole church. It is the concrete embodiment of the mystery of the Universal Church in a particular place and time. Hence it must be in communion with all other particular churches and under the supreme pastoral care of the pope, bishop of Rome, who presides over all the churches.
167. Maturation in following Jesus and passion to proclaim him means that the particular church must constantly renew itself in its life and missionary ardor. Only thus can it be home and school of communion, participation and solidarity for all the baptized. In its concrete social reality, the disciples experience the encounter with Jesus Christ alive, mature in their Christian vocation, discover the wealth and grace of being a missionary, and joyfully proclaim the Word.

⁷⁶ ChL 32.

⁷⁷ LG 9.

⁷⁸ ChL 85.

⁷⁹ ChD 11.

168. The diocese is called to be a “missionary community” in all its communities and structures.⁸⁰ Each diocese needs to enhance its missionary awareness, going out to meet those who do not yet believe in Christ within its own territory, and respond adequately to the major issues of the society of which it is a part. But it is also called to go out with a maternal spirit to seek all the baptized who do not participate in the life of the Christian communities.
169. The diocese, presided over by the bishop, is the first realm of communion and mission. It should inspire and lead a renewed and invigorated collaborative pastoral work so that the variety of charisms, ministries, services and organizations are directed toward the same missionary project in order to communicate life in its own territory. This project, which arises from a journey of varied participation, allows for collaborative ministry capable of responding to new challenges. For a project is only efficient if each Christian community, each parish, each educational community, each community of religious life, each association or movement, and each small community is actively part of the collaborative ministry of each diocese. Each is called to evangelize in a harmonious and integrated manner as part of the pastoral project of the diocese.

5.2.2 The parish, community of communities

170. Among the ecclesial communities in which missionary disciples of Jesus live and are formed, the parishes are paramount. They are the living cells of the Church,⁸¹ and the privileged place in which most of the faithful have a concrete experience of Christ and ecclesial communion.⁸² They are called to be homes and schools of communion. One of the great yearnings expressed in the churches of Latin America and the Caribbean during preparation of the Fifth General Conference, is that of a valiant action to renew parishes so that they may be truly

*places of Christian initiation, of education in and celebration of the faith, open to the full range of charisms, services, and ministries, organized in a communal and responsible way, capable of utilizing existing movements of the apostolate, attentive to the cultural diversity of the people, open to pastoral projects which go beyond the individual parish, and alert to the world in which they live.*⁸³

171. All members of the parish community are responsible for the evangelization of the men and women in each setting. The Holy Spirit, who acts in Jesus Christ, is also sent to all as members of the community, because his action is not limited to the scope of the individual, but is ever opening communities to the missionary task, as happened at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1-13).
172. Renewal of parishes at the outset of the third millennium requires reformulating its structures so that it may be a network of communities and groups, capable of

⁸⁰ Cf. ChL 32.

⁸¹ AS 10; SD 55.

⁸² EAm, 41.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

- being linked to one another, so that their members feel like and really are disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ in communion. What Jesus Christ “did and said” (Acts 1:1) while he was with us must be proclaimed from the parish. His person and his work are the Good News of salvation proclaimed by the ministers and witnesses of the Word that the Spirit raises up and inspires. The Word received is saving and revelatory of the mystery of God and of his will. Every parish is called to be the space where the Word is received and accepted, is celebrated and expressed, in adoration of the Body of Christ, and thus is the dynamic source of missionary discipleship. Its renewal requires that it always let itself be enlightened again by the living and efficacious Word.
173. The Fifth General Conference is an opportunity for all of our parishes to become missionary. The number of Catholics who come to our Sunday celebration is limited; the number of those who are afar, and of those who do not know Christ is immense. Missionary renewal of parishes is urgent in the evangelization of both large cities and the countryside in our continent, which is demanding imagination and creativity on our part so as to reach the multitudes who yearn for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The creation of new pastoral structures is an issue especially in the urban environment because many of those structures arose in other times to respond to the needs of the countryside.
174. The best efforts of parishes now at the outset of the third millennium must be aimed at inviting and training of lay missionaries. Only by multiplying them will we be able to respond to the missionary demands of today. It is also important to recall that the specific field of lay evangelizing activity is the complex world of work, culture, the sciences and the arts, politics, the media and the economy, as well as the realms of family, education, professional life, particularly in those settings where the church becomes present only through them.⁸⁴
175. Following the example of the early Christian community (cf. Acts 2:46-47), the parish community gathers to break the bread of the Word and of the Eucharist and to persevere in catechesis, the sacramental life, and the practice of charity.⁸⁵ It renews its life in Christ in the eucharistic celebration. For the parish, the Eucharist, in which the community of the disciples is strengthened, is a school of Christian life. There, together with eucharistic adoration and the practice of the sacrament of reconciliation in order to worthily approach to receive communion, its members are prepared so they can produce ongoing fruits of charity, reconciliation, and justice for the life of the world.
- a) The Eucharist, source and culmination of the Christian life, makes our parishes to be ever eucharistic communities that sacramentally live the encounter with Christ Savior.

⁸⁴ LG 31, 33; GS 43; AA 2.

⁸⁵ BENEDICT XVI, General Audience, Apostolic Visit to Brazil, May 23, 2007.

They also celebrate with joy:

- b) In Baptism: the incorporation of a new member into Christ and into his body which is the Church.
 - c) In Confirmation: the perfection of the baptismal character and strengthening of ecclesial belonging and of apostolic maturity.
 - d) In Penance or Reconciliation: the conversion that we all need to combat sin, which makes us inconsistent with our baptismal commitments.
 - e) In the Anointing of the Sick: the evangelical sense of community members who are seriously ill or in danger of death.
 - f) In the sacrament of Holy Orders: the gift of the apostolic ministry which continues to be exercised in the Church for the pastoral care of all the faithful.
 - g) In Matrimony: love of spouses which as God's grace germinates and grows to maturity making effective in daily life the complete self-giving that they made mutually in marrying.
176. The Eucharist, sign of unity with all, which extends and makes present the mystery of the Son of God made man (cf. Phil 2:6-8), poses for us the need for comprehensive evangelization. The vast majority of the Catholics of our continent live under the scourge of poverty. It has different expressions: economic, physical, spiritual, moral, and so forth. If Jesus came so that we might have life in fullness, the parish has the wonderful opportunity of responding to the great needs of our peoples. To do so it must follow the path of Jesus and become good Samaritan like Him. Each parish must come to embody in specific signs of solidarity its social commitment in the various settings in which it moves, with all "the imagination of charity."⁸⁶ It cannot stand apart from the great suffering endured by most of our people often in the form of hidden poverties. Any authentic mission combines concern for the transcendent dimension of human beings and for all their concrete needs, so that all may reach the fullness offered by Jesus Christ.
177. Benedict XVI reminds us that "a love for the Eucharist leads to a growing appreciation of the sacrament of Reconciliation"⁸⁷ We live in a culture marked by strong relativism and a loss of the sense of sin which leads us to forget the need for the sacrament of Reconciliation in order to worthily approach receiving the Eucharist. As pastors, we are called to encourage frequent confession. We invite our priests to devote sufficient time to offering the sacrament of Reconciliation with pastoral zeal and merciful hearts, and to prepare worthily the places of celebration, so that they may express the meaning of this sacrament. Likewise, we ask our faithful to appreciate this marvelous gift of God and to approach it in order to renew baptismal grace and to live more authentically the call of Jesus to

⁸⁶ NMI 50.

⁸⁷ SCr 20.

be his disciples and missionaries. We bishops and priests, ministers of reconciliation, are particularly called to live intimately with the Master. We are conscious of our weakness and of the need to be purified by the grace of the sacrament which is offered to us so that we may identify ever more with Christ, Good Shepherd, and missionary of the Father. As it is our joy to be fully available as ministers of reconciliation, we ourselves must also frequently approach, on our penitential journey, the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

5.2.3 Basic ecclesial communities and small communities

178. In the ecclesial experience of some churches of Latin America and the Caribbean, basic (base) ecclesial communities have been schools that have helped form Christians committed to their faith, disciples and missionaries of the Lord, as is attested by the generous commitment of so many of their members, even to the point of shedding their blood. They return to the experience of the early communities as described in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Acts 2:42-47). Medellín recognized in them an initial cell for building the Church and a focal point of faith and evangelization.⁸⁸ Puebla noted that small communities, especially basic ecclesial communities, enable the people to have access to greater knowledge of the Word of God, social commitment in the name of the Gospel, the emergence of new lay services, and education of the faith of adults.⁸⁹ However, it also noted that “not a few members of certain communities, and even entire communities, have been drawn to purely lay institutions or have even been turned into ideological radicals, and are now in the process of losing any authentic feel for the Church.”⁹⁰
179. In the missionary following of Jesus, ecclesial base communities have the word of God as source of their spirituality and the guidance of their Shepherds to assure ecclesial communion. They deploy their evangelizing and missionary commitment among the humblest and most distant, and they visibly express the preferential option for the poor. They are source and seed of varied services and ministries on behalf of life in society and the Church. Remaining in communion with their bishop and participating in the overall thrust of diocesan pastoral activity, ecclesial base communities become a sign of vitality in the particular church. By thus acting in conjunction with parish groups, associations, and ecclesial movements, they can help revitalize parishes, making them a community of communities. In their effort to meet the challenges of the contemporary age, ecclesial base communities shall take care not to alter the precious treasure of the Church’s tradition and magisterium.
180. As a response to the demands of evangelization, along with ecclesial base communities there are other valid forms of small communities and even networks of communities, of movements, groups of life, prayer, and reflection on the Word of God. All ecclesial communities and groups will yield fruit insofar as the

⁸⁸ Cf. *Medellin*, 15.

⁸⁹ Cf. PD 629.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 630.

Eucharist is the center of their life and the Word of God is a beacon of their journey and activity in the one Church of Christ.

5.2.4 Episcopal conferences and communion between the churches

181. In addition to the service that they provide in their particular churches, the bishops exercise this office together with the other diocesan churches. They thereby embody and manifest the bond of community that unites them to one another. Especially since Vatican II, this experience of episcopal community must be understood as an encounter with the living Christ, present in the brethren united in his name.⁹¹ To grow in this brotherhood and in shared pastoral coresponsibility, bishops must cultivate the spirituality of communion in order to augment the bonds of collegiality that unite them to the other bishops in their own conference, but also to the entire college of bishops and to the church of Rome, presided over by the successor of Peter: *cum Petro et sub Petro*.⁹² The bishops find in the episcopal conference their space for discerning in solidarity the major problems of society and the Church, and the stimulus for offering pastoral guidelines for encouraging the members of the People of God to assume their vocation of being missionary disciples faithfully and decisively.
182. The People of God is built up as a communion of particular churches, and through them, as an exchange between cultures. In this framework, bishops and local churches express their concern for all the churches, especially for those closest, united in ecclesiastical provinces, regional conferences, and other forms of interdiocesan association within each nation or between countries of the same region or continent. These varied forms of community vigorously stimulate the “relationships of brotherhood between dioceses and parishes,”⁹³ and foster “greater cooperation between sister churches.”⁹⁴
183. CELAM is an ecclesial organism of fraternal aid among bishops whose primary concern is to work together for the evangelization of the continent. Over the course of its fifty years, it has provided very important services to the bishops conferences and to our particular churches, among which we highlight the general conferences, regional gatherings, and study seminars in its various agencies and institutions. The result of all this effort is a brotherhood felt between the bishops of the continent and a theological reflection and a common pastoral language that fosters communion and exchange between the churches.

5.3 MISSIONARY DISCIPLES WITH SPECIFIC VOCATIONS

184. The condition of disciple springs from Jesus Christ as from its fountain, through faith and Baptism, and grows in the Church, the community where all its members acquire equal dignity and participate in various ministries and charisms.

⁹¹ Cf. EAm 37.

⁹² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolos suos*.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

The proper and specific way of living out baptismal holiness in the service of the Kingdom of God is thereby embodied in the Church.

185. In faithfully fulfilling their baptismal vocation, disciples must take into account the challenges that today's world presents to the Church of Jesus, including: the exodus of believers to sects and other religious groups; cultural trends contrary to Christ and the Church; frustration among priests faced with immense pastoral work; the scarcity of priests in many places; changing cultural paradigms; the phenomenon of globalization and secularization; the grave problems of violence, poverty, and injustice; the growing culture of death, which affects life in all its forms.

5.3.1 Bishops, missionary disciples of Jesus High Priest

186. As successors of the apostles, together with the Supreme Pontiff and under his authority,⁹⁵ we bishops have accepted with faith and hope the calling to serve the people of God, according to the heart of Christ, Good Shepherd. Together with all the faithful and by virtue of baptism we are, first of all, disciples and members of the People of God. Like all the baptized and together with them, we want to follow Jesus, Master of life and truth in the communion of the Church. As shepherds, servants of the Gospel, we are conscious of being called to embody love for Jesus Christ and for the Church in the intimacy of prayer, and to give of ourselves to our brothers and sisters, over whom we preside in charity. It is as Saint Augustine says: with you I am Christian, for you I am bishop.
187. The Lord calls us to promote the charity and holiness of the faithful by all means. We strive so that the people of God will grow through the sacraments presided over by us and by the other ordained ministers. We are called to be teachers of the faith, and hence to announce the Good News, which is source of hope for all, to oversee and promote the Catholic faith with care and courage. By virtue of the close fraternity that comes from the sacrament of holy orders, it is our duty to cultivate in a special way the bonds that unite us to our priests and deacons. We serve Christ and the Church through discernment of the will of the Father to reflect the Lord in his way of thinking, feeling, speaking and behaving in the midst of human beings. In short, we bishops must be close joyful witnesses of Jesus Christ, Good Shepherd (cf. Jn 1:1-18).
188. As shepherds and spiritual guides of the communities entrusted to us, we bishops are called "to make the Church the home and the school of communion."⁹⁶ As leaders of communion, we have the mission of welcoming, discerning, and fostering charisms, ministries, and services in the Church. As fathers and center of unity, we strive to present to the world a face of the Church in which all feel welcome as in their own home. For the entire people of God, especially for priests, we seek to be fathers, friends, and brothers, always open to dialogue.

⁹⁵ Cf. ChD 2.

⁹⁶ MNI 43.

189. To grow in these attitudes, we bishops must seek constant union with the Lord, cultivate the spirituality of communion with all who believe in Christ and promote the bonds of collegiality that unite them to the college of bishops, particularly to its head, the bishop of Rome. We cannot forget that the bishop is principle and builder of the unity of his particular church and sanctifier of his people, witness of hope and father of the faithful, especially of the poor, and that his primary task is to be teacher of the faith, proclaimer of the word of God and the administration of the sacraments, as servants of the flock.
190. The whole people of God should be grateful to retired bishops, who as pastors have given up their lives to the service of the Kingdom, being disciples and missionaries. We welcome them with kindness, and we draw on their vast apostolic experience, which can still produce many fruits. They still have strong connections to the dioceses that were entrusted to them, to which they are united by their charity and their prayer.

5.3.2 Priests, missionary disciples of Jesus Good Shepherd

5.3.2.1 Identity and mission of priests

191. We are joyfully appreciative and grateful that the immense majority of priests live out their ministry faithfully and are a model for others, that they take time for their own ongoing formation, that they cultivate a spiritual life that encourages other priests, centered on hearing the Word of God and on daily celebration of the Eucharist. “My mass is my life and my life is a prolonged mass!”⁹⁷ We also thank those who have been sent to other churches prompted by an authentic missionary spirit.
192. A glance at our actual moment shows us situations that affect and challenge the life and ministry of our priests. These include the theological identity of the priestly ministry, how they fit into contemporary culture, and situations that affect their life.
193. The first challenge has to do with the theological identity of the priestly ministry. Vatican II establishes the ministerial priesthood at the service of the common priesthood of the faithful; each participates in the single priesthood of Christ, although in a qualitatively different way.⁹⁸ Christ, High and Eternal Priest, has redeemed us and has shared his divine life with us. In Him we are all children of the same Father, and brothers and sisters of each other. The priest cannot fall into the temptation of regarding himself as a mere delegate or simply a representative of the community; rather he is a gift to it by the anointing of the Spirit, and by his special union with Christ the head. “Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God” (Heb 5:1).

⁹⁷ HURTADO, Alberto, *Un Fuego que Enciende Otros Fuegos*, pp. 69-70.

⁹⁸ Cf. LG 10.

194. The second challenge has to do with the priest's ministry inserted in contemporary culture. The priest is called to be familiar with it in order to sow the seed of the Gospel within it, that is, so that the message of Jesus may become a valid, comprehensible, hope-filled, and relevant interpretation for the life of man and woman today, and particularly for youth. This challenge includes the need to suitably enhance the initial and ongoing formation of priests in its four dimensions (human, spiritual, intellectual, pastoral).⁹⁹
195. The third challenge has to do with vital and affective aspects, celibacy, and an intense spiritual life grounded in pastoral charity, which draws nourishment from personal experience with God and in communion with the brethren. It likewise has to do with cultivating fraternal relations with the bishop, the other priests of the diocese, and lay people. In order for the priest's ministry to be coherent and give witness, he must love and carry out his pastoral task in communion with the bishop and with the other priests of the diocese. The priestly ministry that springs from Holy Orders has a "radical communal shape" and can only be carried out as a "collective work."¹⁰⁰ The priest must be a man of prayer, mature in his choice of life for God, and must make use of the means of perseverance, such as the sacrament of confession, devotion to the Blessed Virgin, mortification, and fervent dedication to his pastoral mission.
196. The priest is particularly invited to cherish celibacy as a gift from God which allows him a special configuration with Christ's own lifestyle and makes him a sign of pastoral charity in surrender to God and to human beings with a full and undivided heart. "This choice on the part of the priest expresses in a special way the dedication which conforms him to Christ and his exclusive offering of himself for the Kingdom of God."¹⁰¹ The celibate seeks to assume his own affectivity and sexuality with maturity, living them serenely and joyfully on a shared journey.¹⁰²
197. Other challenges are of a structural nature, such as the existence of parishes that are too large and make it difficult to carry out adequate pastoral ministry; very poor parishes which force pastors do other work in order to be able to survive; parishes located in areas of extreme violence and insecurity; and shortage and poor distribution of priests in the churches of the continent.
198. In the image of the Good Shepherd, the priest is called to be a man of mercy and compassion, close to his people and servant of all, particularly those suffering great need. Pastoral charity, the fountain of priestly spirituality, inspires and unifies his life and ministry. Conscious of his limitations, he values organic pastoral work and enthusiastically collaborates in his presbyterium.

⁹⁹ Cf. PDV 72.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 17.

¹⁰¹ SCa 24.

¹⁰² Cf PDV 44.

199. The People of God feel the need for disciple-priests: those who have a deep experience of God, are configured to the heart of the Good Shepherd, docile to the motions of the Spirit, who are nourished by the Word of God, the Eucharist and prayer; for missionary-priests: who are moved by pastoral charity which leads them to care for the flock entrusted to them and to seek out who have strayed furthest, preaching the Word of God, always in deep communion with their bishop, priests, deacons, men and women religious, and lay people; for servant-of-life-priests: who are alert to the needs of the poorest, committed to the defense of the rights of the weakest, and promoters of the culture of solidarity. The need is also for priests full of mercy, available to administer the sacrament of Reconciliation.
200. All this requires that dioceses and bishops conferences develop a ministry for priests emphasizing the specific spirituality and permanent and integral formation of priests. The pastoral exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* stresses that:

*Permanent or ongoing formation, precisely because it is "permanent," should always be a part of the priest's life. In every phase and condition of his life, at every level of responsibility he has in the Church, he is undergoing formation. Clearly then, the possibilities for formation and the different kinds of formation are connected with the variety of ages, conditions of life and duties one finds among priests.*¹⁰³

Taking into account the number of priests who left the ministry, let each particular church seek to establish with them relationships of fraternity and mutual collaboration in accordance with the norms laid down by the Church.

5.3.2.2 Pastors, inspirers of a community of missionary disciples

201. Parish renewal requires new attitudes in pastors and in the priests who are in its service. The first requirement is that the pastor be an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ, because only a priest in love with the Lord can renew a parish. But he must likewise be an ardent missionary who lives in constant yearning to seek out those who are separated and is not satisfied with mere administration.
202. But the commitment of the priest and communities of religious is clearly not enough. All lay people should feel jointly responsible for the formation of disciples and in mission. This means that parishes must promote and foster missionary diversity and generously devote time to the sacrament of Reconciliation. A renewed parish multiplies persons who provide services and add ministries. Imagination is likewise required in this field to find a response to the many and ever changing challenges posed by the situation, requiring new services and ministries. Combining all of them in the unity of a single evangelizing project is essential for assuring missionary communion.

¹⁰³ PDV 76.

203. A parish, community of missionary disciples, needs committees that move beyond any sort of bureaucracy. Parish Pastoral Councils will have to be formed by missionary disciples continually concerned to reach out to all. The Economic Concerns Committee, together with the entire parish community, will work to obtain necessary funding, so that the mission may advance and become a reality in all environments. These and all such committees must be inspired by a spirituality of missionary communion:

Unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, "masks" of communion rather than its means of expression and growth.¹⁰⁴

204. Within the parish boundaries, the Christian family is the first and most basic ecclesial community. That is where the fundamental values of Christian life are lived and passed on. It is called "domestic church."¹⁰⁵ In it the parents are the primary transmitters of the faith to their children, teaching them through example and word to be true missionary disciples. Likewise, when this experience of missionary discipleship is authentic, "a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families, and of the neighborhood of which it forms part."¹⁰⁶ This operates in daily life, "in and through the events, problems, difficulties and circumstances of everyday life."¹⁰⁷ The Spirit who makes everything new, acts even within abnormal situations in which a process of transmission of faith takes place, but we must recognize that under current circumstances, this process sometimes faces considerable difficulties. The parish intends to reach not only isolated individuals, but the life of all families, to enhance their missionary dimension.

5.3.3 Permanent deacons, missionary disciples of Servant Jesus

205. Some disciples and missionaries of the Lord are called to serve the Church as permanent deacons. Most of them are enhanced by the twofold sacramentality of Matrimony and Holy Orders. They are ordained to serve the Word, charity, and the liturgy, especially for the sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony; also to aid in the formation of new ecclesial communities, especially in geographical and cultural frontline areas, where the Church's evangelizing activity ordinarily does not reach.
206. Each permanent deacon must carefully cultivate his involvement in the body of deacons, in faithful communion with his bishop and in close unity with the priests and other members of the people of God. When they are at the service of a parish, deacons and priests must seek dialogue and work in communion.
207. They must receive a suitable human, spiritual, doctrinal, and pastoral formation with suitable programs that make provision for the wife and family, when they are married. Their formation will prepare them to fruitfully exercise their ministry in

¹⁰⁴ NMI 43.

¹⁰⁵ LG 11.

¹⁰⁶ FC 52; CCC 1655-1658, 2204-2206, 2685.

¹⁰⁷ FC 51.

the fields of evangelization, the life of the communities, the liturgy and social action, especially with those most in need, thereby giving witness to Christ-servant alongside the sick, those who suffer, migrants and refugees, the outcast, and victims of violence, and the imprisoned.

208. The Fifth Conference expects from deacons an evangelical witness and a missionary drive so that they may be apostles in their families, their jobs, their communities, and on the new frontiers of mission. Candidates to the permanent diaconate should not be given expectations that go beyond the proper nature of the diaconate level.

5.3.4 Faithful laymen and laywomen, disciples and missionaries of Jesus, Light of the world

209. The laity are:

*by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.*¹⁰⁸

They are “human beings of the Church in the midst of the world, and human beings of the world living within the Church.”¹⁰⁹

210. Their proper and specific mission takes place in the world, in such a way that, through their witness and activity, they contribute the transformation of situations and the creation of just structures according to the criteria of the Gospel.

*Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, suffering.*¹¹⁰

It is also their duty to make the faith they profess credible by displaying authenticity and coherency in their conduct.

211. Lay people are also called to participate in the Church’s pastoral action, first by the witness of their lives, and second, by actions in the field of evangelization, liturgical life, and other forms of apostolate, according to local needs under the guidance of the shepherds. The latter shall be willing to open spaces for them to participate and to entrust them with ministries and responsibilities in a Church where all live out their Christian commitment responsibly. We commend catechists, delegates of the Word, and leaders of communities who are doing

¹⁰⁸ Cf. LG 31.

¹⁰⁹ PD 786.

¹¹⁰ EN 70.

- magnificent work within the Church,¹¹¹ and we encourage them to continue the commitment that they acquired in Baptism and Confirmation.
212. In order to carry out their mission with pastoral responsibility, lay people need a solid doctrinal, pastoral, and spiritual formation and proper support to give witness to Christ and to the values of the Kingdom in the realm of social, economic, political and cultural life.
213. Today the entire Church in Latin America and the Caribbean wants to place itself in a state of mission. As Pope John Paul II used to tell us, the continent cannot be evangelized today without the collaboration of the faithful laity.¹¹² They must play an active and creative role in the preparation and execution of pastoral projects for the community. This demands a greater open-mindedness on the part of their shepherds in understanding and accepting the “being” and the “doing” of lay people in the church, who by their Baptism and Confirmation are disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ. In other words, the lay person must definitely be taken into account in a spirit of communion and participation.¹¹³
214. In this regard, the strengthening of varied lay associations, ecclesial apostolic movements, paths of Christian formation, ecclesial communities, and new communities, which should be supported by the pastors, are a hopeful sign. They help many baptized and many missionary groups to assume their Christian identity more responsibly, and to collaborate more actively in the mission of evangelization. In recent decades, various associations and lay apostolic movements have taken a strong leading role. Accordingly, adequate discernment, encouragement, coordination, and pastoral guidance, especially by the successors of the apostles, will help order this gift toward the edification of the one Church.¹¹⁴
215. We recognize the value and effectiveness of parish councils, and of diocesan and national councils of lay people, because they foster communication and participation in the church and their active presence in the world. Building citizenship in the broadest sense, and building ecclesiality in lay people is one and the same movement.

5.3.5 Consecrated men and women, missionary disciples of Jesus, the Father’s Witness

216. Consecrated life is a gift of the Father through the Spirit to his Church,¹¹⁵ and constitutes a decisive element for its mission.¹¹⁶ It is expressed in the monastic, active, and contemplative life, secular institutes, as well as by societies of

¹¹¹ Cf. LG 31, 33; GS 43; AA 2.

¹¹² EAm 44.

¹¹³ Cf. PG II.

¹¹⁴ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Homily in the celebration of first vespers on the Vigil of Pentecost*, Meeting with movements and new ecclesial communities, June 3, 2006.

¹¹⁵ VC 1.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

- apostolic life and other new forms. It is a path of following Christ in a special way, to devote oneself to him with an undivided heart, and like Him to be placed at the service of God and humankind, assuming the form of life that Christ chose in coming into this world: a celibate, poor, and obedient life.¹¹⁷
217. In communion with their shepherds, consecrated men and women are called to make the places where they are present, their fraternal life in communion and their works, spaces where the Gospel is explicitly proclaimed, primarily to the very poor, as they have done in our continent since the beginning of evangelization. Thus, in keeping with their founding charisms, they collaborate in bringing into being a new generation of disciple and missionary Christians and a society where the justice and dignity of the human person is respected.
 218. From its very being, consecrated life is called to be expert in communion, within Church and society. Its life and its mission must be inserted within the particular Church and in communion with the bishop. To that end, common channels and collaborative initiatives must be created, so as to lead to mutual knowledge and esteem and sharing mission with all those called to follow Jesus.
 219. In a continent where serious tendencies toward secularization are evident likewise in consecrated life, religious are called to give witness to the absolute primacy of God and his Kingdom. Consecrated life becomes witness of the God of life in a social context that relativizes its value (obedience); it witnesses to freedom in the face of the market and wealth which evaluate people by what they have (poverty); and it witnesses to a surrender in radical and free love to God and to humankind as opposed to the eroticization and trivialization of relations (chastity).
 220. Today in Latin America and the Caribbean, consecrated life is called to be a discipleship life, fervent about Jesus-Way to the merciful Father, and hence deeply mystical and communitarian in nature. It is called to be a missionary life, fervent about proclaiming Jesus-Word of the Father; and hence radically prophetic, capable of illuminating in the light of Christ the shadows of the contemporary world and the paths of new life, and hence what is required is a prophetic witness that yearns even to surrender one's life in continuity with the tradition of holiness and martyrdom of so many religious men and women over the history of the continent. It must likewise be at the service of the world, fervent for Jesus-Life of the Father, who becomes present in the littlest ones and those who are least whom it wishes to serve from its own charism and spirituality.
 221. Latin America and the Caribbean especially need the contemplative life, as witness that only God is sufficient to fill the sense of meaning and joy.

In a world that is losing the sense of the divine to overvaluation of the materials, you dear sisters, committed from your cloisters in being witnesses of the values for which they live, are to be witnesses of the Lord

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14, 16, and 18..

*to today's world, and pour out with your prayer a new breath of life in the church and in people today.*¹¹⁸

222. The Holy Spirit is still raising up new forms of consecrated life in the Church, which must be welcomed and accompanied in their growth and development within the local churches. The bishop must make a serious and judicious discernment on their meaning, necessity, and authenticity. The shepherds appreciate as a gift the consecrated virginity of those who commit themselves to Christ and to his Church with generosity and undivided heart, and they intend to watch over their initial and ongoing formation.
223. The Confederation of Secular Institutes (CISAL) the Confederation of Religious Men and Women (CLAR), and National Conferences are structures of service and leadership which in authentic communion with the shepherds and under their guidance in fruitful and friendly dialogue¹¹⁹ are called to stimulate their members to engage in mission as disciples and missionaries at the service of the Kingdom of God.¹²⁰
224. Latin American and Caribbean peoples expect a great deal of consecrated life, especially from the testimony and contribution of contemplative religious women and those in apostolic life, who together with other brother religious, members of secular institutes, and societies of apostolic life, display the Church's motherly face. Their yearning to listen, welcome, and serve, and their witness to the alternative values of the Kingdom show that a new Latin American and Caribbean society, founded on Christ, is possible.¹²¹

5.4 THOSE WHO HAVE LEFT THE CHURCH TO JOIN OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS

225. In our pastoral experience, often sincere people who leave our church do not do so because of what "non-Catholic" groups believe, but fundamentally for what they live; not for doctrinal but for vivential reasons; not for strictly dogmatic, but for pastoral reasons; not due to theological problems, but to methodological problems of our Church. They hope to find answers to their concerns. They are seeking, albeit with serious dangers, answers to some aspirations that perhaps they have not found in the Church, as ought to be the case.
226. In our church we should enhance work along four lines:
- a) *Religious experience.* In our Church we must offer all our faithful "a personal encounter with Jesus Christ," a profound and intense religious experience, a *kerygmatic* proclamation and the personal witness of the evangelizers that leads to a personal conversion and to a thorough change of life.

¹¹⁸ John Paul II, *Address to Cloistered Religious in Cathedral of Guadalajara*, Mexico, January 30, 1979.

¹¹⁹ Cf. PC 23; CIC 708.

¹²⁰ Cf. VC 50-53.

¹²¹ Cf. IA 5.

- b) *Community life.* Our faithful are seeking Christian communities where they are accepted fraternally and feel valued, visible, and included in the Church. Our faithful must really feel that they are members of an ecclesial community and stewards of its development. That will allow for greater commitment and self-giving in and for the Church.
- c) *Biblical and doctrinal formation.* Along with a strong religious experience and notable community life, our faithful need to deepen knowledge of the Word of God and the contents of the faith, because that is the only way to bring their religious experience to maturity. Along this strongly experiential and communal path, doctrinal formation is not experienced as theoretical and cold knowledge, but as a fundamental and necessary tool in spiritual, personal, and community growth.
- d) *Missionary commitment of the entire community.* It goes out to meet those who are afar, is concerned about their situation so as to attract them once more to the Church and invite them to return to it.

5.5 ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

5.5.1 Ecumenical dialogue so that the world may believe

- 227. The comprehension and practice of the ecclesiology of communion leads us to ecumenical dialogue. The relationship with baptized brothers and sisters of other churches and ecclesial communities is a path that the disciple and missionary cannot relinquish,¹²² for lack of unity represents a scandal, a sin, and a setback in fulfilling Christ's desire: "that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me" (Jn 17:21).
- 228. The justification for ecumenism is not merely sociological, but evangelical, trinitarian, and baptismal. "It expresses the real albeit imperfect communion" already existing between "those who were reborn by Baptism" and the concrete testimony of fraternity.¹²³ The magisterium insists on the trinitarian and baptismal character of ecumenical effort, where dialogue emerges as a spiritual and practical attitude, along a route of conversion and reconciliation. Only thus will the day arrive when "when we will be able to celebrate the Holy Eucharist together with all believers in Christ."¹²⁴ A fruitful way to advance toward communion is to recover in our communities the meaning of the baptism commitment.
- 229. Today the authentic apologetics practiced by Church fathers as explanation of the faith must be restored. Apologetics in itself does not have to be negative or merely defensive. Rather it entails the ability to say clearly and convincingly what is in our minds and hearts, as Saint Paul says, "living the truth in love" (Eph

¹²² Cf. UUS 3.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 96.

¹²⁴ SCa 56.

- 4:15). Today more than ever Christ's disciples and missionaries need a renewed apologetics so that all may have life in Him.
230. Sometimes we forget that unity is primarily a gift of the Holy Spirit, and we do not pray much for this intention.
- This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name, "spiritual ecumenism."*¹²⁵
231. Over forty years ago, Vatican II recognized the action of the Holy Spirit in the movement for the unity of Christians. Since then we have gathered many fruits. In this field, we need more and better qualified agents of dialogue. It is good to make better known the statements signed by the Catholic Church in the field of ecumenism since the Council. Bilateral and multilateral dialogues have produced good fruits. It is also advisable to study the *Ecumenical Directory* and its instructions on catechesis, the liturgy, priestly formation and pastoral ministry.¹²⁶ The human mobility typical of today's world can be a propitious occasion for the ecumenical dialogue of life.¹²⁷
232. In our situation, the emergence of new religious groups, plus the tendency to confuse ecumenism with interreligious dialogue, have hindered obtaining greater fruits in ecumenical dialogue. Hence, we encourage ordained ministers, lay people and those in consecrated life to participate in ecumenical bodies after a careful preparation and meticulously following by their shepherds and to carry out joint actions in the various fields of ecclesial, pastoral, and social life. Indeed, ecumenical contact favors mutual esteem, encourages listening to God's Word in common, and calls to conversion those who claim to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ. We hope that the promotion of the unity of Christians, undertaken by Bishops Conferences takes firm hold and bears fruit under the light of the Holy Spirit.
233. At this new stage of evangelization, we want dialogue and ecumenical cooperation to lead to promoting new forms of discipleship and mission in communion. We note that where dialogue is established, proselytism diminishes, mutual knowledge and respect increase, and possibilities for witnessing together expand.
234. As a generous response to the Lord's prayer "that all may be one" (Jn 17:21), the successors of Peter have encouraged us to advance patiently along the path of unity. John Paul II exhorts us:

¹²⁵ UR 8.

¹²⁶ Cf. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of those Engaged in Pastoral Work*, nn. 3-5.

¹²⁷ Cf. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Ministry to Migrants and Itinerant People, *Instruction Erga migrantes caritas Christi* 56-58.

*In this courageous journey towards unity, the transparency and the prudence of faith require us to avoid both false irenicism and indifference to the Church's ordinances. Conversely, that same transparency and prudence urge us to reject a halfhearted commitment to unity and, even more, a prejudicial opposition or a defeatism which tends to see everything in negative terms.*¹²⁸

As he began his pontificate, Benedict XVI said:

*Good intentions do not suffice. Concrete gestures that enter hearts and stir consciences are essential, inspiring in everyone that inner conversion that is the prerequisite for all ecumenical progress.*¹²⁹

5.5.2 Relationship with Judaism and interreligious dialogue

235. We gratefully recognize the bonds that connect us to the Jewish people, with which we are united by faith in the one God and his revealed Word in the Old Testament.¹³⁰ They are our “elder brothers” in the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We are pained by the history of misunderstandings that they have suffered in our countries as well. There are now many common causes that demand greater collaboration and mutual respect.
236. By the breath of the Holy Spirit and other means known to God, Christ’s grace can reach all those whom He redeemed, beyond the ecclesial community, and in different ways.¹³¹ Explaining and promoting this salvation already at work in the world is one of the tasks of the church with regard to the Lord’s words: “be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).
237. Interreligious dialogue, particularly with the monotheistic religions, is based directly on the mission that Christ entrusted to us, and it calls for wise articulation between proclamation and dialogue as constitutive elements of evangelization.¹³² With that attitude the Church, “universal sacrament of salvation,”¹³³ reflects the light of Christ which “enlightens everyone” (Jn 1:9). The presence of the Church among non-Christian religions is comprised of effort, discernment, and testimony, supported by theological faith, hope and charity.¹³⁴
238. Even if the subjectivism and poorly defined identity of certain proposals make contacts difficult, this does not allow us to abandon the commitment and the grace of dialogue.¹³⁵ Rather than giving up, investment must be made in knowing the

¹²⁸ UUS 79,

¹²⁹ BENEDICT XVI, First message at the end of the eucharistic concelebration with the cardinal electors in the Sistine Chapel, Wednesday April 20, 2005.

¹³⁰ Cf. NAe 4.

¹³¹ Cf. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Congregation for the Evangelization of peoples, *Dialogue and proclamation*, 1991, 29.

¹³² Cf. NMI 55.

¹³³ LG 1.

¹³⁴ Cf. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Congregation for the Evangelization of peoples, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 1991, n.40.

¹³⁵ *ibid.* 89.

religions, in theological and pastoral discernment, in training competent agents for interreligious dialogue, and paying attention to the different religious visions present in the cultures of our continent. Interreligious dialogue does not mean ceasing to proclaim the good News of Jesus Christ to non-Christian peoples, albeit with meekness and respect for their religious convictions.

239. In addition to its theological character, interreligious dialogue has a specific significance in the building of the new humanity: it opens unexplored paths of Christian testimony, promotes the freedom and dignity of peoples, stimulates collaboration for the common good, overcomes violence motivated by fundamentalist religious attitudes, and educates in peace and civic tolerance: it is an area of the beatitudes which are promoted by the Church's social doctrine.

**THE FORMATIVE ITENERARY
OF MISSIONARY DISCIPLES**

6.1 A TRINITARIAN SPIRITUALITY OF ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS CHRIST

240. An authentic proposal of a encounter with Jesus Christ must be established upon a solid foundation of Trinity-Love. The experience of a triune God who is inseparable unity and community enables us to overcome selfishness and fully find ourselves in service to the other. The baptismal experience is the starting point of all Christian spirituality, which is based on the Trinity.
241. It is God the Father who attracts us through the eucharistic surrender of his Son (cf. Jn 6:44), gift of love with which he went out to meet his children, so that renewed by the power of the Spirit, we might call him Father:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" (Gal. 4:4-6).

This is a new creation, where the love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit renews the life of creatures.

242. In the story of Trinitarian love, Jesus of Nazareth, man like us and God with us, died and risen, is given to us as Way, Truth, and Life. In the encounter of faith with the astonishing realism of his Incarnation we have been able to hear, see with our eyes, contemplate, and touch with our hands the Word of life (cf. 1 Jn 1:1), and we experience

God himself who goes in search of the "stray sheep," a suffering and lost humanity. When Jesus speaks in his parables of the shepherd who goes after the lost sheep, of the woman who looks for the lost coin, of the father who goes to meet and embrace his prodigal son, these are no mere words: they constitute an explanation of his very being and activity.¹³⁶

This definitive proof of love has the character of a radical humiliation (*kenosis*), because Christ "humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8).

6.1.1 The encounter with Jesus Christ

243. The Christ-event is therefore the beginning of this new subject emerging in history that we call "disciple":

¹³⁶ DCE 12.

*Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.*¹³⁷

This is precisely what all the gospels have preserved, while presenting it differently, as the beginning of Christianity: a faith encounter with the person of Jesus. (cf. Jn 1:35-39).

244. The very nature of Christianity therefore consists of recognizing the presence of Jesus Christ and following Him. That was the marvelous experience of those first disciples, who upon encountering Jesus were fascinated and astonished at the exceptional quality of the one speaking to them, especially how he treated them, satisfying the hunger and thirst for life that was in their hearts. The evangelist John has portrayed for us the image of the impact produced by the person of Jesus on the first two disciples who met him, John and Andrew. Everything starts with a question: “What are you looking for?” (Jn 1:38). That question is followed by the invitation to live an experience: “Come and you will see” (Jn 1:39). This account will remain in history as a unique synthesis of the Christian approach.
245. The very same question full of expectation is asked today in our Latin American continent: “Rabbi, Where are you staying?” (Jn 1:38), where do we find you adequately in order to “initiate an authentic process of conversion, communion and solidarity”?¹³⁸ Which are the places, the persons, the gifts that tell us of you, put us in communion with you, and enable us to be your disciples and missionaries?

6.1.2 Places of encounter with Jesus Christ

246. Due to the invisible action of the Holy Spirit, the encounter with Christ takes place in faith received and lived in the Church. With Pope Benedict XVI's words, we repeat with certainty:

*The Church is our home! This is our home! In the Catholic Church we find all that is good, all that gives grounds for security and consolation! Anyone who accepts Christ, "the way, the truth and the life" in his totality, is assured of peace and happiness, in this life and in the next!*¹³⁹

247. We encounter Jesus in Sacred Scripture read in the church. Sacred scripture, “Word of God written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit,”¹⁴⁰ is, along with tradition, source of life for the Church and soul of its evangelizing action. To be ignorant of scripture is to be ignorant of Jesus Christ and to fail to proclaim him. Hence Benedict XVI's invitation:

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³⁸ EAm 8.

¹³⁹ BENEDICT XVI, *Address at the End of Praying the Holy Rosary at the Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, May 12, 2007.*

¹⁴⁰ DV 9.

*At the beginning of this new phase that the missionary Church of Latin America and the Caribbean is preparing to enter, starting with this Fifth General Conference in Aparecida, an indispensable pre-condition is profound knowledge of the word of God. To achieve this, we must train people to read and meditate on the word of God: this must become their staple diet, so that, through their own experience, the faithful will see that the words of Jesus are spirit and life (cf. Jn 6:63). Otherwise, how could they proclaim a message whose content and spirit they do not know thoroughly? We must build our missionary commitment and the whole of our lives on the rock of the word of God.*¹⁴¹

248. It thus becomes necessary to offer the Word of God to the faithful as gift of the Father for the encounter with Jesus Christ living, path of “authentic conversion and of renewed communion and solidarity”¹⁴² This proposal will mediate encounter with the Lord if the revealed Word contained in scripture is presented as source of evangelization. Disciples of Jesus yearn to be nourished with the bread of the Word: they want to have access to proper interpretation of the biblical texts, to use them as mediation of dialogue with Jesus, and that they be the soul of evangelization itself and of proclamation of Jesus to all. Hence, the importance of a “biblical ministry” understood as a biblical impetus to pastoral ministry, that it serve as school of interpretation or knowledge of the Word, of communion with Jesus, or prayer with the Word, and of inculturated evangelization or proclamation of the Word. This demands that bishops, priests, deacons, and lay ministers of the Word approach sacred scripture in a way that is not merely intellectual and instrumental, but with a heart “hungry to hear the Word of the Lord” (Am 8:11).
249. Among the many ways of approaching sacred scripture, there is one privileged way to which we are all invited: *Lectio divina* or the practice of prayerful reading of sacred scripture. This prayerful reading, when well practiced, leads to the encounter with Jesus-Master, to the knowledge of the mystery of Jesus-Messiah, to communion with Jesus-Son of God, and to the testimony of Jesus-Lord of the Universe. With its four moments (reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation), prayerful reading fosters the personal encounter with Jesus Christ in the manner of so many figures in the Gospel: Nicodemus and his longing for eternal life (cf. Jn 3:1-21), the Samaritan woman and her yearning for true worship (cf. Jn 4:1-42), the man born blind and his desire for inner light (cf. Jn 9), Zacchaeus and his wish to be different (cf. Lk 19:1-10), and so forth. Thanks to this encounter, all of them were enlightened and recreated because they opened themselves to the experience of the mercy of the Father who offers himself through his Word of truth and life. They did not open their heart to something of the Messiah, but to the Messiah himself, route of growth in “maturity according to

¹⁴¹ IA 3.

¹⁴² EAm 12.

- his fullness” (Eph 4:13), process of discipleship, of communion with brothers and sisters and commitment to society.
250. We encounter Jesus Christ in an admirable way in the Sacred Liturgy. In living it, celebrating the paschal mystery, Christ’s disciples delve deeper into the mysteries of the Kingdom and sacramentally express their vocation as disciples and missionaries. Vatican II’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy shows us the place and function of the liturgy in the following of Christ, in the missionary action of Christians, in new life in Christ, and in the life of our peoples in Him.¹⁴³
251. The Eucharist is the privileged place of the disciple’s encounter with Jesus Christ. With this sacrament, Jesus attracts us to himself and makes us enter into his dynamism toward God and toward neighbor. There is a close connection between the three dimensions of the Christian vocation: believing, celebrating, and living the mystery of Jesus Christ, so that Christian existence truly acquires a eucharistic form. In each Eucharist, Christians celebrate and take on the paschal mystery by participating in it. Therefore the faithful must live their faith in the centrality of the paschal mystery of Christ through the Eucharist, so that their whole life is increasingly eucharistic life. The Eucharist, inexhaustible source of the Christian vocation, is at the same time inextinguishable source of missionary drive. In it the Holy Spirit strengthens the identity of disciples, and awakens in them the firm intention of boldly proclaiming to others what they have heard and lived.
252. Thus becomes clear the great importance of the Sunday obligation, of “living according to Sunday” as an inner need of the believer, the Christian community, and the parish community. Without active participation in the Sunday eucharistic celebration and on holy days of obligation, there will be no mature missionary disciple. Every great reform in the church is linked to the rediscovery of faith in the Eucharist.¹⁴⁴ Hence it is important to promote the “Sunday ministry,” and give it “priority in pastoral programs,”¹⁴⁵ for a new impulse in the evangelization of the people of God on the Latin American continent.
253. With deep pastoral affection, we want to tell the thousands of communities with their millions of members who do not have the opportunity to participate in the Sunday Eucharist, that they also can and must live “according to Sunday.” They can nourish their already admirable missionary spirit by taking part in the “Sunday celebration of the Word,” which makes the paschal mystery present in the love that draws together (1 Jn 3:14), in the Word received (cf. Jn 5:24-25), and in community prayer (cf. Mt 18:20). Certainly, believers must yearn for full participation in the Sunday Eucharist and hence we also encourage them to pray for priestly vocations.

¹⁴³ Cf. SC 7.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.* 6.

¹⁴⁵ IA 4.

254. The sacrament of Reconciliation is the place where the sinner experiences in a singular manner the encounter with Jesus Christ, who has compassion on us and gives us the gift of his merciful forgiveness, gives us the sense that love is stronger than the sin committed, frees us from whatever keeps us from remaining in his love, and returns to us the joy and enthusiasm of proclaiming Him to others with open and generous heart.
255. It is in personal and community prayer that the disciple, fed by the Word and the Eucharist, cultivates a relationship of deep friendship with Jesus Christ and seeks to embrace the will of the Father. Daily prayer is a sign of the primacy of grace in the missionary disciple's journey. Hence, "we have to learn to pray, as it were learning this art ever anew from the lips of the Divine Master."¹⁴⁶
256. Jesus is present in the midst of a living community in faith and fraternal love. There he fulfills his promise: "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). He is in all disciples who strive to make Jesus' existence their own, and to live their life hidden in Christ's life (cf. Col 3:3). They experience the power of his resurrection to the point of identifying deeply with Him: "yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). He is in the shepherds, who represent Christ himself (cf. Mt 10:40; Lk 10:16).

The bishops by divine institution have succeeded to the place of the apostles, as shepherds of the Church, and he who hears them, hears Christ, and he who rejects them, rejects Christ and Him who sent Christ (Lumen Gentium, 20).

He is in those who give testimony to the struggle for justice, for peace, and for the common good, sometimes even surrendering their own life, and in all the events in the life of our peoples, who invite us to seek a more just and more fraternal world, in every human reality, whose limitations we sometimes find painful and overwhelming.

257. We also encounter Him in a special way in the poor, the afflicted, and the sick (cf. Mt 25:37-40) who reclaim our commitment and give us testimony of faith, patience in suffering, and constant struggle to go on living. How many times do the poor and those who suffer actually evangelize us! In the recognition of this presence and nearness, and in the defense of the rights of the excluded, the Church's faithfulness to Jesus Christ is at stake.¹⁴⁷ The encounter with Jesus Christ in the poor is a constitutive dimension of our faith in Jesus Christ. Our option for them emerges from contemplation of his suffering face in them¹⁴⁸ and from the encounter with Him in the afflicted and outcast, whose immense dignity He himself reveals to us. It is our very adherence to Jesus Christ that makes us friends of the poor and unites us to their fate.

¹⁴⁶ NMI 33.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 49.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.* 25.

6.1.3 Popular piety as space of encounter with Jesus Christ

258. The Holy Father emphasized the “rich and profound popular religiosity, in which we see the soul of the Latin American peoples,” and presented it as “the precious treasure of the Catholic Church in Latin America.”¹⁴⁹ He called for it to be promoted and protected. This way of expressing the faith is present in different manners in all social sectors, in a multitude that merits our respect and affection, because their piety “manifests a thirst for God which only the simple and poor can know.”¹⁵⁰ The “religion of the Latin American people is an expression of the Catholic faith. It is a people’s Catholicism,”¹⁵¹ deeply inculturated, which contains the most valuable dimension of Latin American culture.
259. Among the expressions of this spirituality are: patron saint celebrations, novenas, rosaries, the Way of the Cross, processions, dances and songs of religious folklore, affection for the saints and angels, solemn promises, and family prayer. We highlight pilgrimages, where the People of God can be recognized in their journey. There the believer celebrates the joy of feeling surrounded by myriad brothers and sisters, journeying together toward God who awaits them. Christ himself becomes pilgrim, and walks arisen among the poor. The decision to set out toward the shrine is already a confession of faith, walking is a true song of hope, and arrival is the encounter of love. The pilgrim’s gaze rests on an image that symbolizes God’s affection and closeness. Love pauses, contemplates mystery, and enjoys it in silence. It is also moved, pouring out the full load of its pain and its dreams. The confident prayer, flowing sincerely, is the best expression of a heart that has relinquished self-sufficiency, recognizing that alone it can do nothing. A living spiritual experience is compressed into a brief moment.¹⁵²
260. In it, pilgrims undergo the experience of a mystery that goes beyond them, the transcendence not only of God, but also of the Church, which transcends their family and their neighborhood. At shrines many pilgrims make decisions that mark their lives. These walls contain many stories that millions could tell of conversion, forgiveness, and gifts received.
261. Popular piety delicately permeates the personal existence of each believer, and even though he or she lives in a multitude, it is not a “mass spirituality.” At different moments of daily struggle, many go back to some small sign of God’s love: a crucifix, a rosary, a candle lit to accompany a child in his or her illness, an Our Father murmured amidst tears, a tender glance at a beloved image of Mary, or a smile directed toward heaven in the midst of a simple joy.

¹⁴⁹ IA 1.

¹⁵⁰ EN 48.

¹⁵¹ PD 444.

¹⁵² *El Santuario, memoria, presencia, y profecía del Dios vivo. L’Osservatore Romano*. Spanish edition, 22, (May 28, 1999).

262. It is true that faith that was incarnated in the culture can be deepened and permeate ever better how our peoples live. But this can happen only if we value positively what the Holy Spirit has already sown. Popular piety is an “indispensable starting point in deepening the faith of the people and in bringing it to maturity.”¹⁵³ Hence, the missionary disciple must be “sensitive to it, know how to perceive its interior dimensions and undeniable values.”¹⁵⁴ When we say that it has to be evangelized or purified, we do not mean that it is devoid of gospel wealth. We simply want all members of the believing people, recognizing the testimony of Mary and also of the saints, to try to imitate them more each day. Thus they will strive for a more direct contact with the Bible and greater participation in the sacraments, come to enjoy the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist, and express even better the service of love in solidarity in their lives. This is the way which will make it possible to draw on the rich potential of holiness and social justice encompassed in the people’s mysticism.
263. We cannot deprecate popular spirituality, or consider it a secondary mode of Christian life, for that would be to forget the primacy of the action of the Spirit and God’s free initiative of love. Popular piety contains and expresses a powerful sense of transcendence, a spontaneous ability to find support in God and a true experience of theological love. It is also an expression of supernatural wisdom, because the wisdom of love does not depend directly on the enlightenment of the mind, but on the internal action of grace. That is why we call it popular spirituality, that is, a Christian spirituality which, while it is a personal encounter with the Lord, includes much of the bodily, the perceptible, the symbolic, and people’s most concrete needs. It is a spirituality incarnated in the culture of the lowly, which is not thereby less spiritual, but is so in another manner.
264. Popular spirituality is a legitimate way of living the faith, a way of feeling part of the Church and a manner of being missionaries, where the deepest vibrations of America’s depths come together. It is part of a “cultural historic originality”¹⁵⁵ of the poor of this continent, and fruit of a “synthesis between their cultures and the Christian faith.”¹⁵⁶ In the environment of secularization experienced by our peoples, it is still a powerful confession of the living God who acts in history, and a channel for handing on the faith. Journeying together to shrines and taking part in other manifestations of popular piety, also taking one’s children or inviting others, is in itself an evangelizing gesture by which the Christian people evangelizes itself and fulfills the Church’s missionary calling.
265. Our peoples particularly identify with the suffering Christ; they look at him, kiss him or touch his wounded feet as though saying: This is he “who has loved me and given himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20). Many of them, beaten, ignored,

¹⁵³ Congregation for divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*,” n. 64.

¹⁵⁴ EN 48.

¹⁵⁵ PD 446.

¹⁵⁶ IA 1.

dispossessed, hold their arms aloft. With their characteristic religiosity, they firmly adhere to the immense love that God has for them and that continually reminds them of their own dignity. They also find God's affection and love in the face of Mary. In it they see reflected the essential gospel message. From the shrine of Guadalupe our beloved Mother makes her littlest children feel that they are in the fold of her cloak. Now from Aparecida she invites them to cast their nets into the world to bring out of anonymity those who are sunk in oblivion, and bring them to the light of faith. Gathering her children, she brings our peoples together around Jesus Christ.

6.1.4 Mary, disciple and missionary

266. The greatest realization of Christian existence as trinitarian living as “children in the Son” is given us by the Virgin Mary, who by her faith (cf. Lk 1:45) and obedience to God's will (cf. Lk 1:38) and by her constant meditation on the Word and on the actions of Jesus (cf. Lk 2:19, 51), is the Lord's most perfect disciple.¹⁵⁷ As the Father's interlocutor in his project of sending his Word to the world for human salvation, Mary, by her faith, becomes the first member of the community of believers in Christ, and also collaborates in the spiritual rebirth of the disciples. Her figure emerges from the Gospel as a free and strong woman, consciously directed toward true following of Christ. She has fully experienced the entire pilgrimage of faith as mother of Christ and then of the disciples, and yet has not been saved from incomprehension and continually having to seek the Father's project. Thus she came to stand at the foot of the cross in deep communion, so as to then fully enter into the mystery of the covenant.
267. With her, providentially united to the fullness of time (Cf. Gal 4:4), the hope of the poor and desire of salvation comes to fulfillment. The Virgin of Nazareth had a unique mission in the history of salvation, conceiving, educating, and accompanying her Son to his ultimate sacrifice. From the cross, Jesus Christ entrusts to his disciples, represented by John, the gift of Mary's motherhood, which springs directly from the paschal hour of Jesus: “And from that hour the disciple took her into his home” (Jn 19:27). Persevering along with the apostles awaiting the Spirit (cf. Acts 1:13-14), she aided in the birth of the missionary Church, imprinting on it a Marian seal that deeply marks its identity. As mother of multitudes, she strengthens the fraternal bonds among all, promotes reconciliation and forgiveness, and helps the disciples of Jesus Christ experience themselves as family, the family of God. In Mary, we are with Christ, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and likewise with our brothers and sisters.
268. As in the human family, the Church-family is generated around a Mother, who confers “soul” and tenderness on shared family life.¹⁵⁸ Mary, Mother of the Church, and model and paradigm of humanity, is shaper of communion. One of the fundamental events of the Church is when the “yes” sprang forth from Mary.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. LG 53.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. PD 295.

She draws multitudes to communion with Jesus and his Church, as we often experience at Marian shrines. Hence, the Church, like the Virgin Mary, is mother. This Marian vision of the church is the best antidote to a merely functional or bureaucratic Church.

269. Mary is the great missionary, continuer of her Son's mission, who forms missionaries. As she gave birth to the Savior of the world, she brought the Gospel to our Americas. In the Guadalupe event, together with the humble Juan Diego, she presided over Pentecost, which opened us to the gifts of the Spirit. Since then, countless communities have found in her the closest inspiration for learning how to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus. We joyfully note that she has become part of the journey of each of our peoples, deeply entering into the fabric of their history and taking on the noblest and most significant features of the people in them. The various devotions and shrines spread all over the continent attest to Mary's closeness to the people, and they likewise manifest the faith and trust that her devotees feel toward her. She belongs to them and they experience her as mother and sister.
270. Today when the emphasis is being given to discipleship and mission in our Latin American and Caribbean continent, it is she who shines before our eyes as the complete and absolutely faithful image of the following of Christ. This is the hour of the most radical follower of Christ, of her teaching for discipleship and mission, to which Pope Benedict XVI directs us:

Mary Most Holy, the pure and immaculate Virgin, is for us a school of faith destined to guide us and give us strength on the path that leads us to the Creator of Heaven and Earth. The Pope has come to Aparecida with great joy so as to say to you first of all: "Remain in the school of Mary." Take inspiration from her teachings, seek to welcome and to preserve in your hearts the enlightenment that she, by divine mandate, sends you from on high¹⁵⁹.

271. She who "kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart" (Lk 2:19; cf. 2:51), teaches us the primacy of listening to the Word in the life of the disciple and missionary. The *Magnificat*

is entirely woven from threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the Word of God. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the Word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the Word of God; the Word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the Word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God. Since Mary is completely imbued with the Word of God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ BENEDICT XVI, *Address at the end of the praying of the Holy Rosary at the Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida*, May 12, 2007.

¹⁶⁰ DCE 41.

This familiarity with the mystery of Jesus is facilitated by praying the rosary, where:

*The Christian people sits at the school of Mary and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love. Through the Rosary the faithful receive abundant grace, as though from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer.*¹⁶¹

272. With her eyes on her children in their needs as at Cana of Galilee, Mary helps keep alive attitudes of attention, service, commitment, and selfless generosity that should distinguish the disciples of her Son. She also indicates what pedagogy should be used so that the poor “feel at home” in every Christian community.¹⁶² She creates communion and educates to a way of life shared in solidarity, in fraternity, in caring for and welcoming the other, especially if he or she is poor or in need. Her strong presence in our communities has enriched and will continue to enrich the Church’s motherly dimension and its welcoming attitude, which makes it “home and school of communion,”¹⁶³ and spiritual space that prepares for mission.

6.1.5 The apostles and the saints

273. The apostles of Jesus and the saints have also marked the spirituality and way of life of our churches. Their lives are privileged places of encounter with Jesus Christ. Their testimony remains valid and their teachings inspire the being and action of the Christian communities of the continent. Among them, the apostle Peter to whom Jesus entrusted the mission of confirming the faith of his brothers (cf. Lk 22:31-32), helps them to strengthen the bond of communion with the pope, his successor, and to find in Jesus the words of eternal life. Paul, the tireless evangelizer, has shown them the path of missionary boldness and the will of approaching each cultural reality with the Good News of salvation. John, the disciple loved by the Lord, has revealed to them the transforming power of the new commandment and the fecundity of remaining in his love.
274. Our peoples nourish affection and special devotion to Joseph, Mary’s husband, the just, faithful, and generous man who knows how to lose himself in order to find himself in the mystery of the Son. St. Joseph, the silent teacher, fascinates, attracts, and teaches, not with words but as the shining testimony of his virtues and his firm simplicity.
275. Our communities bear the stamp of the apostles, and they also recognize the Christian testimony of so many men and women who sowed the seeds of the Gospel in our lands, even spilling their blood as martyrs. Their example of life and holiness constitutes a precious gift for the believing journey of Latin Americans, and at the same time, a stimulus for imitating their virtues in new cultural expressions in history. With the passion of their love for Jesus Christ,

¹⁶¹ RVM 1.

¹⁶² NMI 50.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* 43.

they have been active members and missionaries in their ecclesial community. They have courageously persevered in promoting people's rights, they were clear-sighted in critically discerning reality in the light of the church's social teaching and credible through the coherent testimony of their lives. We contemporary Christians draw on their legacy and we feel called to continue with renewed apostolic and missionary zeal the evangelical style of life that they have transmitted on to us.

6.2 THE PROCESS OF FORMATION OF MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

276. The vocation and commitment to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ today in Latin America and the Caribbean requires a clear and firm option for the formation of our communities, for the sake of all the baptized, regardless of the role they play in the Church. We look to Jesus, the Master who personally formed his apostles and disciples. Christ gives us the method: "Come and see" (Jn 1:39), I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14:6). With Him we can develop the potentialities in people and form missionary disciples. With enduring patience and wisdom, Jesus invited all to follow Him. He led those who agreed to follow him into the mystery of the Kingdom of God, and after his death and resurrection, he sent them to preach the Good News in the power of his Spirit. His style becomes emblematic for those doing formation, and takes on special relevance when we think of the patient work of formation that the Church must undertake in the new sociocultural context of Latin America.
277. The formative itinerary of the follower of Jesus sinks its roots down into the dynamic nature of the person and in the personal invitation of Jesus Christ, who calls his own by name, and they follow him because they know his voice. The Lord awakened the deep aspirations of his disciples and drew them to himself, full of astonishment. Following him is fruit of a fascination that responds to the desire for human fulfillment and to the yearning for full life. A disciple is someone who is passionate for Christ, and recognizes him as the master leading and accompanying him.

6.2.1 Aspects of the process.

278. We highlight five fundamental aspects in the process of forming missionary disciples. They appear differently at each step of the journey but are closely intertwined and draw nourishment from one another:
- a) *The Encounter with Jesus Christ:* Those who will be his disciples are already seeking him (cf. Jn 1:38), but it is the Lord who calls them: "Follow me" (Mk 1:14; Mt 9:9). The deeper meaning of the search must be discovered, and the encounter with Christ that leads to Christian initiation must be fostered. This encounter must be constantly renewed by personal testimony, proclamation of the *kerygma*, and the missionary action of the community. The *kerygma* is not simply a stage, but the leitmotiv of a process that culminates in the maturity of the disciple of Jesus Christ. Without the *kerygma*, the other aspects of this process are condemned to sterility, with hearts not truly converted to the Lord.

Only out of the *kerygma* does the possibility of a true Christian initiation occur. Hence, the Church should have it present in all its actions.

- b) *Conversion*: It is the initial response of those who have listened to the Lord in wonder, who believe in Him through the action of the Spirit, and who decide to be His friend and go with him, changing how they think and live, accepting the cross of Christ, conscious that dying to sin is attaining life. In Baptism and the sacrament of Reconciliation Christ's Redemption is actualized for us.
- c) *Discipleship*: The person constantly matures in knowledge, love, and following of Jesus the master, and delves deeper into the mystery of His person, his example, and his teaching. Ongoing catechesis and sacramental life are of fundamental importance for this stage; they strengthen initial conversion, and enable missionary disciples to persevere in Christian life and mission in the midst of the world that challenges them.
- d) *Communion*: There can be no Christian life except in community: in families, parishes, communities of consecrated life, base communities, other small communities, and movements. Like the early Christians who met in community, the disciples take part in the life of the Church, and in the encounter with brothers and sisters, living the love of Christ in solidarity, in fraternal life. They are also accompanied and encouraged by the community and its shepherds as they mature in the live of the Spirit.
- e) *Mission*: As they get to know and love their Lord, disciples experience the need to share with others their joy at being sent, at going to the world to proclaim Jesus Christ, dead and risen, to make real the love and service in the person of the neediest, in short, to build the Kingdom of God. Mission is inseparable from discipleship, and hence it must not be understood as a stage subsequent to formation, although it is carried out in different ways, depending on one's own vocation and on the moment in human and Christian maturation at which the person stands.

6.2.2 General criteria

6.2.2.1 Comprehensive, kerygmatic , and ongoing formation

279. The primary mission of formation is to help the members of the Church to always be with Christ, and thus to recognize, welcome, internalize, and develop the experience and values that constitute Christian identity and mission in the world. Hence formation entails a integral process, that is, it encompasses varied dimensions, all harmonized among themselves in vital unity. At the foundation of these dimensions is the power of the *kerygmatic* proclamation. People feel the contagious power of the Spirit and the Word and are led to listen to Jesus Christ, to believe in Him as their Savior, to recognize him as the one who gives full meaning to their life, and to follow in his footsteps. The proclamation is based on the fact of the presence of the Risen Christ today in the church, and it is an absolutely necessary factor in the process of forming disciples and missionaries. At the same time, formation is ongoing and dynamic, in accordance with people's

development and with the service that they are called to provide in the midst of the demands of history.

6.2.2.2 A formation attentive to diverse dimensions.

280. Formation encompasses diverse dimensions that must be integrated harmoniously throughout the formation process, namely the human and communal, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral missionary dimensions.
- a) *The Human and Communal Dimension.* It tends to accompany formation processes that lead to taking on one's own history and healing it, so as to become capable of living as Christians in a pluralistic world, with balance, strength, serenity, and inner freedom. It entails developing personalities that mature in contact with reality and are open to Mystery.
 - b) *The Spiritual Dimension.* This is the formative dimension that grounds Christian existence in the experience of God made manifest in Jesus, and leads it by the Spirit over the paths of a deep maturation. Through the various charisms, the person is rooted in the journey of life and service proposed by Christ, with a personal style. It makes it possible to pursue wholeheartedly by faith, like the Virgin Mary, the joyful, luminous, sorrowful, and glorious paths of one's Lord and Teacher.
 - c) *The Intellectual Dimension.* The encounter with Christ, Word made Flesh, empowers the dynamism of reason which seeks the meaning of reality and opens up to Mystery. It is expressed in serious reflection, constantly updated through study, which opens intelligence to truth with the light of faith. It also trains for discernment, critical judgment, and dialogue on the overall situation and the culture. It particularly assures well grounded biblical and theological knowledge, and knowledge of the human sciences, in order to acquire the necessary competence for the sake of the ecclesial services required and so as to be suitably present in secular life.
 - d) *The Pastoral and Missionary Dimension.* An authentic Christian journey fills the heart with joy and hope and moves believers to proclaim Christ continually in their life and their environment. It projects toward the mission of forming missionary disciples at the service of the world. It trains for proposing appealing projects and styles of Christian life, with organic actions and fraternal collaboration with all members of the community. It helps combine evangelization and pedagogy, communicating life and offering pastoral itineraries in accordance with the Christian maturity, age, and other conditions proper to persons or groups. It fosters the responsibility of lay people in the world for building the Kingdom of God. It arouses continual concern for those who have distanced and for those who are oblivious to the Lord in their lives.

6.2.2.3 A formation that is respectful of process

281. Reaching the stature of new life in Christ, identifying deeply with Him¹⁶⁴ and his mission is a long road requiring diversified itineraries that respect personal processes and continual and gradual community rhythms. In the diocese, the central thrust must be a comprehensive formation project approved by the bishop and drawn up with the proper diocesan bodies, taking into account all the leading forces of the particular church: associations, services and movements, religious communities, small communities, social ministry commissions, and various ecclesial bodies so as to offer the comprehensive view and the convergence of the various initiatives. There must also be a suitably prepared training team to assure the effectiveness of the process itself and to accompany people with dynamic, active, and open pedagogies. The presence and contribution of lay men and women on training teams supplies a special unique richness, because out of their experiences and competencies, they offer criteria, contents, and valuable witness for those who are in formation.

6.2.2.4 A formation that makes provision for accompanying the disciples

282. Each sector of the People of God asks to be accompanied and formed, in keeping with the particular vocation and ministry to which it has been called: the bishop is the principle of unity in the diocese through the threefold ministry of teaching, sanctifying, and governing; priests by cooperating with the ministry of the bishop in care for the people of God entrusted to them; permanent deacons in life-giving, humble, and persevering service as valuable aid to bishops and priests; consecrated men and women in radical following of the Master; laymen and laywomen who carry out their evangelizing responsibility by collaborating in forming Christian communities and in building the Kingdom of God in the world. Training is therefore required for those who can accompany others spiritually and pastorally.
283. We emphasize that the formation of lay men and women must contribute primarily to an activity as missionary disciples in the world, from the standpoint of dialogue and transformation of society. Specific formation so that they can have a significant impact on different fields is imperative, especially

*in the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization.*¹⁶⁵

6.2.2.5 A formation in the spirituality of missionary action

284. Disciples must be formed in a spirituality of missionary action, which is based on docility to the impulse of the Spirit, to its life giving power which mobilizes and transfigures all dimensions of existence. It is not an experience limited to the

¹⁶⁴ Cf. EN 19.

¹⁶⁵ EN 70.

- private spaces of devotion, but rather seeks to penetrate everything with its fire and life. Moved by the drive and zeal that come from the Spirit, the disciple and missionary learns to express it in work, dialogue, service, and everyday mission.
285. When the impulse of the Spirit permeates and motivates all areas of existence, it also pervades and shapes each individual's specific calling. Thus the spirituality proper to priests, religious men and women, parents, business people, catechists, and so forth takes shape and develops. Each of the vocations has a concrete and distinctive way of living spirituality which gives depth and enthusiasm to the specific performance of their tasks. Thus life in the Spirit does not enclose us in cozy intimacy, but makes us generous and creative persons, happy in proclamation and missionary service. We become committed to the demands of reality and able to find a profound significance for everything that we are entrusted with doing for the Church and for the world.

6.3 INITIATION TO CHRISTIAN LIFE AND PERMANENT CATECHESIS

6.3.1 Initiation to Christian life

286. There are many believers who do not take part in the Sunday Eucharist, receive the sacraments regularly, or involve themselves actively in the church community. Without ignoring the importance of the family in Christian initiation, this phenomenon deeply challenges us to imagine and organize new ways of approaching them in order to help them to value the meaning of sacramental life, community participation, and citizen commitment. A high percentage of Catholics are unaware of their mission to be salt and leaven in the world, and their Christian identity is weak and vulnerable.
287. This constitutes a great challenge that deeply questions the way we are educating in the faith and how we are nourishing Christian living; a challenge that we must face decisively, boldly, and creatively, because in many places Christian initiation has been poor or fragmented. Either we educate in the faith, really putting people in contact with Jesus Christ and inviting them to follow Him, or we will not fulfill our mission of evangelization. We face the inescapable task of offering a workable approach to Christian initiation which besides indicating the "what," also offers elements for the "who," the "how," and the "where" it is done. Thus we will take on the challenge of a new evangelization, to which we have been called repeatedly.
288. Christian initiation, which includes the *kerygma*, is the practical manner of putting people in contact with Jesus Christ and initiating in discipleship. It also gives us the opportunity to enhance the unity of the three sacraments of initiation and delve deeper into their rich meaning. Christian initiation, properly speaking, has to do with the first initiation in the mysteries of the faith, whether in the form of baptismal catechumenate for the non-baptized, or in the formal postbaptismal catechumenate for the baptized who are not sufficiently catechized. This catechumenate is intimately connected with the sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, solemnly celebrated in the Paschal Vigil. It should

therefore be distinguished from other processes of catechesis and formation that can presume Christian initiation as their foundation.

6.3.2 Proposals for Christian initiation

289. We feel the urgency of developing in our communities a process of initiation into Christian life starting with the *kerygma*, guided by the Word of God, leading to an ever greater personal encounter with Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect man,¹⁶⁶ experienced as fullness of humanity, which leads to conversion, to following in an ecclesial community, and to a maturing of faith in the practice of the sacraments, service, and mission.
290. We recall that in the oldest tradition of the Church, the formative itinerary of the Christian “always had an experiential character. While not neglecting a systematic understanding of the content of the faith, it centered on a vital and convincing encounter with Christ, as proclaimed by authentic witnesses.”¹⁶⁷ This is an experience that leads into a deep and joyful celebration of the sacraments, with all the wealth of their signs. Life is thereby gradually transformed by the holy mysteries celebrated, enabling the believer to transform the world. The term for it is “mystagogical catechesis.”
291. Being a disciple is a gift that is intended to grow. Christian initiation provides the possibility of a gradual apprenticeship in knowledge, love, and following of Jesus Christ. It thus forges Christian identity with fundamental convictions and accompanies the search for the meaning of life. The catechetical dynamics of Christian initiation must be undertaken. A community that takes on Christian initiation renews community life and awakens its missionary character. This requires new pastoral attitudes on the part of bishops, priests, deacons, people with vows, and pastoral agents.
292. As traits of the disciple, toward which Christian initiation points, we single out: having as center the person of Jesus Christ, our Savior and fullness of our humanity, source of all human and Christian maturity; having a spirit of prayer, being a lover of the Word, practicing frequent confession and participating in the Eucharist; cheerfully being a part of the ecclesial and social community, showing solidarity in love, and being a fervent missionary.
293. The parish must be the place where Christian initiation is assured. Its unavoidable tasks include: initiating insufficiently evangelized baptized adults into Christian life; educating baptized children in the faith in a process that leads them to complete their Christian initiation; and initiating the non-baptized who upon hearing the *kerygma*, desire to embrace the faith. In this task, studying and assimilating the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is a necessary focal point and secure support.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Symbol *Quicumque*: DS 76.

¹⁶⁷ SCa 64.

294. Taking on Christian initiation demands not only a renewal of the parish's mode of catechesis. We propose that the formative catechetical process adopted by the Church for Christian initiation be assumed throughout the continent as the ordinary and absolutely necessary way of introduction into Christian life, and as basic and fundamental catechesis. It will be followed by ongoing catechesis which continues the process of maturing in the faith, which should encompass vocational discernment and offering enlightenment for the direction of one's personal life.

6.3.3 Permanent catechesis

295. In considering the current situation of catechesis, there has obviously been great progress. The time devoted to preparing for the sacraments has increased. Both families and pastors are more aware of its need. It is understood to be absolutely necessary in all Christian formation. It has become routine for diocesan and parish catechetical commissions to be set up. The large number of people who feel called to become highly dedicated catechists is admirable. This assembly extends a sincere recognition to them.
296. However, despite good will, the theological and pedagogical formation of catechists generally leaves much to be desired. Teaching materials and aids are often quite varied and are not part of a comprehensive pastoral plan; they do not always reflect contemporary pedagogical methods. Catechetical programs in parishes often fail to bet full collaboration from families. Pastors and other people in charge do not put major effort into performing their proper role as primary catechists.
297. The challenges posed by the situation of society in Latin America and the Caribbean require a more personal and better grounded Catholic identity. Strengthening this identity entails adequate catechesis to promote personal and community attachment to Christ, especially in those who are weaker in the faith.¹⁶⁸ It is a task that falls to the entire community of disciples, but particularly to those of us who as bishops have been called to serve the Church, shepherding it, leading it to the encounter with Jesus, and teaching it to live everything that he has commanded us (cf. Mt 28:19-20).
298. Catechesis must not be only occasional, reduced to moments before the sacraments or to Christian initiation, but rather "a permanent catechetical journey."¹⁶⁹ Hence each particular church, with the aid of Bishops Conferences, is charged with setting up a comprehensive and progressive process covering the entire span of life from childhood to old age, bearing in mind that the General Directory of Catechesis regards catechesis of adults as the fundamental form of education in faith. In order for the people to truly know Christ in depth and follow him faithfully, they must be led especially in reading and meditating on the Word of God, which is the primary foundation of ongoing catechesis.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Address in the Meeting with the Bishops of Brazil*, May 11, 2007.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 3.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

299. Catechesis cannot be limited to merely doctrinal formation, but it must be a true school of integral formation. Hence, friendship with Christ in prayer, appreciation for liturgical celebration, shared experience in community, and apostolic commitment through ongoing service to others must be cultivated. To that end it would be useful to have some catechetical aids prepared on the basis of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, and to set up courses and schools of ongoing formation for catechists.
300. An appropriate catechesis must be given to accompany the faith already present in popular religiosity. One concrete possibility is to offer a process of Christian initiation in visits to families, where not only are the contents of faith communicated to them, but they are led to the practice of family prayer, to prayerfully reading the Word of God, and to developing the evangelical virtues, so as to establish them ever more firmly as domestic churches. For this growth in faith, it is also well to utilize pedagogically the educational potential within popular Marian piety. It is an educational path whereby cultivating personal love for the Virgin, true “educator in faith,”¹⁷¹ leads us to increasingly resemble Jesus Christ, and leads to gradual assimilation of his attitudes.

6.4 PLACES OF FORMATION FOR MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

301. We will now briefly consider some spaces of formation of missionary disciples.

6.4.1 The family, first school of faith

302. The family, “patrimony of humanity” constitutes one of the most valuable treasures of Latin American peoples. It has been the setting and school of communion, source of human and civic values, and home where human life is born and is welcomed generously and responsibly. In order for the family to be “school of faith” and be able to help parents to be the first catechists of their children, family ministry must offer opportunities for formation, catechetical materials, and moments of celebration that will enable it to fulfill its educational mission. The family is called to lead children along the path of Christian initiation. Together with the parish, the family, small church, must be the primary place for Christian initiation of children.¹⁷² It offers children a Christian meaning of existence and accompanies them in charting their direction in life, as missionary disciples.
303. It is also a duty of parents, especially through the example of their life, to educate their children for love as gift of themselves and to aid them to discover their vocation of service, whether in lay life or consecrated life. Thus, the formation of their children as disciples of Jesus Christ takes place in the experiences of daily life in the family itself. Children are entitled to be able to count on their father and mother to take care of them and be with them on the way toward fullness of life. “Family catechesis” carried out in different ways has proven to be a successful help in family unity, as well as offering an efficient possibility for forming

¹⁷¹ PD 290.

¹⁷² SCa 19.

parents, youth, and children to be firm witnesses of the faith in their respective communities.

6.4.4 Parishes

304. The community dimension is intrinsic to the mystery and the reality of the Church, which must reflect the Blessed Trinity. This essential dimension has been lived in various ways over the centuries. The Church is communion. Parishes are living cells of the Church¹⁷³ and special places where most of the faithful have a concrete experience of Christ and his Church.¹⁷⁴ They include inexhaustible communal riches because in them is found an immense variety of situations, ages, and tasks. Especially today, when the crisis of family life affects so many children and young people, parishes offer a community space for being formed in the faith and growing in community.
305. Hence, community formation must especially be cultivated in the parish. Through various celebrations and initiatives, primarily with the Sunday Eucharist, which is the “the privileged moment of the community’s encounter with the risen Lord,”¹⁷⁵ the faithful should experience the parish as a family in faith and charity, where they accompany and help one another to follow Christ.
306. If we want parishes to be centers from which mission radiates within their own boundaries they must also be places of constant formation. This requires that a variety of approaches to formation be organized within them, assuring accompaniment and the maturing of all pastoral agents and of laypeople inserted in the world. Adjacent parishes can combine efforts along these lines, while not neglecting opportunities for formation from the diocese and the bishops conference.

6.4.3 Small ecclesial communities

307. It is evident that in recent years the spirituality of communion has been growing, and that significant efforts using different methodologies have been made to encourage lay people to become involved in small ecclesial communities, which are producing abundant fruits. Small ecclesial communities offer a privileged medium for the New Evangelization and to enable the baptized to live as authentic disciples and missionaries of Christ.
308. They are a favorable setting for hearing the Word of God, for living fraternity, for fostering prayer, for deepening processes of formation in the faith, and for bolstering the demanding commitment of being apostles in society today. They are places of Christian experience and evangelization, which are all the more necessary in the secularized cultural situation hostile to the Church with which we have to deal.

¹⁷³ AA 10; SD 55.

¹⁷⁴ EAm 41.

¹⁷⁵ IA 4.

309. If lively dynamic small communities are desired, a solid spirituality must be fostered in them, one based on the Word of God, to keep them in full communion of life and ideals with the local church, and in particular with the parish community. The parish will thereby come to be a “community of communities,”¹⁷⁶ as we have proposed in Latin America for some years now.
310. We point out that the processes for forming small communities must be reinvigorated in our continent, for in them we have a sure source of vocations to the priesthood, the religious life, and lay life with special dedication to the apostolate. Small communities would also make it possible to reach the distant, the indifferent, and those who fuel discontent or resentments against the Church.

6.4.4 Ecclesial movements and new communities

311. The new movements and communities are a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. In them the faithful find the opportunity to be formed as Christians, growing, and committing themselves apostolically as true missionary disciples. Thus they exercise the natural and baptismal right of free association, as indicated by Vatican II¹⁷⁷ and confirmed by the Code of Canon Law. It would be advisable to prod some movements and associations that today show a certain weariness or fatigue, and invite them to renew their original charism, which is still enriching the diversity with which the Spirit is manifested and acts in the Christian people.
312. The movements and new communities constitute a valuable contribution in the particular church achieving its purpose. By their very nature they express the charismatic dimension of the church.

There is no conflict or opposition in the Church between the institutional and the charismatic dimensions, of which the Movements are a significant expression. Both are co-essential to the divine constitution of the People of God¹⁷⁸.

In the Church’s life and evangelizing action, we find that we must respond to new situations and needs of Christian life in the modern world. In this setting as well, the movements and new communities are an opportunity for many people who are distant to have an experience of a living encounter with Jesus Christ, and thus recover their baptismal identity, and their active participation in the life of the Church.¹⁷⁹ In them “we can see the varied presence and sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸⁰

313. In order to better benefit from the charisms and services of the ecclesial movements in the field of formation of lay people, we wish to respect their charisms and originality, seeking to have them more fully a part of the core structure which is present in the diocese. For its part, the diocesan community

¹⁷⁶ Cf. SD 58.

¹⁷⁷ AA 18 ff.

¹⁷⁸ BENEDICT XVI, *Address*, March 24, 2007.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. IA 4.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* 5.

must welcome the spiritual and apostolic riches of the movements. Certainly, the movements should keep what makes them distinct, but within a deep unity with the particular church, not only in faith but in action. The more the wealth of charisms multiplies, the more the bishops are called to exercise pastoral discernment so as to foster the necessary integration of the movements into the life of the diocese, appreciating the wealth of their communal, formative, and missionary experience. A special welcome and appreciation should be afforded to those ecclesial movements that have already gone through examination and discernment by the Holy See, and are now regarded as gifts and goods for the universal Church.

6.4.5 Seminaries and houses of religious formation

- 314 With regard to the formation of disciplines and missionaries of Christ, vocation ministry occupies a particular position. It carefully accompanies all those whom the Lord calls to serve the church in the priesthood, consecrated life, or the lay state. Vocations ministry, for which the entire people of God is responsible, begins in the family and continues in the Christian community. It should be directed at children, and especially youth to help them discover the meaning of life and the plan that God has for each individual, by accompanying them in their discernment process. Fully integrated into the realm of ordinary pastoral ministry, vocations promotion ministry is fruit of a solid joint pastoral ministry, in families, in the parish, in Catholic schools, and in other church institutions. Prayer for vocations must be intensified in various ways, thereby also helping create greater sensitivity and receptivity to the Lord; thus different vocation initiatives must be promoted and coordinated.¹⁸¹ Vocations are God's gift, and hence in each diocese, there must be special prayers to the "Lord of the harvest."
315. In view of the shortage of people responding to the vocation to the priesthood and consecrated life in many places in Latin America and the Caribbean, special care must urgently be given to promoting vocations, cultivating those environments propitious for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, with the certainty that Jesus is still calling disciples and missionaries to be with Him and to send them forth to preach the Kingdom of God. This Fifth Conference issues an urgent call to all Christians, and especially to youth, to be open to a possible call from God to the priesthood or to religious life; it reminds them that the Lord will give them the grace necessary to respond decisively and generously, despite the problems generated by a secularized culture centered on consumerism and pleasure. We invite families to recognize the blessing of a child called by God to this consecration and to support his or her decision and journey of vocational response. We encourage priests to give witness to a happy life, joy, enthusiasm, and holiness in the Lord's service.

¹⁸¹ Cf. PDF 41; EA. 40.

316. Seminaries and houses of formation are no doubt a special setting, the school and home for the formation of disciples and missionaries. The initial formation time is a stage where future priests share life following the example of the apostolic community around the Risen Christ: they pray together, celebrate the same liturgy culminating in the Eucharist; from the Word of God they receive the teachings that gradually illuminate their minds and shape their hearts for exercising fraternal charity and justice; and they periodically provide pastoral services to different communities, thereby preparing to live a solid spirituality in communion with Christ the Shepherd and in docility to the action of the Spirit, becoming a personal and attractive sign of Christ in the world, according to the path of holiness proper to the priestly ministry.¹⁸²
317. We recognize the effort of those who are chartered with formation in seminaries. Their witness and preparation are decisive for accompanying seminarians toward an emotional maturity that will make them suitable for embracing priestly celibacy and able to live in communion with their brothers in the priestly vocation; in this sense, the courses established for those in charge of formation are an effective means of aiding their mission.¹⁸³
318. The contemporary situation requires greater attention to formation programs in seminaries, since young people are victims of the negative influence of postmodern culture, especially the mass media, bringing with it the fragmentation of the personality, inability to take on irrevocable commitments, absence of human maturity, weakening of spiritual identity, and so forth, which impede the process of forming authentic disciples and missionaries. Hence, before entry into the seminary, those responsible for conducting formation must make a very careful selection, taking into account the psychological balance of a sound personality, a genuine motivation of love for Christ and for the Church, and an intellectual capacity adequate to the requirements of ministry today.¹⁸⁴
319. There must be a seminary formation plan that offers seminarians a true comprehensive process—human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral—centered on Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. It is crucial that during the formation years, seminarians be authentic disciples, and come to have a true personal encounter with Jesus Christ in prayer with the Word, so as to establish with Him relationships of friendship and love, ensuring an authentic process of spiritual initiation, especially during the Propaedeutic Period. The spirituality promoted

¹⁸² Cf. PDV 60; OT 4; Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the ministry and life of priests*, n. 4.

¹⁸³ In this regard the synod fathers exhort bishops to “assign the most suitable priests to this work, after preparing them with specific training for this delicate mission” EAm 40; Congregation for Catholic Education, *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, 31-36; ID., *Guidelines on the preparation of those in charge of formation in seminaries*, n. 65-71; OT 5.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. C.I.C. can. 241, 1; Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons of Homosexual Tendencies in View of their Admission to the Seminary and to Sacred Order*.

- must respond to the identity of the particular vocation, whether diocesan or religious.¹⁸⁵
320. Throughout formation, an effort shall be made to develop a tender and filial love for Mary, so that each candidate comes to have spontaneous familiarity with her and “takes her into his home” like the beloved disciple. She will provide priests strength and hope in difficult moments, and will encourage them to be untiringly missionary disciples for the people of God.
 321. Special attention must be devoted to the process of human formation toward maturity, so that the vocation to the ministerial priesthood of the candidates becomes in each of them a stable and definitive life project, in the midst of a culture that exalts the disposable and the provisional. The same is true of education for affectivity and sexual maturity. Such maturity should lead to understanding better the gospel meaning of consecrated celibacy as a value that configures one to Jesus Christ, and hence as a state of love, fruit of the precious gift of divine grace, according to the example of the nuptial self-giving of the Son of God; to receiving it as such with firm decision, with magnanimity and wholeheartedly; and to living it with serenity and faithful perseverance, with proper asceticism on a personal and community journey, as surrender to God and to others with a full and undivided heart.¹⁸⁶
 322. In the entire formation process, the seminary environment and the formation pedagogy must foster a climate of healthy freedom and of personal responsibility, and avoid creating artificial environments or imposed paths. The candidate’s option for the priestly life and ministry must mature and be supported by true and authentic, free and personal motivations. That is the aim of discipline in houses of formation. Pastoral experiences, discerned and accompanied in the formation process, are extremely important for corroborating the authenticity of the motivations in the candidate and helping him to assume the ministry as a true and generous service in which what I am and what I do, consecrated person and ministry, are inseparable realities.
 323. At the same time, the seminary must offer a serious and deep intellectual formation in the field of philosophy, the human sciences, and especially in theology and missiology, so that the future priest learns to proclaim the faith in all its integrity, faithful to the magisterium of the Church, with critical attention, alert to the cultural context of our time and the major currents of thought and behavior that he will have to evangelize. Likewise, the study of the Word of God must be strengthened in the academic curriculum in the various fields of formation, striving to assure that the Divine Word is not reduced to something merely notional, but that it is really spirit and life that enlightens and nourishes all

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Circular Letter Concerning some of the More Urgent Aspects of Spiritual Formation in Seminaries*, January 6, 1980, p. 23; ID *The Propaedeutic Period* May 1, 1998, p. 14.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. PO 16; OT 4; PDV 50; Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*; n.5; Congregation for Catholic Education, *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy*, n. 31, Rome 1974.

- existence. Therefore, each seminary must have a sufficient number of well prepared professors.¹⁸⁷
324. It must be confirmed that the candidates are able to take on the demands of community life, which entails dialogue, capacity for service, humility, appreciation for the charisms of others, willingness to let oneself be challenged by others, obedience to the bishop, and openness to growing in missionary communion with priests, deacons, religious, and laity, serving unity in diversity. The Church needs priests and religious who never cease being aware that they are disciples in communion.
325. Young people from poor families or indigenous groups require an inculturated formation, that is, they must receive adequate theological and spiritual training for their future ministry, without thereby losing their roots, and so that they may accordingly be evangelizers close to their peoples and cultures.¹⁸⁸
326. The complementarity between the formation begun in the seminary and the formation process which embraces the various stages of the priest's life should be noted. It must be made clear that formation ends only with death. Permanent formation

*is a duty, in the first instance, for young priests. They should have frequent and systematic meetings which, while they continue the sound and serious formation they have received in the seminary, will gradually lead young priests to grasp and incarnate the unique wealth of God's gift which is the priesthood and to express their capabilities and ministerial attitude, also through an ever more convinced and responsible insertion in the presbyterate, and therefore in communion and co - responsibility with all their brethren.*¹⁸⁹

To that end, well articulated and constantly evaluated diocesan plans are needed.

327. Houses and centers of formation of religious life are also privileged spaces of discipleship and formation of missionary men and women, according to the charism proper to each religious institute.

6.4.6 Catholic Education

328. Latin America and the Caribbean are in the midst of a particular and delicate educational emergency. Indeed, the new educational reforms in our continent, driven by pressures to adapt to the new demands being created with global change, seem to be centered primarily on the acquisition of knowledge and skills; they suggest a plainly reductionist understanding of the human being, inasmuch as they conceive education mostly for the sake of production, competitiveness, and the market. Furthermore, they often foster the inclusion of factors contrary to life, the family, and sound sexuality. Hence, they do not promote the best values of

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Ratio Fundamentalis*, nn. 32 and 36-37.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. EAm 40; RM 54; PDV 32; Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory* n. 15.

¹⁸⁹ PDV 76.

- young people nor their religious spirit, nor do they teach them the paths toward overcoming violence and attaining happiness, nor do they help them to lead a sober life and acquire those attitudes, virtues, and habits that will make the home they establish stable, and turn them into community-oriented builders of peace and the future of society.¹⁹⁰
329. In view of this situation, strengthening close collaboration with parents and conceiving of a quality education to which all students, male and female, in our peoples have a right without distinction, the true purpose of every school must be stressed. The school is called to become primarily a privileged place of comprehensive formation and development, through the systematic and critical assimilation of one's culture. It does so through a living and vital encounter with the cultural legacy. This means that such an encounter takes place in the school in an ongoing manner, that is, by confronting and placing the perennial values in the contemporary context. Indeed, if culture is to be educational, it must be inserted into the problems of the time in which the young person's life unfolds. Thus, the different disciplines must be presented not only as knowledge to be acquired, but as values to be assimilated and truths to be discovered.
330. It is a strict responsibility of the school, as educational institution, to highlight the ethical and religious dimension of culture, precisely in order to activate the spiritual dynamism of the individual person and help him or her to attain the ethical freedom that presupposes and perfects psychological freedom. But ethical freedom occurs only in confrontation with the absolute values on which the meaning and value of the life of human beings depends. Even in the realm of education there appears the tendency to accept the present as parameter of values, thereby running the risk of responding to transitory and superficial values and of losing sight of the deeper exigencies of the contemporary world (EC 30). Education humanizes and personalizes human beings when they are thereby enabled to fully develop their thinking and freedom, bringing them to flourish in habits of comprehension and in initiatives of communion with the entire real order. Human beings thereby humanize their world, produce culture, transform society, and build history.¹⁹¹

6.4.6.1 Catholic educational institutions

331. The primary mission of the Church is to announce the Gospel in such a fashion as to assure the relationship between faith and life in the individual person and in the socio-cultural setting in which people live, act, and interrelate. Thus it strives to

transform through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources

¹⁹⁰ FC 36-38; JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Families*, 13, February 2, 1994; Pontifical Council for the Family, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, Art. 5 c, October 22, 1982; Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality. Guidelines for Education within the Family*, December 8, 1995.

¹⁹¹ PD 1025.

*of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation.*¹⁹²

332. When we speak of a Christian education, therefore, we understand that the teacher is educating toward a project of a human being in whom Jesus Christ dwells with the transforming power of his new life. There are many aspects in which education takes place, and that comprise the educational project. There are many values, but these values are never alone; they always make up an ordered constellation, whether explicitly or implicitly. If the ordering has Christ as its foundation and terminus, then such education is recapitulating everything in Christ and is a true Christian education; if not, it may speak of Christ, but it runs the risk of not being Christian.¹⁹³
333. Both aspects thereby become intertwined. That means that it is inconceivable that the Gospel can be proclaimed unless it illuminates, infuses encouragement and hope, and inspires adequate solutions to the problems of existence; nor can a true and full promotion of human beings be conceived without opening them to God and proclaiming Jesus Christ to them.¹⁹⁴
334. In its schools the Church is called to promote an education centered on the human person who is capable of living in community, and making his or her contribution to its well being. Given the fact that many are excluded, the Church must press for quality formal and informal education for all, especially for the poorest. That means an education that brings children, youth, and adults into encounter with the cultural values of their own country, discovering or integrating the religious and transcendent dimension into those values. To that end, we need a dynamic pastoral ministry of education to accompany education processes, to be a voice legitimizing and safeguarding freedom of education vis-à-vis the state and the right to a quality education of the most dispossessed.
335. Thus we are in a position to affirm that in the educational project of the Catholic school, Christ, Perfect Man, is the foundation in whom all human values encounter their full realization, and accordingly their unity. He reveals and promotes the new meaning of existence and transforms it, enabling man and woman to live divinely; that is, to think, desire, and act, according to the Gospel, making the beatitudes the standard of their life. Precisely because of the explicit reference to the Christian vision shared by all members of the school community—albeit in different degree and respecting the freedom of conscience and religious freedom of non-Christians present there—education is “Catholic” because for it the Gospel principles become educational norms, internal motivations, and at the same time, final goals. This is the specifically Catholic character of education. For Jesus Christ elevates and ennobles human persons,

¹⁹² EN 19.

¹⁹³ SD 265.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. *Iuvenum Patris*. Apostolic Letter of John Paul II on the centenary of the death of St. John Bosco.

gives value to their existence, and constitutes the perfect example of life. He is the best news, proposed to young people by Catholic schools.¹⁹⁵

336. Therefore, the goal that the Catholic school sets for itself is to lead children and youth to the encounter with the living Jesus Christ, Son of the Father, brother and friend, Master and merciful Shepherd, hope, way, truth and life, and thus to experience covenant with God and with human beings. It does so by aiding in building the personality of the students, having Christ as reference point for mindset and life. As that reference point gradually becomes explicit and internalized, it will help them to see history as Christ sees it, to judge life as He does, to choose and live as He does, to cultivate hope as He teaches us, and to live communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit in Him. By the mysterious fruitfulness of this reference point, persons are built up in their existential unity, that is, they assume their responsibilities and seek the ultimate meaning of their life. Situated within the Church, community of believers, in freedom they are able to live the faith intensely, proclaim it, and celebrate it joyfully in the reality of each day. As a consequence, the human attitudes that lead to sincere openness to truth, to respecting and loving people, to expressing their own freedom in self-giving and in service to others to transform society, mature and become second nature.
337. Catholic schools are called to deep renewal. We must restore the Catholic identity of our schools through a courageous and bold missionary impulse, so that it becomes a prophetic option shaped in a pastoral practice of participatory education. Such projects must promote the comprehensive formation of the person, having its foundation in Christ, with ecclesial and cultural identity, and with academic excellence. They must also bring about solidarity and charity to the poorest. Oversight of educational processes, parent participation in them, and teacher training are priority tasks of the educational ministry.
338. Our proposal is that in Catholic institutions education in faith be comprehensive and across the curriculum, taking into account the formation process for encountering Christ and for living as his disciples and missionaries and introducing true processes of Christian initiation within it. We likewise recommend that the educational community (principals, teachers, administrative staff, teachers, parents, etc.) as authentic ecclesial community and center of evangelization, undertake its role in the formation of disciples and missionaries at all levels. From there, in communion with the Christian community, its source, it should promote a pastoral service in the sector where it is inserted, especially youth, the family, catechesis, and promoting the human development of the very poor. These objectives are essential in processes of student admissions, their families, and hiring teachers.

¹⁹⁵ Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, n. 34.

339. Freedom of education is an unrelinquishable principle for the Church. Broad exercise of the right to education in turn requires, as a condition for its authentic realization, the full freedom that ought to be enjoyed by every person in choosing the education of their children which they consider most in accordance with the values that they prize most and consider necessary. By the fact of having given them life, parents assume the responsibility of offering their children favorable conditions for their growth and the grave obligation of educating them. Society must recognize them as the first and primary educators. The duty of family education as initial school of social virtues is so important that when it is missing it is unlikely to be supplied. This principle cannot be relinquished.¹⁹⁶
340. Because of its significance and scope, this non-transferable right, which entails an obligation and expresses the freedom of the family in the realm of education, must be firmly guaranteed by the state. Hence, government, which is charged with protecting and defending the freedoms of citizens, in keeping with distributive justice, must spend public aid—which derives from taxes from all citizens—in such a manner that all parents, regardless of their social condition, may choose, according to their conscience, from within the wide range of educational options, the schools suited to their children. This is the fundamental value and the juridical nature that grounds aid to schools. Therefore, no educational sector, not even the state itself, may claim for itself the power to bestow on itself privilege and exclusivity for the education of the very poor, without thereby undermining important rights. The natural rights of the human person, peaceful co-existence of citizens, and the progress of all are thereby promoted.

6.4.6.2 Universities and advanced institutes of Catholic education

341. By its very nature, the Catholic university provides important assistance to the Church in its evangelizing mission. It is a vital witness to Christ and his message institutional in nature that very necessary and important for cultures permeated with secularism. The fundamental activities of a Catholic university must be linked and harmonized with the Church's evangelizing mission. They are carried out through research pursued in the light of the Christian message, which places new human discoveries at the service of people and society. It thus offers a formation given in a context of faith to prepare people capable of rational and critical judgment, conscious of the transcendental dignity of the human person. This entails a professional training that includes ethical values and the dimension of service to people and society; dialogue with the culture, which fosters better understanding and transmission of the faith; and theological research which helps faith to be expressed in language that makes sense to these times. Because the church is ever more aware of its saving mission in this world, it wants to feel these institutes close to it and wishes to have them present and operating in spreading the authentic message of Christ.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Pontifical Council for the Family, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, Art. 3c; October 22, 1983.

¹⁹⁷ ECE 49.

342. Catholic universities, accordingly, must faithfully develop their Christian uniqueness, because they carry gospel responsibilities that other kinds of institutions are not obliged to fulfill. These particularly include dialogue between faith and reason and faith and culture, and the formation of professors, students and administrative staff through the church's social and moral doctrine, so that they may be capable of commitment in solidarity to human dignity and to the community, and to display prophetically in the life of Latin American and Caribbean societies the newness represented by Christianity. Hence, care must be taken with the human, academic, and Christian profile of those primarily responsible for research and teaching.
343. There must be a university ministry accompanying the life and journey of all members of the university community, promoting personal and committed encounter with Jesus Christ and multiple solidarity and missionary initiatives. It must also pursue close relations and dialogue with members of other public universities and research centers.
344. In recent decades in Latin America and the Caribbean, we observe the emergence of different institutes of theology and pastoral ministry offering refresher courses aimed at the formation of pastoral agents. Along these lines, opportunities for dialogue, discussion and the pursuit of adequate responses to the enormous challenges faced by evangelization in our continent have been created. Countless leaders have likewise been trained for service to the particular churches.
345. We encourage appreciation for the rich postconciliar reflection of the church in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the philosophical, theological, and pastoral reflection of our churches and their centers for formation and research, so as to strengthen our own identity, develop pastoral creativity, and to energize what is ours. Study and theological and pastoral research must be fostered to deal with the challenges of the new multiple, differentiated, and globalized social reality, seeking new responses to sustain faith and the living out of discipleship of pastoral agents. We also suggest greater use of the services offered by existing theological and pastoral formation institutes by fostering dialogue between them and devoting more resources and joint efforts in the formation of lay men and women.
346. This Fifth Conference is grateful for the invaluable service provided by various institutions of Catholic education in promoting human development and evangelization of the new generations, and their support to the culture of our peoples, and it encourages dioceses, religious congregations, and organizations of lay Catholics that maintain schools, universities, institutes of higher education and of non-formal training, to continue untiringly in their dedicated and irreplaceable apostolic mission.

Part Three
THE LIFE OF
JESUS CHRIST FOR
OUR PEOPLES

**THE MISSION OF THE DISCIPLES
IN THE SERVICE OF FULL LIFE**

347. “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.”¹⁹⁸ Hence, the missionary impulse is a necessary fruit of the life that the Trinity communicates to the disciples.

7.1 LIVING AND COMMUNICATING THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST TO OUR PEOPLES

348. The great novelty that the Church proclaims to the world is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, Word and Life, came to the world to make us “sharers in the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4), to share with us his divine life. It is the trinitarian life of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, eternal life. His mission is to manifest the Father’s immense love, that he wants us to be his children. The proclamation of the *kerygma* is an invitation to become aware of this life-giving love of God who offers himself to us in Christ died and risen. This is the first thing that we must proclaim and also hear, because grace has an absolute primacy in Christian life and in all the Church’s evangelizing activity: “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor 15:10).

349. The call of Jesus in the Spirit and the Church’s proclamation always appeal to our trusting acceptance by faith. “He who believes in me has eternal life.” Baptism does not merely purify from sins. It causes those who are baptized to be reborn, conferring on them the new life in Christ, who incorporates them into the community of disciples and missionaries of Christ, into the Church, and makes them children of God; it enables them to recognize Christ as Firstborn and Head of all humankind. Being brothers and sisters means living fraternally and being ever alert to the needs of the weakest.

350. Our peoples do not want to walk in the shadows of death; they hunger and thirst for life and happiness in Christ. They seek him as source of life. They yearn for this new life in God to which the disciple of the Lord is born by Baptism and is reborn by the sacrament of Reconciliation. They seek this life which is strengthened when it is confirmed by the Spirit of Jesus and when the disciples renew their covenant of love in Christ, with the Father and with their brothers and sisters at each eucharistic celebration. Accepting the Word of eternal life and nourished by the Bread that has come down from heaven, they want to live the fullness of love, and lead all to the encounter with Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

351. However, in the exercise of our freedom we sometimes reject this new life (cf. Jn 5:40), or we do not persevere on the way (cf. Heb 3:12-14). Through sin, we choose a path of death. Hence, the proclamation of Jesus always calls to

¹⁹⁸ AG 2.

conversion, which makes us share in the triumph of the Risen One and begins a journey of transformation.

352. A very credible witness of holiness and commitment is expected of those who live in Christ. When we desire and seek this holiness we do not live less, but better, because when God asks for more, it is because he is offering much more: “Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything.”¹⁹⁹

7.1.1 Jesus at the service of life

353. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, wishes to communicate his life to us and place himself at the service of life. We see him when he approaches the blind man on the road (cf. Mk 10:46-52), when he ennobles the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4:7-26), when he heals the sick (cf. Mt 11:2-6), when he feeds the people who are hungry (cf. Mk 6:30-44), when he frees the possessed (cf. Mk 5:1-20). Jesus includes all in his Kingdom of life: he eats and drinks with sinners (cf. Mk 2:16), unconcerned that he is regarded as a glutton and drunkard (cf. Mt 11:19); he touches lepers (cf. Lk 5:13), and he receives Nicodemus by night to invite him to be born again (cf. Jn 3:1-15). He likewise invites his disciples to reconciliation (cf. Mt 5:24), love for enemies (cf. Mt 5:44), and to opt for the poorest (cf. Lk 14:15-24).
354. In his Word and in all the sacraments, Jesus offers us food for the journey. The Eucharist is the vital center of the universe, capable of satisfying hunger for life and happiness: “the one who feeds on me will have life because of me” (Jn 6:57). At this banquet we happily participate in eternal life, and thus our daily existence becomes an extended Mass. But all God’s gifts require an adequate disposition in order to produce fruits of change. They especially demand of us a communal spirit, opening our eyes to recognize Him and serve Him in the very poor: “in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself”²⁰⁰ Hence Saint John Chrysostom used to appeal: “Do you wish to honor the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk, only then to neglect him outside where he is cold and ill-clad.”²⁰¹

7.1.2 Varied dimensions of life in Christ

355. Jesus Christ is fullness of life that elevates the human condition to divine condition for his glory. “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10). His friendship does not require that we give up our yearnings for fullness of life, for he loves our happiness on this earth as well. The Lord says that He created everything “for our enjoyment” (1 Tim 6:17).
356. The new life of Jesus Christ touches the entire human being and develops human existence in fullness “in its personal, family, social and cultural dimensions.”²⁰² That requires entering into a process of change that transfigures the varied aspects of life itself. Only thus will it become possible to recognize that Jesus Christ is

¹⁹⁹ BENEDICT XVI, *Homily at the inauguration of the pontificate*, April 24, 2005.

²⁰⁰ DCE 15.

²⁰¹ ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on St. Matthew*, L 3-4 58, 508-509.

²⁰² IA 4.

our savior in all senses of the word. Only thus will we manifest that life in Christ heals, strengthens, and humanizes. For “He is the Living One who walks alongside us, revealing to us the meaning of events, suffering and death, rejoicing and feasting.”²⁰³ Life in Christ includes the joy of eating together, enthusiasm for making progress, the pleasure of working and learning, the joy of serving whoever needs us, contact with nature, enthusiasm for communal projects, the pleasure of living sexuality in keeping with the gospel, and all the things that the Father gives us as signs of his sincere love. We can find the Lord in the midst of the joys of our limited existence, and that gives rise to sincere gratitude.

357. But hedonistic and individualistic consumerism, which jeopardizes human life for the sake of immediate unbridled pleasure, obscures the meaning of life and degrades it. The vitality offered by Christ invites us to expand our horizons and recognize that by embracing the daily cross, we enter into the deeper dimensions of existence. The Lord, who invites us to appreciate things and to make progress, also warns us of the danger of the obsession to accumulate: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth” (Mt 6:26). “What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life?” (Mt 16:26). Jesus Christ offers us a great deal, in fact much more than we expect. He gives the Samaritan woman more than the water from the well, he offers the hungry multitude more than relief from hunger. He surrenders Himself as life in abundance. The new life in Christ is participation in the triune God’s life of love. It begins at baptism and culminates in the final resurrection.

7.1.3 At the service of a full life for all

358. But the living conditions of many of those who are abandoned, excluded, and ignored in their poverty and pain stand in contradiction to this project of the Father and challenge believers to greater commitment to the culture of life. The Kingdom of life that Christ came to bring is incompatible with such inhuman situations. If we try to close our eyes to these realities we are not advocates of the life of the Kingdom and we place ourselves on the path of death: “We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. Whoever does not love remains in death” (1 Jn 3:14). The “unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbor”²⁰⁴ which “invites all to overcome grave social inequalities and the enormous differences in access to goods”²⁰⁵ must be emphasized. Both concern for developing more just structures and for transmitting the social values of the gospel are situated in this context of fraternal service to worthy life in dignity.
359. We thus discover a profound law of reality: life only develops fully in fraternal and just communion. For “God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person but also the social relations existing between men.”²⁰⁶ Given the various situations

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ DCE 16.

²⁰⁵ IA 4.

²⁰⁶ DCSD 52.

that reflect the divisions between brothers and sisters, we feel compelled to assure that the Catholic faith of our Latin American and Caribbean peoples is expressed in a more decent life for all. The Church's rich social magisterium tells us that we cannot conceive of an offer of life in Christ without dynamism toward integral liberation, humanization, reconciliation, and involvement in society.

7.1.4 A mission to communicate life

360. Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by in the mission of communicating life to others. The Gospel helps us to discover that a morbid concern for one's own life vitiates the human and Christian quality of that life. We live much better when we have inner freedom to give everything away: "Whoever loves his life loses it" (Jn 12:25.). Here we discover another profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures insofar as it is surrendered in order to give life to others. That is certainly what mission means.
361. Jesus' project is to establish the Kingdom of his Father. Hence, he asks his disciples: "As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Mt 10:7). This is the Kingdom of life. For what Jesus proposes to our peoples, the fundamental content of this mission, is the offer of full life for all. Thus, the church's teaching, norms, ethical orientations, and all its missionary activity must allow this attractive offer of a more worthy life in Christ to shine through for each man and each woman in Latin America and the Caribbean.
362. We commit ourselves to a continent-wide Great Mission that will require that we deepen and enrich all the reasons and motivations to make each believer a missionary disciple. We need to develop the missionary dimension of life in Christ. The Church needs to be jolted to prevent it from becoming well established in comfort, stagnation, and lukewarmness, aloof from the suffering of the continent's poor. We need every community to become a powerful radiating center of life in Christ. We hope for a new Pentecost that will free us from fatigue, disillusionment, and conformity to the environment; a coming of the Spirit who renews our joy and our hope. Hence, it will become imperative that there be warm spaces of community prayer to feed the fire of an irrepressible zeal and make possible an attractive testimony of unity so "that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21).
363. The power of this proclamation of life will be fruitful if we do it in an appropriate way, with the attitudes of the Master, always keeping the Eucharist as source and summit of all missionary activity. We call on the Holy Spirit in order to be able 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. He keeps calling, keeps inviting, keeps offering constantly a worthy and full life for all. In Latin America and the Caribbean, we, his male and female disciples, are now called to sail out to sea for an abundant catch. This means setting out from our isolated minds and throwing ourselves with courage and confidence (*parrhesia*) into the mission of the entire Church.

364. We pause to gaze at Mary and we recognize in her a perfect image of the missionary disciple. She exhorts us to do as Jesus tells us (cf. Jn 2:5), so that He can pour out his life over Latin America and the Caribbean. Alongside her, we intend to be attentive again to listen to the Master, and gathered around her, we again receive with trembling the missionary mandate of her Son: *Go and make disciples of all peoples* (Mt 28:19). We hear it as community of missionary disciples, who have experienced the living encounter with Him, and we want to share this incomparable happiness with others every day.

7.2 PASTORAL CONVERSION AND MISSIONARY RENEWAL OF COMMUNITIES

365. All ecclesial structures and all pastoral plans of dioceses, parishes, religious communities, movements, and any Church institution must be imbued with this firm missionary decision. 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.

366. Personal conversion engenders the ability to make everything subject to establishing the Kingdom of life. We bishops, priests, permanent deacons, religious men and women, and lay men and women are called to assume an attitude of ongoing pastoral conversion, which entails listening attentively and discerning “what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 2:29) through the signs of the times in which God is made manifest.

367. The Church’s ministry cannot ignore the historic context in which its members live. Its life takes place in very specific sociocultural contexts. These social and cultural transformations naturally represent new challenges to the Church in its mission of building the Kingdom of God. Hence the need, in fidelity to the Holy Spirit who leads it, for an ecclesial renewal that entails spiritual, pastoral, and also institutional reforms.

368. Conversion of the shepherds also leads us to live and promote a spirituality of communion and participation.

*making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up.*²⁰⁷

Pastoral conversion requires that ecclesial communities be communities of missionary disciples around Jesus Christ, Master and Shepherd. Thence arises the attitude of openness, dialogue, and willingness to promote the stewardship and real participation of all the faithful in the life of Christian communities. Today more than ever, the testimony of ecclesial communion and holiness are a pastoral

²⁰⁷ NMI 43.

- priority. Pastoral planning must be inspired by the new commandment of love (cf. Jn 13:35).²⁰⁸
369. We find the paradigmatic model of this community renewal in the early Christian communities (cf. Acts 2:42-47), which were able to keep seeking new ways of evangelizing in accordance with cultures and circumstances. We are likewise prompted by Vatican II's communion of ecclesiology, the synodal path in the post-council period, and the previous general conferences of Latin American and Caribbean bishops. We remain mindful that, as Jesus assures us, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:29).
370. The pastoral conversion of our communities requires moving from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry. Thus, it will be possible for "the program of the Gospel to continue to take root in the life of the Church everywhere"²⁰⁹ with new missionary zeal, making the Church visibly present as a mother who reaches out, a welcoming home, a constant school of missionary communion.
371. The diocese's pastoral plan, its approach to collaborative ministry, must be a conscious and effective response to meet the demands of today's world, with a
- detailed pastoral plan . . . goals and methods, formation and enrichment of the people involved, the search for the necessary resources — which will enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mould communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture.*²¹⁰
- Lay people must participate in discernment, decision making, planning and execution.²¹¹ This diocesan plan requires constant oversight by the bishop, priests, and pastoral agents, with a flexible attitude that allows them to remain alert to the claims of ever changing situations.
372. Bearing in mind the size of our parishes, breaking them up into smaller territorial units with their own leadership and coordination teams is advisable so as to allow closer contact with persons and groups living in the territory. It is advisable that missionary agents promote the creation of communities of families to foster sharing their Christian faith and responses to problems. We recognize as an important phenomenon in our time the emergence and spread of different forms of missionary volunteer service which are handling a variety of services. The Church supports national and international volunteer networks and programs, which in many countries have emerged within the realm of civil society organizations on behalf of our continent poorest people, in the light of the principles of dignity, subsidiarity, and solidarity, in accordance with the Church's social doctrine.

²⁰⁸ Cf. NMI 20.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 29.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

²¹¹ Cf. ChL 51.

These are not simply strategies for pursuing pastoral success, but fidelity in imitation of the Master, ever close, accessible, available to everyone, eager to communicate life in every corner of the earth.

7.3. OUR COMMITMENT TO MISSION *AD GENTES*

373. We are conscious and grateful that the Father so loved the world that he sent his Son to save it (cf. Jn 3:17), and so we want to be continuers of his mission, because it is the reason for the Church's existence and defines its deepest identity.

374. As missionary disciples, we want the influence of Christ to reach the ends of the earth. We discover the presence of the Holy Spirit in mission lands through signs:

- a) The presence of the values of the Kingdom of God in cultures, recreating them from within to transform situations inimical to the gospel.
- b) The efforts of men and women who find in their religious beliefs the energy for their commitment to engage with the world of their time.
- c) The birth of the ecclesial community.
- d) The testimony of persons and communities that proclaim Jesus Christ through the holiness of their lives.

375. His Holiness Benedict XVI has confirmed that mission *ad gentes* is opening to new dimensions.

*Thus, the area of the "missio ad gentes" appears to have been considerably extended and cannot be defined solely on the basis of geographical or juridical considerations; indeed, the missionary activity of the People of God is not only intended for non-Christian peoples and distant lands, but above all for social and cultural contexts and hearts.*²¹²

376. At the same time, the world expects of our Latin American and Caribbean church a more significant commitment to the universal mission on all continents. In order to avoid falling into the trap of becoming closed in on ourselves, we must be formed as missionary disciples without borders, willing to go "to the other shore," there where Christ is still not recognized as God and Lord, and the church is not yet present.²¹³

377. We disciples, who by essence are missionaries by virtue of Baptism and confirmation, are formed with a universal heart, open to all cultures and to all truths, cultivating our capacity for human contact and dialogue. With the courage given us by the Spirit, we are willing to proclaim Christ where he is not accepted, with our life, with our action, with our profession of faith, and with his Word. Emigrants are likewise disciples and missionaries and are called to be a new seed of evangelization, like the many emigrants and missionaries who brought the Christian faith to our Americas.

²¹² BENEDICT XVI, *Address on Fortieth Anniversary of Ad Gentes*, March 11, 2006.

²¹³ Cf. AG 6.

378. We want to urge local churches to support and organize national missionary centers and to act in close collaboration with the Pontifical Missionary Societies and other church aid ventures, whose importance and dynamism for inspiring and aiding mission we acknowledge and for which we give heartfelt thanks. As we mark the fiftieth anniversary of the encyclical *Fidei Donum*, we thank God for the men and women missionaries who came to our continent and are today present in it, giving testimony to the missionary spirit of their local churches as they are sent by them.
379. It is our desire that this Fifth Conference will prompt many disciples in our churches to go out and evangelize on the “other shore.” Faith is strengthened by giving it away, and in our continent we must enter into a new springtime of mission *ad gentes*. We are poor churches, but “we must give from our poverty and from the joy of our faith,”²¹⁴ and do so without discharging to only a few of those sent out the commitment that belongs to the whole Christian community. Our capacity to share our spiritual, human, and material gifts with other churches, will confirm the authenticity of our new opening to mission. Hence we encourage participation in holding missionary conferences.

²¹⁴ PD 368.

**KINGDOM OF GOD AND
PROMOTING HUMAN DIGNITY**

380. The mission of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ has a universal destination. Its mandate of charity encompasses all dimensions of existence, all people, all environments of community life, and all peoples. Nothing human can be alien to it. By God's revelation and by the human experience of faith, the Church knows that Jesus Christ is the complete, all-surpassing, and satisfactory answer to human questions about truth, the meaning of life and reality, happiness, justice, and beauty. These concerns are rooted in the heart of every person and they resonate in what is most human in the culture of the various peoples. Hence, any authentic sign of truth, good, and beauty in the human adventure comes from God and cries out for God.
381. Striving to approach the life of Jesus Christ and in response to the yearnings of our peoples, we next highlight some major areas, priorities, and tasks for mission of the disciples of Jesus Christ today in Latin America and the Caribbean.

8.1 KINGDOM OF GOD, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND CHRISTIAN CHARITY

382. "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15). The voice of the Lord continues calling us as missionary disciples and challenges us to guide our whole life from within the transforming reality of the Kingdom of God which becomes present in Jesus. We very joyfully welcome this good news. God-love is Father of all men and women of all peoples and races. Jesus Christ is the Kingdom of God which seeks to deploy all its transforming power in our church and in our societies. God has chosen us in Him to be his children with the same origin and destiny, with the same dignity, with the same rights and duties, lived out in the supreme commandment of love. The Spirit has sown this seed of the Kingdom in our baptism and makes it grow through the grace of ongoing conversion thanks to the Word and the sacraments.
383. Evident signs of the presence of the Kingdom are: living the beatitudes personally and in community; the evangelization of the poor; knowing and doing the will of the Father; martyrdom for the faith; access of all to the goods of creation; sincere, fraternal, mutual forgiveness; accepting and respecting the richness of pluralism; and the struggle not to succumb to temptation and to not be slaves of evil.
384. Being disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ so that our peoples may have life in Him, leads us to assume in a gospel spirit and from the perspective of the Kingdom, the crucial tasks that contribute to the enhancement of every human being, and to work together with other citizens and institutions for the sake of humanity. Merciful love toward all those whose life is violated in any of its dimensions, as indeed the Lord demonstrates in all his deeds of mercy, requires that we provide aid to meet urgent needs, while working with other bodies or

institutions to develop more just structures nationally and internationally. Structures must be created to firmly establish a social, economic, and political order without inequity, and with opportunities for all. New structures must likewise be created to promote a genuine human coexistence, prevent arrogant domination by some, and facilitate constructive dialogue for the necessary social consensus.

385. Mercy will always be necessary, but it must not contribute to creating vicious circles that help maintain an evil economic system. Works of mercy must go hand in hand with the pursuit of true social justice, raising the living standard of citizens, and promoting them as agents of their own development. In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI has considered the complex relationship between justice and charity with inspired clarity. There he tells us that “just ordering of society and the State is a central responsibility of politics,” not of the Church. But the Church “cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice”.²¹⁵ It collaborates by purifying reason of all those things that confuse it and prevent integral liberation from being achieved. It is also the Church’s task to aid with preaching, catechesis, denunciation, and the testimony of love and justice, so that the necessary spiritual forces are aroused in society and social values are developed. Only thus will structures really be more just, and will they be able to be effective, and be sustained over time. Without values there is no future, and there will be no saving structures, for underlying those structures is always human frailty.
386. The proper and specific mission of the Church is to communicate the life of Jesus Christ to all persons, proclaiming the Word, administering the sacraments, and practicing charity. It is welcomed to be reminded that love is shown more in works than in words; that is true for our words in this Fifth Conference as well. Not everyone who says Lord, Lord (cf. Mt 7:21). It is our supreme task as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ to witness love for God and for neighbor with concrete works. Alberto Hurtado used to say, “In our works, our people know that we understand their suffering.”

8.2 HUMAN DIGNITY

387. Contemporary culture tends to propose ways of being and living contrary to the nature and dignity of the human being. The dominant impact of the idols of power, wealth, and fleeting pleasure have become—above the value of the person—the highest standard for operating and the decisive criterion in social organization. Confronted by this reality, we again proclaim the supreme value of every man and every woman. In placing everything created at the service of the human person, the Creator manifests the dignity of the human person and calls for it to be respected (Cf. Gen 1:26-30).

²¹⁵ DCE 28.

388. We proclaim that all human beings exist purely and simply by the love of God who created them, and by the love of God who preserves them at every moment. The creation of man and woman in his image and likeness is a divine event of life, and its source is the faithful love of the Lord. Hence, only the Lord is author and master of life, and human beings, his living image, are always sacred, from their conception, at all stages of existence, until their natural death, and after death. The Christian view of human beings makes apparent their value, which transcends the entire universe: “God has shown us unsurpassably how he loves all human beings, and thereby confers infinite dignity on them.”²¹⁶
389. Our mission so that our peoples may have life in Him manifests our conviction that the meaning, fruitfulness, and dignity of human life is found in the living God revealed in Jesus. We are impelled by mission to bring to our people the full and happy life that Jesus brings us, so that all human persons may live in accordance with the dignity given them by God. We do so aware that this dignity will reach its fullness when God is all in all. He is the Lord of life and history, conqueror of the mystery of evil, and saving event that enables us to issue a true judgment on reality so as to safeguard the dignity of persons and peoples.
390. Our fidelity to the gospel demands that we proclaim the truth about the human being and the dignity of every human person in every public and private aeropagus in today’s world, and from within all expressions of the Church’s life and mission.

8.3 PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR AND EXCLUDED

391. This broad concern for human dignity is the source of our anguish over the millions of Latin American men and women who cannot lead a life that responds to this dignity. The preferential option for the poor is one of the distinguishing features of our Latin American and Caribbean church. Indeed, addressing our continent Pope John Paul II stated that

*for the Christian people of America conversion to the Gospel means to revise “all the different areas and aspects of life, especially those related to the social order and the pursuit of the common good.”*²¹⁷

392. Our faith proclaims that Jesus Christ is “the human face of God and the divine face of man.”²¹⁸ Hence, “the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty.”²¹⁹ This option arises out of our faith in Jesus Christ, God made man, who has become our brother (cf. Heb 2:11-12). Yet it is neither exclusive nor excluding.

²¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Message to the handicapped, Angelus* November 16, 1980.

²¹⁷ EAm 27.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.* 67.

²¹⁹ IA 3.

393. If this option is implicit in Christological faith, we Christians as disciples and missionaries are called to contemplate, in the suffering faces of our brothers and sisters, the face of Christ who calls us to serve Him in them: “The suffering faces of the poor are suffering faces of Christ.”²²⁰ They question the core of the Church’s action, its ministry, and our Christian attitudes. Everything having to do with Christ has to do with the poor, and everything connected to the poor cries out to Jesus Christ: “whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40). John Paul II emphasized that this biblical text “sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ.”²²¹ For in Christ the great became small, the strong became weak, the rich became poor.
394. Solidarity likewise springs from our faith in Christ as a permanent attitude of encounter, brotherly and sisterly spirit, and service, which is to be manifested in visible options and gestures, primarily in defense of life and of the rights of the most vulnerable and excluded, and in continual accompaniment in their efforts to be agents for changing and transforming their situation. The Church’s service of charity among the poor “is an aspect which must clearly mark the Christian life, the Church’s whole activity and her pastoral planning.”²²²
395. The Holy Father has reminded us that the Church is called to be “advocate of justice and of the poor”²²³ in the face of intolerable social and economic inequalities,²²⁴ which “cry to heaven.”²²⁵ We have much to offer because

*The Church's social teaching is able to offer hope even in the worst of situations, because, if there is no hope for the poor, there will be no hope for anyone, not even for the so-called rich.*²²⁶

The preferential option for the poor demands that we devote special attention to those Catholic professional people who are responsible for the finances of nations, those who promote employment, and politicians who must create conditions for the economic development of countries, so as to give them ethical guidelines consistent with their faith.

396. We commit ourselves to work so that our Latin American and Caribbean Church will continue to be, with even greater determination, a traveling companion of our poorest brothers and sisters, even as far as martyrdom. Today we want to ratify and energize the preferential option for the poor made in previous Conferences.²²⁷ That it is preferential means that it should permeate all our pastoral structures and priorities. The Latin American Church is called to be sacrament of love, solidarity, and justice within our peoples.

²²⁰ SD 178.

²²¹ NMI 49.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ DI 4.

²²⁴ TMA 51.

²²⁵ EAm 56.

²²⁶ PG 67.

²²⁷ Medellin 14, 4-11; PD 1134-1165; SD 178-181.

397. Today we tend to defend our spaces of privacy and enjoyment too much, and we easily allow ourselves to be infected by individualistic consumerism. Hence, our option for the poor is in danger of remaining on a theoretical or merely emotional level, without truly impacting our behavior and our decisions. What is needed is a permanent stance expressed in concrete options and deeds²²⁸ that avoids any paternalistic attitude. We are asked to devote time to the poor, provide them kind attention, listen to them with interest, stand by them in the most difficult moments, choosing to spend hours, weeks, or years of our life with them, and striving to transform their situation from within their midst. We cannot forget that that is what Jesus himself proposed with the way he acted and with his words: “when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.” (Lk 14:13).
398. Only the closeness that makes us friends enables us to appreciate deeply the values of the poor today, their legitimate desires, and their own manner of living the faith. The option for the poor should lead us to friendship with the poor. Day by day the poor become agents of evangelization and of comprehensive human promotion: they educate their children in the faith, they engage in ongoing solidarity among relatives and neighbors, they constantly seek God, and give life to the Church’s pilgrimage. In the light of the gospel, we recognize their immense dignity and their sacred worth in the eyes of Christ, who was poor like them and excluded among them. Out of this believing experience, we will share with them the defense of their rights.

8.4. A RENEWED PASTORAL MINISTRY FOR INTEGRAL HUMAN PROMOTION

399. Taking on this option for the poor with new energy, we state that any evangelization process entails human promotion and authentic liberation, “without which a just order in society is not possible.”²²⁹ We also understand that true human promotion cannot be reduced to particular aspects: “It must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man.”²³⁰ out of the new life in Christ that transforms the person so that it “makes him agent of his own development.”²³¹ For the Church, the service of charity, like the proclamation of the Word and celebration of the sacraments it is “an indispensable expression of her very being,”²³²
400. Hence, from our condition as disciples and missionaries, we want to energize the Gospel of life and solidarity in our pastoral plans in the light of the Church’s social doctrine. We also intend to promote more effective ecclesial ways of taking action in social matters with the preparation and commitment of laypeople. John Paul II offers reason for hope:

²²⁸ DCE 28, 31.

²²⁹ IA 3.

²³⁰ PP 14.

²³¹ PP 15.

²³² DCE 25.

*However imperfect and temporary are all the things that can and ought to be done through the combined efforts of everyone and through divine grace, at a given moment of history, in order to make people's lives more human, nothing will be lost or will have been in vain*²³³.

401. Bishops Conferences and local churches have the mission of promoting renewed efforts to strengthen a structured, organic, and comprehensive social ministry which with both direct aid and development efforts²³⁴ becomes present in the new realities of exclusion and marginalization in which the more vulnerable groups live, where life is most in jeopardy. At the center of this action is each person, who is welcomed and served with Christian warmth. In this activity on behalf of the life of our peoples, the Catholic church supports mutual collaboration with other Christian communities.
402. Globalization is causing the emergence of new faces of the poor in our peoples. With special attention and in continuity with our previous General Conferences, we focus our attention on the faces of the new excluded: migrants, victims of violence, displaced people and refugees, victims of human trafficking and kidnappings, the disappeared, people sick with HIV and endemic diseases, drug addicts, adults, boys and girls who are victims of prostitution, pornography and violence or of child labor, abused women, victims of exclusion and traffic for sexual exploitation, differently-abled people, large groups of unemployed men and women, those excluded by technological illiteracy, street people in large cities, the indigenous and Afro-Americans, landless peasants and miners. Through its social ministry the Church should welcome and journey with these excluded people in the appropriate environments.
403. In this task, concrete actions should be designed with pastoral creativity to influence governments to enact social and economic policies to deal with the varied needs of the population and lead toward sustainable development. With the aid of different ad hoc bodies and organizations the Church can engage in ongoing Christian interpretation and a pastoral approach to the reality of our continent, utilizing the rich legacy of the Church's social doctrine. It will thereby have concrete bases for demanding that those who are responsible for designing and enacting the policies that affect our peoples will do so in keeping with ethics, solidarity, and genuine humanism. In doing so, lay men and women play a fundamental role, undertaking important tasks in society.
404. We offer our encouragement to business people who manage large and medium companies, and small businesspeople, economic agents in production and sales, in both the private and community sector, because they are creators of wealth in our nations when they strive to generate decent jobs, foster democracy, promote the aspiration to a just society and to civic coexistence in well-being and in peace. We likewise appreciate those who do not invest their capital in speculative shares, but

²³³ SRS 48.

²³⁴ EA 58.

rather in creating sources of employment, and are concerned for their workers, and regard “them and their families” as the company’s greatest wealth; those who live modestly, because, as Christians they have made austerity a precious value; who work with governments out of concern for, and achieving, the common good; and are generous in works of solidarity and mercy.

405. Indeed, we cannot forget that the greatest poverty is that of not recognizing the presence of the mystery of God and his love in the life of the human being, which alone saves and liberates. In fact, “Anyone who excludes God from his horizons falsifies the notion of ‘reality’ and, in consequence, can only end up in blind alleys or with recipes for destruction.”²³⁵ The truth of this statement is obvious given the failure of all systems that put God in parenthesis.

8.5 GLOBALIZATION OF SOLIDARITY AND INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

406. The Church in Latin America and the Caribbean feels that it has a responsibility to form Christians and sensitize them to the major issues of international justice. Hence, both the shepherds and the builders of society have to be alert to international discussions and standards in this area. This is especially important for lay people who take on public responsibilities in solidarity with the life of peoples. Hence we propose the following:

- a) Support the participation of civil society for the reorientation and consequent restoration of ethics in politics. Hence, venues for the participation of civil society to make democracy effective, a true economy of solidarity, and comprehensive, sustainable development in solidarity are all very important.
- b) Shape a Christian ethics that sets as a challenge achieving the common good, creating opportunities for all, battling corruption, and enforcing labor and labor union rights. Priority must be given to creating economic opportunities for traditionally excluded sectors of the population, such as women and youth, based on recognition of their dignity. Hence, efforts must be made toward a culture of responsibility at all levels involving persons, companies, governments, and the international system itself.
- c) Working for the common good means promoting just regulation of the economy, finances, and world trade. It is crucial that the burden of foreign debt be lifted in order to foster investments in development and social spending.²³⁶ Global regulations should be devised to prevent and control speculative movement of capital, promote fair trade and the lowering of the protectionist barriers of the powerful, assure adequate prices for raw materials produced by impoverished countries and fair regulations for attracting and regulating investments and services, and so forth.
- d) Examine carefully intergovernmental treaties and other negotiations over free trade. The Church in the Latin American country involved, taking into

²³⁵ IA 3.

²³⁶ TMA 51, SD 197.

account all the factors in play, must find the most effective ways to alert the politicians responsible and public opinion to the possible negative consequences that can affect the most exposed and vulnerable sectors of the population.

- e) Call on all men and women of good will to put into practice fundamental principles like the common good (the home is everyone's), subsidiarity, and intergenerational and intragenerational solidarity.

8.6 SUFFERING FACES THAT PAIN US

8.6.1 Street people in large cities

- 407. In large cities a growing number of people are living on the street. They require special care, attention, and development work on the part of the Church, so that while they are provided the help that they need in order to live, they are also included in participatory development projects in which they themselves become active agents in moving back into society.
- 408. We want to urge local and national governments to design policies to encourage care for these human beings, while dealing with the causes of this scourge which affects millions of our people in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- 409. The preferential option for the poor impels us as disciples and missionaries of Jesus to seek new and creative paths in order to respond to other effects of poverty. Their penurious situation and family violence often force many boys and girls to try to earn money on the street for their own survival and that of their family, thereby exposing them to grave moral and human risks.
- 410. It is the state's social obligation to create a policy that includes street people. Violence and even killing of street children and youth in the street, as has regrettably happened in some countries in our continent, shall never be acceptable as a solution to this very serious social problem.

8.6.2 Migrants

- 411. Pastoral accompaniment of migrants is an expression of charity, which is in fact ecclesial charity. Millions of real people for different reasons are constantly on the move. Emigrants, the displaced, and refugees, especially for economic and political reasons and violence, constitute a new and disturbing fact in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- 412. The Church as mother must experience itself as a Church without borders, family Church, attentive to the growing phenomenon of human mobility in its diverse sectors. She believes that it is crucial to develop a mindset and spirituality for the pastoral service of brothers and sisters on the move, setting up appropriate national and diocesan structures to facilitate the encounter between the foreigner and the welcoming particular church. Bishops Conferences and dioceses must prophetically assume this specific ministry, whose thrust must be that of combining criteria and actions that can be helpful for ongoing care for migrants, who themselves should also become disciples and missionaries.

413. To attain this objective, dialogue between the sending and receiving churches must be enhanced so as to provide humanitarian and pastoral care to those who have moved, supporting them in their religiosity, and appreciating their cultural expressions in everything having to do with the Gospel. Awareness of the reality of human mobility must be developed in seminaries and houses of formation so as to provide a pastoral response to it. Likewise attention must be given to preparing lay people who with a Christian sense, professional competence, and capacity for understanding, can accompany those arriving, and likewise the families left behind in their places of origin.²³⁷ We think that “the reality of migrations must never been seen as a problem, but rather and particularly as a great resource for the journey of humankind.”²³⁸
414. One of the tasks of the Church on behalf of migrants is unquestionably prophetic critique of the attacks that they often suffer, and also the effort, together with civil society organizations, to influence the governments of countries, to achieve a migration policy that takes into account the rights of people on the move. It must also be mindful of those displaced due to violence. In countries scourged by violence, pastoral action should be undertaken to accompany the victims and take them in, and offer them training so they can live off their work. Their pastoral and theological efforts to promote universal citizenship in which there is no distinction of persons must likewise be deepened.
415. Migrants should be pastorally accompanied by their churches of origin and urged to become disciples and missionaries in the lands and communities that take them in, sharing with them the riches of their faith and their religious traditions. Migrants who leave from our communities can offer a valuable missionary contribution to the communities that receive them.
416. The generous remittances sent from the United States, Canada, European countries and elsewhere by Latin American immigrants witness to their capacity for sacrifice and love in solidarity toward their own families and homelands. It is usually aid from the poor to the poor.

8.6.3 Sick people

417. The Church has made an option for life. That option inevitably pushes us toward the furthest limits of existence: being born and dying, the child and the old person, the healthy person and the ill. St. Irenaeus tells us that “the glory of God is the living human being,” even one who is weak, the recently conceived, the one worn out by the years and the sick person. Christ invited his apostles to preach the Kingdom of God and heal the sick, who are true cathedrals of encounter with the Lord Jesus.
418. This twofold command has been fulfilled since the beginning of evangelization. The purpose of combating disease is to achieve physical, psychological, social, and spiritual harmony in order to carry out the mission received. The ministry of

²³⁷ Cf. EMCC. 70, 71, and 86-88.

²³⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Address, *Angelus*, January 14, 2007.

health care is the response to the great questions of life, such as suffering and death, in the light of the Lord's death and resurrection.

419. Health is a topic that involves major forces in the world, but those forces do not provide a purpose that transcends it. In contemporary culture, there is no place for death, and in the face of its reality, efforts are made to conceal it. Opening it up to its spiritual and transcendent dimension, healthcare ministry becomes proclamation of the Lord's death and resurrection, the only true health. In the sacramental economy of the love of Christ, it unifies the love of many "good Samaritans," priests, deacons, nuns, lay people and health professionals. The 32,116 Catholic institutions devoted to healthcare ministry in Latin America represent a resource for evangelization that should be utilized.
420. In visits to the sick in health facilities, in silently being with the sick person, kind treatment, sensitive care for the requirements of the disease, the motherhood of the church is expressed through the professionals and volunteers, disciples of the Lord. The church enfolds them with its kindness, strengthens the heart, and for the dying, accompanies them in the final passage. The sick person lovingly receives the Word, forgiveness, the sacrament of Anointing, and gestures of charity from brothers and sisters. Human suffering is a special experience of the Lord's cross and resurrection.
421. Hence, healthcare ministry, which includes different fields of care, should be fostered in the particular churches. We regard it as extremely important to encourage a ministry to people living with HIV-AIDS, in its broader context and in its pastoral meanings. It should promote accompanying people with understanding and mercy, and defending the rights of persons who are infected, make information available, and promote education and prevention with ethical criteria, primarily among the younger generations, so as to awaken the consciousness of everyone to contain this pandemic. At this Fifth General Conference, we ask governments to provide free universal access to AIDS drugs and the proper dosages.

8.6.4 Addicts

422. The drug problem is like an oil slick spreading everywhere. It recognizes no geographical or human borders. It attacks rich and poor countries alike, children, youth, adults, older people, men and women. The Church cannot remain indifferent toward this scourge which is destroying humanity, especially the younger generations. Its labor is aimed especially in three directions: prevention, accompaniment, and support for governmental policies to halt this pandemic. In prevention, it insists on education in the values that ought to guide the younger generations, especially the value of life and love, personal responsibility, and the human dignity of God's children. In accompaniment, the church is with drug addicts to help them recover their dignity and overcome this disease. In support of drug eradication, it continually denounces the unspeakable criminality of drug traffickers who trade in so many human lives, having as their goal profit and power in their lowest expressions.

423. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the Church must urge a head-on battle against drug consumption and trafficking, insisting on the value of prevention and reeducation, and supporting governments and citizen organizations working along these lines, and pressing the state on its responsibility to combat drug trafficking and prevent the use of any kind of drug. Science has pointed to religiosity as a major factor in protection and recovery for drug users.
424. We denounce the fact that the drug business has become routine in some of our countries, due to the huge economic interests involved in it. One consequence is the large number of people, most of them children and youth, who are now enslaved and living in very dangerous situations, who turn to drugs to calm their hunger, or to escape from the cruel and discouraging situation in which they live.²³⁹
425. It is the state's responsibility to combat, firmly and based on the law, the indiscriminate sale of drugs and their illegal consumption. Unfortunately, corruption also takes place in this realm, and those who ought to be defending a more decent life sometimes unlawfully take advantage of their work for their own economic benefit.
426. We encourage all efforts made by the state, civil society and the churches to accompany these people. The Catholic Church operates many projects in response to this set of problems, growing out of our being disciples and missionaries of Jesus, although still not enough, given the magnitude of the problem. They are experiences that reconcile addicts with the earth, work, their family, and God. Along these lines, the Therapeutic Communities deserve special mention for their humanistic and transcendent view of the person.

8.6.5 The imprisoned

427. A reality that impacts all sectors of the population, but primarily the poorest, is violence, resulting from injustices and other evils, which have been sown in communities for many years. This leads to greater lawbreaking, and hence many people have to serve their sentences in inhumane prisons, characterized by arms trade, drugs, overcrowding, torture, lack of rehabilitation programs, and organized crime which hinders a process of reeducation and return to a productive life in society. Unfortunately today prisons are often schools for learning how to commit crime.
428. Governments must seriously and truthfully face the situation of the justice system and the prison situation. Court procedures must be streamlined; there must be personalized attention on the part of the civilian and military staff who under very

²³⁹ "Brazil's statistics concerning drug abuse and other forms of chemical dependency are very high. The same is true of Latin America in general. I therefore urge the drug-dealers to reflect on the grave harm they are inflicting on countless young people and on adults from every level of society: God will call you to account for your deeds. Human dignity cannot be trampled upon in this way. The harm done will receive the same censure that Jesus reserved for those who gave scandal to the 'little ones,' the favorites of God (cf. Mt 18:7-10)." (Benedict XVI, *Speech at Fazenda da Esperanca*, May 12, 2007).

- difficult conditions work in prison institutions; and ethical formation and the corresponding values must be strengthened.
429. The Church thanks chaplains and volunteers, who work in prisons with great pastoral commitment. However, prison ministry must be strengthened, including the work of evangelization and human promotion by chaplains and prison volunteer services. Human rights teams or vicariates to guarantee due process for those deprived of their liberty and very close attention to their families are a priority.
 430. Bishops Conferences and dioceses are encouraged to foster prison ministry commissions to sensitize society on the very serious issue of prisons, encourage processes of reconciliation inside prisons, and influence local and national policies dealing with citizen security and prison issues.

FAMILY, PERSONS, AND LIFE

431. We cannot pause here to analyze all the issues involved in the Church's pastoral activity, nor can we propose finished plans or exhaustive lines of action. We will merely devote attention to some issues that have become particularly relevant recently, so that Bishops Conferences and other local bodies may subsequently move to broader, concrete considerations adapted to the needs of their own territory.

9.1 MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

432. The family is one of the most important treasures of Latin American and Caribbean peoples, and it is heritage of all humanity. In our countries a significant portion of the population is affected by difficult living conditions that directly threaten the family institution. As disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ, we are called to work so that this situation may be transformed, and the family may assume its being and its mission²⁴⁰ within society and the Church.²⁴¹

433. The Christian family is founded on the sacrament of matrimony between a man and a woman, sign of God's love for humankind and of Christ's self-surrender for his spouse, the Church. This covenant of love gives rise to fatherhood and motherhood, and childhood and brother- and sisterhood, and the commitment of the couple to a better society.

434. We believe that "the family is the image of God, who in his innermost mystery is not aloneness but a family."²⁴² Our families have their origin, their perfect model, their most beautiful motivation and their ultimate destiny in the communion of love of the three Divine Persons.

435. Inasmuch as the family is the value most cherished by our peoples, we believe that concern for it should be undertaken as one of the thrusts running through all of the Church's evangelizing activity. In every diocese there must be an "intense and vigorous"²⁴³ family ministry to proclaim the gospel of the family, promote the culture of life, and work to assure that the rights of the family are recognized and respected.

436. We hope that legislators, heads of government, and health professionals, conscious of the dignity of human life and of the rootedness of the family in our peoples, will defend and protect it from the abominable crimes of abortion and euthanasia; that is their responsibility. Hence, in response to government laws and provisions that are unjust in the light of faith and reason, conscientious objection

²⁴⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Second World Meeting with Families in Rio de Janeiro*, October 4, 1997, n. 4.

²⁴¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Address at the First World Meeting of Families*, nn. 2 and 7, Rome, October 8, 1994; *Second World Meeting of Families*, Rio de Janeiro, October 3, 1997; FC 17, November 22, 1981; BENEDICT XVI, *Family, be what you are!* Valencia, July 8, 2006.

²⁴² PD 582.

²⁴³ IA 5.

- should be encouraged. We must adhere to “eucharistic coherence,” that is, be conscious that they cannot receive holy communion and at the same time act with deeds or words against the commandments, particularly when abortion, euthanasia, and other grave crimes against life and family are encouraged. This responsibility weighs particularly over legislators, heads of governments, and health professionals.²⁴⁴
437. In order to protect and support the family, actions such as the following may be undertaken by family ministry:
- a) Bring about comprehensive and organic commitment to families from other ministries, and from marriage and family ministries, movements, and associations.
 - b) Encourage projects to promote evangelized and evangelizing families.
 - c) Renew remote and proximate preparation for the sacrament of Matrimony and family life with pedagogical itineraries of faith.²⁴⁵
 - d) Promote in dialogue with governments and society, policies and laws on behalf of life, marriage, and the family.²⁴⁶
 - e) Foster and promote integral education of family members, especially those family members who are in difficult situations, including the dimension of love and sexuality.²⁴⁷
 - f) Foster parish and diocesan centers with comprehensive family care ministry, especially to those that are in difficult situations: teenage and single mothers, widows and widowers, senior citizens, abandoned children, and so forth.
 - g) Set up programs of training, care, and accompaniment for responsible fatherhood and motherhood.
 - h) Study the causes of family crises in order to deal with them in all their factors.
 - i) Continue offering ongoing doctrinal and pedagogical formation for agents of pastoral ministry.
 - j) Accompany with care, prudence and compassionate love, following the guidelines of the magisterium,²⁴⁸ couples who live together out of wedlock, bearing in mind that those who are divorced and remarried may not receive communion.²⁴⁹ There must be ways to assure that the message of salvation reaches everyone. Ecclesial actions must be encouraged with interdisciplinary

²⁴⁴ Cf. SCa, 83; EV 73, 74, 89.

²⁴⁵ Cf. Pontifical Council for the family, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*, 19, May 13, 1996; FC 66.

²⁴⁶ Cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, October 22, 1983.

²⁴⁷ Cf. IA 5.

²⁴⁸ FC 84; SCa 29.

²⁴⁹ FC 77.

work in theology and the human sciences to shed light on pastoral ministry and preparation of specialized agents to accompany these brothers and sisters.

- k) With regard to requests for annulment of marriages, efforts must be made so that ecclesiastical tribunals are accessible and act correctly and promptly.²⁵⁰
- l) Help create responsibility so that through Christian charity orphaned and abandoned girls and boys may be welcomed and adopted, and may enjoy family life.
- m) Organize houses of welcome and specific accompaniment in order to approach with compassion and solidarity pregnant girls and adolescents, single mothers, and broken homes.
- n) Bear in mind that the Word of God in both Old and New Testaments, asks us to show special care to widows. Strive to find out how they may receive pastoral care to help them deal with this situation, often one of abandonment and loneliness.

9.2 CHILDREN

- 438. Childhood must today be the object of high-priority action on the part of the Church, the family, and government institutions, both because of the possibilities it offers and the vulnerability to which it is exposed. Children are gift and sign of God's presence in our world by their ability to accept the gospel message with simplicity. Jesus chose them with special affection (cf. Mt 19:14), and presented their capacity for accepting the Gospel as a model for entering into the Kingdom of God (cf. Mk 10:14; Mt 18:3).
- 439. We are pained to see the situation of poverty, domestic violence (especially in out-of-wedlock or broken families), sexual abuse, affecting a large number of our children: child labor, street children, children with HIV, orphans, child soldiers, boys and girls deceived and exposed to pornography and forced prostitution, both virtual and real. Early childhood (0 to 6 years) is especially in need of special attention and care. One cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of so many innocent children.
- 440. On the other hand, because it is the first stage of life of one who has been born, childhood constitutes a wonderful opportunity for handing on the faith. We are grateful to see the valuable action of so many institutions at the service of childhood.
- 441. In this regard we propose some pastoral guidelines:
 - a) Draw inspiration from the attitude of Jesus toward children, that of respect and welcome as the favorites of the Kingdom, caring for their integral formation. The example of prayer of their parents and grandparents is important for their whole life; it is their mission to teach their children and grandchildren their first prayers.

²⁵⁰ Cf. SC 29.

- b) Establish, where they do not already exist, the department or section of childhood, to carry out localized and comprehensive actions on behalf of children.
- c) Promote processes to recognize childhood as a decisive sector for special care on the part of the Church, society, and the state.
- d) Protect the dignity and inalienable natural rights of children, without detriment to the legitimate rights of parents. Assure that children receive education adequate to their age in the realm of solidarity, emotions, and human sexuality.
- e) Support pastoral experiences of care for early childhood.
- f) Study and consider suitable pedagogies for educating children in the faith, especially as related to Christian initiation, with emphasis on the time of first communion.
- g) Value the missionary capacity of children, who not only evangelize their companions but may also be evangelizers of their parents.
- h) Foster the institution of Missionary Childhood.
- i) Promote and communicate in an ongoing manner research on childhood to make sustainable both recognition of care for it, and initiatives for advocacy and promoting the integral development of children.

9.3 ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

442. The stage of adolescence deserves special attention. Adolescents are neither children nor young people. They are at the age of seeking their own identity, independence from their parents, and discovery of the group. At this age they can easily fall prey to false leaders and form gangs. Ministry to adolescents, with its own characteristics, must be fostered to assure perseverance and growth in the faith. The adolescent seeks an experience of friendship with Jesus.
443. Young people and adolescents constitute the vast majority of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean. They represent a huge potential for the present and future of the Church and our peoples as disciples and missionaries of the Lord Jesus. Young people are sensitive to discovering their calling to be friends and disciples of Christ. They are called to be “sentinels of the dawn,”²⁵¹ committing themselves to the renewal of the world in the light of God’s plan. What they fear is not sacrifice or giving up their own life, but rather a meaningless life. Because of their generosity, they are called to serve their brothers and sisters, especially the most needy, with their time and life. They are capable of standing up to the false illusions of happiness and the deceptive paradises of drugs, pleasure, alcohol, and all forms of violence. In their search for the meaning of life, they are sensitive to, and capable of discovering, the particular call that the Lord Jesus issues to them. As missionary disciples, the new generations are called to transmit

²⁵¹ JOHN PAUL II *Message to 17th World Youth Day*, Toronto, July 28, 2002, n. 6.

- to their fellow young people without distinction, the current of life that comes from Christ and to share it in community, building up the Church and society.
444. However, we note with concern that vast numbers of young people in our continent are living in situations that impact them significantly: consequences of poverty that constrain the harmonious growth of their lives and cause exclusion; socialization in which values are no longer passed on primarily in traditional institutions but in new environments with a strong dosage of alienation; and their susceptibility to the new types of cultural expression resulting from globalization, which affects their own personal and social identity. They are easy prey for religious and pseudo-religious offerings. Because of the crisis now affecting the family, they suffer from deep lack of affection and emotional conflicts.
445. They are very affected by low-quality education, which leaves them below the levels needed for competitiveness, compounded by reductionistic understandings of humanity, which limit their life horizons and hinder them from making long-term decisions. Young people appear to be absent from politics due to the mistrust caused by situations of corruption, the poor reputation of politicians, and the pursuit of personal interests as opposed to the common good. Suicides of young people are a reason for concern. Others have no possibility of studying or working and many leave their countries because they find no future in them, and thus the phenomenon of human mobility and migration takes on a youthful face. The indiscriminate and abusive use that many young people make of virtual communication is also worrisome.
446. We suggest some lines of action for facing these challenges:
- a) Renew, in close union with the family, the preferential option for youth effectively and realistically, in continuity with previous general conferences, giving a new impulse to youth ministry in ecclesial communities (dioceses, parishes, movements, etc.).
 - b) Encourage the ecclesial movements that have a pedagogy aimed at evangelization of young people and invite them to place their charismatic, educational, and missionary riches at the service of the local churches.
 - c) Propose the encounter with the living Jesus Christ and following Him in the Church to young people, in the light of God's plan which assures them full realization of their dignity as human beings, leads them to shape their personality, and proposes to them a specific vocational option: the priesthood, religious life, or marriage. During the process of vocational accompaniment, young people shall be gradually introduced into personal prayer and *lectio divina*, receiving the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation, spiritual direction and the apostolate.
 - d) Accentuate in youth ministry, processes of education and maturing in faith, as response of meaning and direction in life, and guarantee of missionary commitment. In particular, the aim shall be to implement a catechesis attractive to young people that introduces them into knowledge of the mystery

of Christ, and to show them the beauty of Sunday Eucharist, which leads them to discover in it the living Christ and the fascinating mystery of the Church.

- e) Youth ministry will help young people to be gradually formed for social and political action and change of structures, in keeping with the Church's social doctrine, as they embrace the preferential and evangelical option for the poor and needy.
- f) Urge training of young people so that they will have opportunities in the world of work and keep them from falling into drugs and violence.
- g) In pastoral methodologies, strive for greater harmony between the adult world and the youth world.
- h) Bring about the participation of young people in pilgrimages on national and world youth days, with proper spiritual and missionary preparation and together with their shepherds.

9.4 THE WELL-BEING OF THE ELDERLY

- 447. The event of the presentation in the temple (cf. Lk 2:41-50) places before us the encounter of generations. The child who is emerging into life, assuming and fulfilling the Law, and the older people, who celebrate it with the joy of the Holy Spirit. Children and the elderly build the future of peoples: children because they lead history forward, older people because they transmit on the experience and wisdom of their lives.
- 448. Respect and gratitude toward older people ought to be attested to first by their own family. The Word of God challenges us in many ways to respect and value our elders and old people. Indeed, it invites us to learn from them with gratitude, and to be with them in their solitude and weakness. The statement of Jesus, "The poor you will always have with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them" (Mc 14:7), can certainly be understood of them, because they are part of every family, people, and nation. Nevertheless, they are often forgotten and neglected by society and even by their own families.
- 449. Many of our elders have spent their life for the good of their family and the community, out of their place and vocation. Many are true missionary disciples of Jesus by their witness and their works. They deserve to be recognized as sons and daughters of God, called to share the fullness of love and to be loved in particular for the cross of their sufferings, diminished capability, or loneliness. The family must not see only the difficulties entailed in living together with them or serving them. Society cannot consider them as a weight or a burden. It is regrettable that in some countries there are no social policies to care sufficiently for older people who are retired, living on a pension, ill, or abandoned. Therefore we call for the design of just social policies in solidarity to deal with these needs.
- 450. The Church feels committed to seek comprehensive humane care for all older people, also helping them to live the following of Christ in their current condition, and incorporating them as much as possible into its evangelizing mission. Hence,

while it gives thanks for the work now being done by nuns, religious men, and volunteers, it wants to renew its pastoral structures and prepare even more agents so as to expand this important service of love.

9.5 THE DIGNITY AND PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

451. Christian anthropology highlights the equal dignity of man and woman by reason of being created in the image and likeness of God. The mystery of the Trinity invites us to live as a community of equals in difference. In an age of marked male chauvinism, the practice of Jesus was decisive in signifying the dignity of women and their indisputable value: he spoke with them (cf. Jn 4:27), he was singularly merciful to women sinners (Lk 7:36-50; Jn 8:11), he healed them (cf. Mk 5:25-34), he defended them in their dignity (cf. Jn 8:1-11), he chose them as first witnesses of his resurrection (cf. Mt 28:9-10), and he brought women into the group of people who were closest to him (cf. Lk 8:1-3). The figure of Mary, disciple par excellence among disciples, is fundamental in the recovery of woman's identity and her value in the Church. The song of the *Magnificat* shows Mary as a woman capable of committing herself to her reality and prophetically addressing it.
452. The relationship between woman and man is one of reciprocity and mutual collaboration. The aim is to harmonize, complement, and labor by combining efforts. Woman is called to be a good steward with man for the present and the future of our human society.
453. We regret that countless women of every condition are not valued in their dignity, are often alone and abandoned, and do not receive sufficient acknowledgement for their dedicated sacrifice and even heroic generosity in the care and education of their children and in passing on the faith in the family. Nor is their indispensable and peculiar participation in constructing a more humane social life and in building up the Church adequately promoted. At the same time, the urgently needed upholding of their dignity and participation may be distorted by ideological currents, marked by the cultural imprint of consumer and spectacle driven societies that are capable of subjecting women to new slaveries. In Latin America and the Caribbean, a chauvinist mindset that ignores the newness of Christianity, in which "the equal dignity and responsibility of women relative to men" ²⁵² is recognized and proclaimed, must be overcome.
454. At this time in Latin America and the Caribbean, the so often silenced cry of women who are subjected to many forms of exclusion and violence in all their forms and at all stages of their lives must be heard. Among them, poor, indigenous and Afro-American women have endured double marginalization. All women must be able to participate fully in ecclesial, family, cultural, social, and economic life, with the creation of spaces and structures to foster greater inclusion.

²⁵² IA 5.

455. Women generally constitute the majority in our communities; they are the primary ones passing on the faith and assisting official church leaders, who should serve them, appreciate them, and respect them.
456. Motherhood must be valued as a superb mission of women. It is not in opposition to their professional development and the exercise of all their dimensions, which enables them to be faithful to God's original plan, whereby the human couple jointly is given the mission of improving the earth. Women are irreplaceable in the home, the education of children, and passing on the faith. But that does not rule out the need for their active participation in building society. Hence integral formation must be fostered so that women may fulfill their mission in the family and in society.
457. The wisdom of God's plan demands that we foster the development of their female identity in reciprocity and complementarity with the identity of men. Hence, the Church is called to share, guide, and accompany projects for promoting women with already existing organizations in society, recognizing the essential and spiritual ministry that women bear within themselves: receiving life, welcoming it, nourishing it, giving birth to it, sustaining it, accompanying it, and deploying their being as women by creating habitable spaces of community and communion. Motherhood is not a solely biological reality, but it is expressed in diverse ways. The maternal vocation is fulfilled through many kinds of love, comprehension, and service to others. The material dimension is also embodied, for example, in adopting children, offering them protection and a home. The Church's commitment in this realm is ethical and deeply evangelical.
458. We propose some pastoral actions:
- a) Foster the organization of ministry in such a way as to help to discover and develop the "genius of woman"²⁵³ in each woman and in realms of church and society and promote the broadest prominence of women .
 - b) Assure the effective presence of women in those ministries in the Church which are entrusted to laypeople, as well as in areas of pastoral planning and decision making, esteeming their contribution.
 - c) Accompany female associations that struggle to overcome difficult situations of vulnerability or exclusion.
 - d) Promote dialogue with officials for developing programs, laws, and government policies to enable women's work life to be reconciled with their duties as mothers.

9.6 THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MALE AND FATHER OF FAMILY

459. In terms of what is specific to them, males are called by the God of life to occupy an original and necessary place in building society, generating culture, and forging history. Deeply motivated by the beautiful reality of love whose source is

²⁵³ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to women*, June 29, 1995, n. 11.

- Jesus Christ, men feel strongly invited to form a family. There, in an essential disposition of reciprocity and complementarity, for the fullness of their own life, they experience and appreciate the active and irreplaceable richness of women's contribution, which enables them to recognize more clearly their own identity.
460. In all the spheres that constitute his calling and mission, the man as baptized must feel sent by the Church to give testimony as disciple and missionary of Jesus Christ. However, in many instances unfortunately he tends to give up this responsibility and delegate it to women or wives.
 461. We must recognize that traditionally in Latin America and the Caribbean, a significant percentage of them have remained on the fringes of the Church and of the commitment that they are called to fulfill in it. They have thereby been distancing themselves from Jesus Christ, the full life for which they so yearn and seek. This kind of distance or indifference by men, which strongly calls into question the style of our conventional ministry, is partly why the separation between faith and culture keeps growing, and contributes to the gradual loss of what is internally essential and what gives meaning, to weakness in adequately resolving conflicts and frustrations, to debility in resisting the assault and seductions of a consumption-oriented, superficial, and competitive culture, and so forth. All of this makes them vulnerable to the proposal of ways of life which appear to be attractive but are ultimately dehumanizing. In a considerable number of them, the way is opened to the temptation of surrendering to violence, infidelity, abuse of power, drug addiction, alcoholism, male chauvinism, corruption, and abandonment of their role as fathers.
 462. Nevertheless, a large percentage of men assume the demands of family, work, and society. Lacking greater understanding, acceptance and affection from their own, valued in terms of what they provide materially, and with no life-giving place in which to share their deepest feelings with full freedom, they are exposed to a situation of profound dissatisfaction that leaves them at the mercy of the disintegrating power of contemporary culture. In the face of this situation, and in consideration of the consequences that the foregoing brings to married life and for the children, special pastoral attention to fathers of family must be given in all our particular churches.
 463. The follow pastoral actions are proposed:
 - a) Revise the contents of the various catecheses in preparation for the sacraments and ecclesial activities and movements related to family ministry, to foster proclamation and reflection on the vocation that the male is called to live out in marriage, the family, the Church, and society.
 - b) Deepen in the relevant venues of ministry, the specific role that the male is to play in building up the family as "domestic church," especially as evangelizing disciple and missionary of his own home.
 - c) Promote in all realms of Catholic education and youth ministry, the proclamation and development of values and attitudes to aid young men and

women to acquire the skills that will enable them to foster the role of the man in married life, in the exercise of fatherhood, and in educating the faith of their children.

- d) Carry out in Catholic universities, in the light of Christian anthropology and morality, the necessary research and reflection, making it possible to become familiar with the contemporary situation of the world of men, the consequences of the impact of contemporary cultural models on their identity and mission, and clues that can be helpful for working together in designing pastoral guidelines on the matter.
- e) Denounce a neoliberal mindset that sees in the father of a family only an instrument of production and profit, even relegating him in the family to a role of mere provider. The growing practice of government policies and private enterprise of promoting even Sunday as a work day, is a step that is profoundly destructive of the family and of fathers.
- f) Foster the active participation of males in the life of the church, creating and promoting venues and services in the fields indicated.

9.7 THE CULTURE OF LIFE: PROCLAIMING IT AND DEFENDING IT

- 464. The human being created in God's image and likeness also has an exalted dignity that we cannot trample and that we are called to respect and promote. Life is freely given by God, a gift and task that we must safeguard starting at conception in all its stages, until natural death, unambiguously.
- 465. Globalization influences the sciences and their methods, ignoring their ethical implications. We disciples of Jesus have to bring the Gospel to where the sciences operate, promote dialogue between science and faith, and in that context, assure that life is defended. This dialogue must be carried out by ethics and in special cases by a well grounded bioethics. Bioethics works with this epistemological foundation in an interdisciplinary manner, where each science contributes its conclusions.
- 466. We cannot escape this challenge of dialogue between faith, reason, and the sciences. Our priority for life and family, both of which are laden with issues debated in ethical matters and in bioethics, impels us to cast the light of the Gospel and the Church's magisterium on them.²⁵⁴
- 467. Today we stand before new challenges that call us to be the voice of the voiceless. The child growing in its mother's womb and people who are in their declining years are a claim for dignified life that cries out to heaven and that cannot but make us shudder. The liberalization and routinization of abortion practices are abominable crimes, just as are euthanasia, genetic and embryonic manipulation, unethical medical testing, capital punishment, and so many other ways of assaulting the dignity and life of the human being. If we want to maintain a solid and inviolable basis for human rights, we absolutely must recognize that human

²⁵⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, FR, September 14, 1998.

life must always be defended from the very moment of conception. Otherwise, the circumstances and conveniences of the powerful will always find excuses for abusing persons.²⁵⁵

468. Aspirations for life, peace, fraternity and happiness do not find a response in the midst of the idols of profit and efficacy, insensitivity to the suffering of others, attacks on life in the womb, infant mortality, deterioration of some hospitals, and all the modalities of violence against children, youth, men and women. This underscores the importance of the struggle for the life, dignity, and integrity of the human person. The fundamental defense of the dignity of these values begins in the family.
469. So that the disciples and missionaries may praise God, giving thanks for life and serving it, we propose the following actions:
- a) Pursue the promotion in Bishops Conferences and dioceses of courses on family and ethical questions for bishops and for agents of ministries to help provide a solid basis for dialogues on the particular problems and situations in life.
 - b) Strive to assure that priests, deacons, religious and lay people undertake university studies of family morality, ethical questions, and when possible, more specialized courses in bioethics.²⁵⁶
 - c) Promote forums, panels, seminars, and congresses to study, consider, and analyze concrete contemporary issues about life in all its manifestations, and especially in the human being, particularly with regard to respect for life from conception to its natural death.
 - d) Ask Catholic universities to organize bioethics programs accessible to all and to take a public stand on the major issues of bioethics.
 - e) Create an ethics and bioethics committee in Bishops Conferences, with persons trained in the matter to guarantee fidelity and respect for the teaching of the Church's magisterium on life, so that it can serve as a venue for researching, studying, discussing, and updating the community when public debate so requires. This committee shall confront the situations that arise in that locality, the country, or the world to define and promote life at the proper time.
 - f) Offer to married couples programs of formation in responsible parenthood and on the use of natural birth regulation methods, as a demanding pedagogy of life and love.²⁵⁷
 - g) Support and pastorally accompany with special kindness and solidarity women who have decided not to have an abortion and welcome mercifully

²⁵⁵ Cf. EV.

²⁵⁶ Cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, *Family and Ethical Questions*, 2006.

²⁵⁷ Cf. EV 97, HV 10.

those who have had abortions, to help them to heal the grave wounds and invite them to become advocates of life. Abortion leaves two victims: certainly the child, but also the mother.

- h) Promote the formation and action of competent lay people, encourage them to become organized to defend life and family, and urge them to participate in national and international bodies.
- i) Assure that conscientious objection is recognized in legislation, and monitor to ensure that it is respected by governments.

9.8. CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

470. As disciples of Jesus, we feel invited to give thanks for the gift of creation, the reflection of the wisdom and beauty of the creative *Logos*. In God's marvelous design, man and woman are called to live in communion with Him, in communion between themselves, and with all creation. The God of life entrusted to the human being his work of creation "to cultivate and care for it" (Gen 2:15). Jesus was very familiar with the Father's concern for the creatures that He feeds (cf. Lk 12:24) and beautifies (cf. Lk 12:27). While he traveled the roads of his land, he not only paused to contemplate the beauty of nature, but invited his disciples to recognize the message hidden in things (cf. Lk 12:24-27; Jn 4:35). The Father's creatures give him glory "by their mere existence,"²⁵⁸ and hence, human beings must make use of them with care and sensitivity.²⁵⁹
471. In Latin America and the Caribbean, awareness is growing of nature as a free legacy that we receive to protect, as a precious space for shared human life and as careful responsibility of human stewardship for the good of all. This legacy often proves to be weak and defenseless against economic and technological powers. Hence, as prophets of life we want to insist that the interests of economic groups that irrationally demolish sources of life are not to prevail in dealing with natural resources, at the cost of whole nations and of humankind itself. The generations that succeed us are entitled to receive an inhabitable world, not a planet with polluted air. Fortunately, an education in ecological responsibility has begun to be introduced in the disciplines in some Catholic schools.
472. The Church is grateful to all who devote themselves to defending life and the environment. Particular importance must be given to the most serious destruction under way in human ecology.²⁶⁰ She is close to small farmers who with generous love very laboriously work the land, sometimes under extremely difficult conditions, to sustain their families and provide all with the fruits of the earth. She especially cherishes the indigenous for their respect for nature and love for mother earth as source of food, common home, and altar of human sharing.

²⁵⁸ CCC 2416.

²⁵⁹ CCC 2418.

²⁶⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus Annus*, n. 38.

473. Today the natural wealth of Latin America and the Caribbean is being subjected to an irrational exploitation that is leaving ruin and even death in its wake, throughout our region. A great deal responsibility in this entire process must be attributed to the current economic model which prizes unfettered pursuit of riches over the life of individual persons and peoples and rational respect for nature. The devastation of our forests and biodiversity through a selfish predatory attitude, involves the moral responsibility of those who promote it because they are jeopardizing the life of millions of people, and particularly the milieu of peasants and indigenous, who are pushed out toward hillside lands and into large cities where they live overcrowded in the encircling rings of poverty. Our region needs to advance in its agroindustrial development toward appreciating the wealth of its lands and its human talents at the service of the common good, but we must mention the problems caused by the savage uncontrolled industrialization of our cities and the countryside, which is polluting the environment with all kinds of organic and chemical wastes. A similar warning must be made about resource-extraction industries which, when they fail to control and offset their harmful effects on the surrounding environment, destroy forests and contaminate water, and turn the areas exploited into vast deserts.
474. We offer some proposals and guidelines toward this situation:
- a) Evangelize our peoples 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, in order to exercise human stewardship over the earth and its resources responsibly, so that it may render all its fruits as intended for all, by educating for a sober and austere way of life in solidarity.
 - b) Deepen pastoral presence in the weakest populations and those most threatened by predatory development, and support them in their efforts to attain equitable distribution of land, water, and urban spaces.
 - c) Pursue an alternative development model,²⁶¹ one that is comprehensive and communal, based on an ethics that includes responsibility for an authentic natural and human ecology, which is based on the gospel of justice, solidarity, and the universal destination of goods, and that overcomes its utilitarian and individualistic thrust, which fails to subject economic and technological powers to ethical criteria.
 - d) Redouble our efforts toward enacting government policies and citizen involvement, to assure the protection, conservation and restoration of nature.
 - e) Decide on measures for social monitoring and control over the application of international environmental standards in our countries.
475. Create consciousness in the Americas of the importance of the Amazon for all humankind. Establish a collaborative ministry among the local churches of the

²⁶¹ PP 20 True development is the "transition for each and everybody from less than human conditions to truly human ones."

various South American countries in the Amazon basin, with differentiated priorities for creating a development model that puts the poor first and serves the common good. Support with the necessary human and financial resources, the Church that lives in the Amazon so that it may continue proclaiming the gospel of life and carry out its pastoral work in forming lay people and priests through seminars, courses, exchanges, visits to communities, and educational material.

**OUR PEOPLES
AND CULTURE**

10. CULTURE AND ITS EVANGELIZATION

476. Culture, understood most broadly, represents the particular way in which human beings and peoples cultivate their relationship to nature and with their fellow humans, with themselves, and with God, so as to attain a fully human existence.²⁶² As such, it is the common heritage of all peoples, and likewise of Latin America and the Caribbean.
477. The Fifth Conference in Aparecida views positively and with true empathy the different forms of culture present in our continent. Faith is only adequately professed, understood, and lived when it makes its way deeply into the cultural substrate of a people.²⁶³ Thus the full importance of culture for evangelization becomes plain. For the salvation brought by Jesus Christ must be light and strength for all the yearnings, joyful or painful situations, and questions present in the respective cultures of peoples. The encounter of faith with cultures purifies them, enables them to develop their potentialities, and enriches them. For they all ultimately seek the truth, which is Christ (Jn 14:6).
478. With the Holy Father, we give thanks that the Church “helping Christian believers to live their faith with joy and coherence,” through the history of this continent, has created and fostered culture: “Faith in God has animated the life and culture of these nations for more than five centuries.” This reality has been expressed in
- art, music, literature, and above all, in the religious traditions and in the peoples’ whole way of being, united as they are by a shared history and a shared creed that give rise to a great underlying harmony, despite the diversity of cultures and languages.*²⁶⁴
479. With the inculturation of the faith, the Church is enriched with new expressions and values, manifesting and celebrating ever better the mystery of Christ, and is enabled to unite faith more with life, thereby contributing to a full catholicity, one that is not simply geographical but cultural as well. Nevertheless, this Latin American and Caribbean cultural heritage is now facing contemporary culture, which shows both lights and shadows. We must consider that culture with empathy in order to understand it, but also with a critical stance to discover whatever within it is the product of human limitation and sin. It displays many successive changes, caused by new knowledge and discoveries of science and technology, resulting in the disappearance of a single image of the world which used to provide direction for everyday life. The full responsibility for constructing

²⁶² Cf. GS 53.

²⁶³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Speech to participants at the World Congress of the General Movement of Cultural Action*, January 16, 1982.

²⁶⁴ IA 1.

one's personality and shaping one's social identity falls on the individual. Thus, on the one hand, we have the emergence of subjectivity, respect for the dignity and freedom of each individual, no doubt an important conquest of humankind. On the other hand, this same pluralism of a cultural and religious nature, forcefully spread by a globalized culture, ends up making individualism a dominant characteristic of contemporary society, responsible for ethical relativism and the crisis of the family.

480. Many Catholics are disconcerted in the face of this cultural change. It is up to the Church to clearly denounce these "anthropological models incompatible with the nature and dignity of the human person."²⁶⁵ The human person must be presented as the center of all social and cultural life, highlighting in it the dignity of being image and likeness of God and the vocation to be children in the Son, called to share his life for all eternity. Christian faith shows us Jesus Christ as the ultimate truth of the human being,²⁶⁶ the model in which being human is displayed in all its ontological and existential magnificence. Proclaiming it fully in our days requires courage and prophetic spirit. Counteracting the culture of death with the Christian culture of solidarity is an imperative for all of us, and has been a constant objective of the Church's social teaching. Nevertheless, the proclamation of the gospel cannot ignore contemporary culture, which must be known, evaluated, and in a certain sense assumed by the Church, with a language understood by our contemporaries. Only thus will Christian faith be able to appear as something relevant and meaningful for salvation. But this same faith must engender alternative cultural models for contemporary society. With the talents that they have received, Christians must be creative in their fields of activity: the world of culture, politics, public opinion, art, and science.

10.2 EDUCATION AS PUBLIC GOOD

481. Earlier we referred to Catholic education but as pastors, we cannot ignore the mission of the state in the field of education, assuring particularly the education of children and youth. These schools should not ignore the fact that openness to transcendence is a dimension of human life, and hence the integral formation of persons calls for the inclusion of religious content.
482. The Church believes that

*children and young people have a right to be motivated to appraise moral values with a right conscience, to embrace them with a personal adherence, together with a deeper knowledge and love of God. Consequently it earnestly entreats all those who hold a position of public authority or who are in charge of education to see to it that youth is never deprived of this sacred right.*²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps*, January 8, 2007.

²⁶⁶ GS 22.

²⁶⁷ GE 1.

483. In view of the difficulties that we encounter in this regard in various countries, we want to strive for the religious formation of the faithful who attend state-run public schools, seeking likewise to accompany them through other formation initiatives in our parishes and dioceses. At the same time, we are grateful for the dedication of religion teachers in public schools and we encourage them in this task. We urge them to pursue doctrinal and pedagogical training. We are also grateful to those who through prayer and community life strive to be a testimony of faith and consistency in these schools.

10.3 PASTORAL MINISTRY OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS

484. The technology revolution and globalization processes shape the contemporary world as a vast media culture. This entails an ability to recognize the new languages which can be helpful for a greater global humanization. These new languages constitute a connection point to the changes in society.

485. “Our century is characterized by the mass media or means of social communication, and the first proclamation, catechesis or the further deepening of faith cannot do without these means.”

When they are put at the service of the Gospel, they are capable of increasing almost indefinitely the area in which the Word of God is heard; they enable the Good News to reach millions of people. The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through them that she proclaims "from the housetops" (cf. Mt 10:27; Lk 12:3) the message of which she is the depositary. In them she finds a modern and effective version of the pulpit. Thanks to them she succeeds in speaking to the multitudes.²⁶⁸

486. In order to form disciples and missionaries in this field, we bishops gathered in the Fifth General Conference, pledge ourselves to accompany those devoted to communications, striving to:

- a) Be familiar with and appreciate this new culture of communications.
- b) Promote professional training in the culture of communications in all pastoral agents and believers.
- c) Train competent professionals in communications who are committed to human and Christian values in the evangelical transformation of society, with particular attention to media owners, producers, program directors, journalists, and announcers.
- d) Support and optimize the creation by the Church of its own communications media in both television and radio, on Internet sites, and in print media.

²⁶⁸ EV 45.

- e) Be present in the mass media: press, radio and TV, digital film, Internet sites, forums, and many other systems in order to introduce into them the mystery of Christ.
 - f) Educate with critical training in the use of the media from an early age.
 - g) Encourage existing initiatives or those to be created in this field, with a spirit of communion.
 - h) Bring about laws to promote a new culture that will protect children, young people, and the more vulnerable, so that communications will not trample values, but rather create valid criteria of discernment.²⁶⁹
 - i) Develop a communications policy that can help both pastoral ministries of communications and Catholic-inspired media to find their place in the Church's evangelizing mission.
487. Viewed from within the entire range of media, the Internet should be understood to be, as expressed earlier at Vatican II, one of the "wonderful technological discoveries."²⁷⁰
- For the Church the new world of cyberspace is a summons to the great adventure of using its potential to proclaim the Gospel message. This challenge is at the heart of what it means at the beginning of the millennium to follow the Lord's command to "put out into the deep": Duc in altum! (Lk 5:4).²⁷¹*
488. *The Church approaches this new medium with realism and confidence. Like other communications media, it is a means, not an end in itself. The Internet can offer magnificent opportunities for evangelization if used with competence and a clear awareness of its strengths and weaknesses.²⁷²*
489. The mass media generally do not replace personal relationships or local community life. However, the sites can reinforce and stimulate exchange of experience and information so as to intensify religious practice by being present and providing guidance. Likewise, in the family parents should alert their children to a conscious use of the contents available on the Internet, to complement their educational and moral formation.
490. Inasmuch as digital exclusion is obvious, parishes, communities, Catholic cultural centers and educational institutions could foster the creation of network points and digital rooms to promote inclusion, developing new initiatives, and utilizing those already existing by viewing them positively. In Latin America there are online magazines, newspapers, sites, portals and services whose contents are both informative and formative, which also have a range of different religious and

²⁶⁹ Cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, Art. 5f, October 22, 1983.

²⁷⁰ *Inter Mirifica*, n. 1.

²⁷¹ JOHN PAUL II, Message of the Holy Father for the 36th World Communications Day, *Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel*. n. 2, January 12, 2002.

²⁷² *Ibid.* 3.

social guidance sites, such as “priest,” “spiritual guide,” “vocational guide,” “professor,” and “doctor.” Many Catholic schools and institutions offer distance theology and biblical culture courses.

10.4 NEW TYPES OF AEROPAGUS AND DECISION MAKING CENTERS

491. We want to congratulate and encourage the many disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ who with their coherent ethical presence, continue to sow the gospel values in the environments where culture is traditionally created and in the new types of aeropagus: the world of communications, peace building, the development and liberation of peoples, especially of minorities, the promotion of women and children, ecology and protection of nature, and the “immense ‘Areopagus’ of culture, scientific research, and international relations.”²⁷³ Evangelizing culture, far from abandoning the preferential option to the poor and the commitment to reality, arises out of passionate love for Christ who accompanies the People of God in the mission of inculturating the gospel in history, ardent and tireless in its Samaritan charity.
492. A very important task is the formation of thinkers and people who occupy decision-making positions. To that end, we must employ effort and creativity in the evangelization of business people, politicians, and opinion makers, the world of labor, and union, cooperative, and community leaders.
493. New missionary and pastoral fields are emerging in contemporary culture. One of them is certainly ministry for tourism²⁷⁴ and entertainment, in which there is a vast field for development in clubs, sports, movie theaters, malls, and other options that daily draw attention and call for being evangelized.
494. In the face of the false impression so widespread in our time, that faith and science are incompatible, the Church proclaims that faith is not irrational. “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to contemplation of truth.”²⁷⁵ That is why we so esteem men and women of faith and science, who have learned to see in the beauty of nature the signs of Mystery, of God’s love and kindness, and they are bright signs that help understand that the book of nature and the sacred scripture speak of the same Word who became flesh.
495. We wish to esteem ever more venues of dialogue between faith and science, including in the mass media. One way to do so is by making known the ideas and work of great Catholic thinkers, especially from the twentieth century, as orientation for a proper understanding of science.

²⁷³ RM 37.

²⁷⁴ Cf. *Orientaciones para la Pastoral del Turismo*, *L'Osservatore Romano* (Ed. Italiana, Suppl. n. 157, July 12, 2001.

²⁷⁵ FR, preamble.

496. God is not only the highest Truth. He is also highest Goodness and supreme Beauty. Hence,

*Society needs artists, just as it needs scientists, technicians, workers, professional people, witnesses of the faith, teachers, fathers and mothers, who ensure the growth of the person and the development of the community by means of that supreme art form which is “the art of education.”*²⁷⁶

497. The gospel values must be communicated in a positive and forward looking manner. Many say they are unhappy not so much with the content of Church teaching, but with the way it is presented. Hence in drawing up pastoral plans we want to:

- a) Foster the formation of a laity able to act as true ecclesial agent and competent interlocutor between Church and society, and society and Church.
- b) Optimize the use of Catholic media, making them more active and effective, whether for communicating the faith or for dialogue between the Church and society.
- c) Work with artists, athletes, fashion professionals, journalists, communicators, and media hosts, and with those who produce information in the media, such as intellectuals, professors, community and religious leaders.
- d) Restore the role of the priest as opinion shaper.

498. Taking advantage of the experiences of Faith and Culture Centers or Catholic Cultural Centers, we will try to create or energize dialogue groups between the Church and opinion makers in various fields. We invite our Catholic universities so that each of them may increasingly serve as a place where the dialogue between faith and reason and Catholic thought is produced and spread.

499. The churches of Latin America and the Caribbean should also create opportunities for the use of art in the catechesis of children, adolescents and adults, and in the Church’s different ministries. The Church’s action in this field must also be brought up to the technical and professional improvement required by artistic expression. Hence a critical awareness must be introduced so as allow the artistic quality of what we produce to be judged objectively.

500. It is crucial that liturgical celebrations incorporate into their expressions artistic elements that can transform and prepare the assembly for the encounter with Christ. Appreciating the spaces of the existing culture, including the church buildings themselves, is an essential task for evangelizing culture. Along these lines, the creation of Catholic cultural centers should be encouraged. They are especially needed in the poorest areas, where access to culture and augmenting respect for the human is all the more urgent.

²⁷⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Artists* no. 4, April 4, 1999.

10.5 DISCIPLES AND MISSIONARIES IN PUBLIC LIFE

501. The disciples and missionaries of Christ must illuminate with the light of the Gospel all realms of social life. The preferential option for poor, rooted in the Gospel, requires pastoral attention devoted to the builders of society.²⁷⁷ If many contemporary structures produce poverty, it is partly due to the lack of fidelity to their gospel commitments on the part of many Christians with special political, economic and cultural responsibilities.
502. The contemporary reality of our continent makes it clear that there is a
*notable absence—in the political sphere, in the world of the media and in the universities—of the voices and initiatives of Catholic leaders with strong personalities and generous dedication, who are coherent in their ethical and religious convictions.*²⁷⁸
503. One of the most noteworthy of the signs of concern is the conception of the human being, man and woman, that has taken shape. The common element in assaults on life in all its manifestations, especially against the most innocent and defenseless, acute poverty and social exclusion, corruption, and ethical relativism, and so forth, is a notion of a human being for all practical purposes closed to God and to the other.
504. Whether out of an exaggerated old-fashioned laicism, or an ethical relativism proposed as the foundation of democracy, powerful groups claim seek to reject any presence and contribution from the Church in the public life of nations, and pressure it to retire to church buildings and its “religious” services. Conscious of the distinction between political community and religious community, the basis for a healthy secularity, the Church will not shrink from being concerned for the common good of peoples, especially for the defense of ethical principles that are non-negotiable because they are rooted in human nature.
505. It is the lay people of our continent who, conscious of their call to holiness by virtue of their baptismal vocation, have to act as leaven in the dough to build a temporal city in keeping with God’s project. Coherence between faith and life in the political, economic, and social realm requires formation of conscience, which translates into knowing the Church’s social doctrine. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* will be very useful for adequate formation in that doctrine. The Fifth General Conference commits itself to carry out an incisive social catechesis, because “The Christian life is not expressed solely in personal virtues, but also in social and political virtues.”²⁷⁹
506. The disciple and missionary of Christ active in the realms of politics and economics and in decision-making centers is exposed to the influence of a culture often dominated by materialism, selfish interests, and a conception of the human

²⁷⁷ Cf. EV 5.

²⁷⁸ IA 4.

²⁷⁹ IA 3.

- being contrary to the Christian vision. Hence, disciples must be firmly grounded in their following of the Lord, so as to have the strength necessary not to succumb to the wiles of materialism and selfishness, but to build a moral consensus within themselves on the fundamental values that make it possible to build a just society.
507. Let us consider how necessary is moral integrity in politicians. Many of the Latin American and Caribbean peoples, but in other continents as well, live in poverty because of endemic problems of corruption. How much discipline of moral integrity we need, understood in the Christian sense as self-control for doing good, for being a servant of truth and of doing our work without letting ourselves be corrupted by favors, interests, or advantages. A great deal of strength and perseverance is needed to preserve the honesty that ought to emerge from a new education to break the vicious cycle of the prevailing corruption. We really need a great deal of effort to advance toward creating a true moral wealth that will allow us to provide for our own future.
508. We bishops gathered in the Fifth Conference want to be present to those who build society, for it is the Church's fundamental vocation in this sector to shape consciences, and to be an advocate of justice and truth and to educate in the individual and political virtues.²⁸⁰ We want to issue a call to the sense of responsibility of those lay people who are present in public life, and more specifically "in the formation of the necessary consensus and in opposition to injustice."²⁸¹

10.6 URBAN MINISTRY

509. Christians today are no longer at the forefront of cultural production, but rather they receive its influence and impacts. Large cities are laboratories of this complex and many-sided contemporary culture.
510. The city has become the proper site of the new cultures which are coming into being and imposing a new language and new sets of symbols. This urban mindset is also spreading even in the countryside. Indeed, the city seeks to harmonize the need for development with the development of needs, often failing in this endeavor.
511. Complex socioeconomic, cultural, political, and religious transformations are taking place in the urban world, and they impact all dimensions of life. That world is comprised of satellite cities and outlying neighborhoods.
512. Living alongside each other in the city are different social categories, such as the economic, social and political elites; different strata of the middle class; and the large multitude of the poor. 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.

²⁸⁰ Cf. IA 4.

²⁸¹ IA 4.

513. The Church originally took shape in the large cities of its time, and made use of them to spread. Hence, we can joyfully and boldly carry out the evangelization of the contemporary city. In response to the new reality of the city, new experiences are taking place in the church, such as renewal of parishes, breaking it down into sectors, new ministries, new associations, groups, communities and movements. But attitudes of fear of urban ministry can be seen: tendencies to remain entrenched in the old methods and to take a defensive stance toward the new culture, and feelings of impotence vis-à-vis the great difficulties of cities.
514. Faith teaches us that God lives in the city in the midst of its joys, yearnings and hopes, and likewise in its pains and suffering. The shadows that mark everyday life, such as violence, poverty, individualism and exclusion cannot prevent us from seeking and contemplating the God of life also in urban environments. Cities are places of freedom and opportunity. In them people seek the possibility of knowing more people, and interacting and coexisting with them. Bonds of fraternity, solidarity, and universality can be experienced in cities. In them the human being is constantly called to ever journey toward meeting the other, coexisting with those who are different, accepting them, and being accepted by them.
515. God's project is "the Holy City, the new Jerusalem" coming down from heaven, with God, "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband," for

God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away (Rev. 21:2-4).

In its fullness this project is yet to come, but it is being fulfilled in Jesus Christ, "the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," (21:6), who tells us "Behold, I make all things new." (21:5).

516. The Church is at the service of bringing about this Holy City, through the proclamation and living of the Word, the celebration of the liturgy, fellowship, and service, especially to the poorest and those who most suffer, and thus as leaven of the Kingdom it continues to transform the contemporary city in Christ.
517. Recognizing and expressing gratitude for the renewing work now being done in many cities, the Fifth General Conference proposes and recommends a new urban ministry to:
- a) Respond to the great challenges of increasing urbanization.
 - b) Be able to serve the varied and complex social, economic, political, and cultural categories: poor, middle class, and elite.
 - c) Develop a spirituality of gratitude, mercy, fraternal solidarity, proper attitudes of one who loves disinterestedly and seeks no recompense.
 - d) Be open to new experiences, styles and languages that can incarnate the gospel in the city.

- e) Transform parishes increasingly into communities of communities.
 - f) Be more intensely devoted to the experience of communities of common interest formed at the supraparochial and diocesan level.
 - g) Bring the elements proper to the Christian life—the Word, the liturgy, fellowship, and service—especially to those who suffer economic poverty and new forms of poverty.
 - h) Spread the Word of God, announce it joyfully and courageously, and train lay people so that they can respond to the great questions and aspirations of today, and be involved in the different settings, structures and decision-making centers of urban life.
 - i) Promote the pastoral ministry of welcome to those who arrive in the city, and those already living in it, moving from passively waiting to actively seeking and reaching out to those who are distant, with new strategies such as home visits, the use of new media, and staying close to everyday situation of each person.
 - j) Devote special attention to the world of urban suffering, that is, care for those who fall by the wayside, and hospital patients, prisoners, the excluded, drug addicts, people living in new outlying areas, in new housing districts, and broken homes and common-law unions.
 - k) Through new parishes and chapels, Christian communities, and pastoral centers, strive to make the Church present in the new human concentrations that are growing rapidly on the outskirts of large cities due to the effects of internal migrations and exclusionary situations.
518. So that the inhabitants of cities and their outskirts, both believers and non-believers, can find fullness of life in Christ, we feel the need that pastoral agents, as disciples and missionaries, must to strive to develop:
- a) A pastoral style appropriate to the urban situation with special attention to language, pastoral structures and practices, and schedules.
 - b) A comprehensive collaborative ministry to integrate parishes, religious communities, small communities, movements, and institutions dealing with the city into a common plan with the goal of reaching the city as a whole. For large cities encompassing several dioceses, an interdiocesan plan is required.
 - c) A sectorization approach dividing parishes into small units allowing for closer interaction and more effective service.
 - d) A process of Christian initiation and ongoing formation to rekindle the faith of the disciples of the Lord, combining knowledge, feeling, and behavior.
 - e) Services of attention, personal welcome, spiritual direction, and the sacrament of reconciliation, responding to the loneliness and the great psychological wounds suffered by many in cities, taking interpersonal relations into account.

- f) Specialized care for lay people in different categories: professionals, business people, and workers.
 - g) Gradual processes of Christian formation, holding events with large crowds, to mobilize the city, giving a sense that the city is an ensemble, is a whole, capable of responding to the feelings of its citizens and in a symbolic language able to transmit the gospel to all persons in the city.
 - h) Strategies for reaching places in cities that are closed off, such as housing developments, condominiums, residential towers, or those located in so-called slums and *favelas*.
 - i) Prophetic presence able to speak aloud on matters of values and principles of the Kingdom of God, even if it runs counter the views of all, provokes attacks, and remains only as proclamation. That is, that it be a beacon, a city placed on the hilltop to give light.
 - j) A greater presence in decision-making centers in the city, both in administrative structures, and in community, professional or any other type of association to watch over the common good and promote the values of the Kingdom.
 - k) Formation and accompaniment of lay men and women who, have influence in areas where public opinion is shaped and become organized among themselves and can serve as advisors for any ecclesial action.
 - l) A pastoral ministry that makes provision for beauty in proclaiming the Word and in the various initiatives, helping to discover the full beauty that is God.
 - m) Special services responding to different activities proper to the city: work, leisure, sports, tourism, art, etc.
 - n) Decentralization of ecclesial services so that many more pastoral agents are involved in this mission, taking professional categories into account.
 - o) Pastoral formation of future priests and pastoral agents, capable of responding to the new challenges of urban culture.
519. None of the foregoing reduces the importance, however, of a renewed rural ministry to strengthen people in the countryside and their economic and social development, thereby counteracting migration. The Good News should be proclaimed to them so as to enrich their cultures and community and social relations.

10.7 AT THE SERVICE OF THE UNITY AND FRATERNITY OF OUR PEOPLES

520. In this new cultural situation, we declare that the project of the Kingdom is present and is possible, and hence we aspire toward a united, reconciled, and integrated Latin America and Caribbean. Dwelling in this shared home is a complex racial mixture and a variety of ethnicities and cultures, in which the

*Gospel has thus become on the Continent the supporting element of a dynamic synthesis which, with various facets and according to the different nations, nonetheless expresses the identity of the Latin American People.*²⁸²

521. The challenges we face in Latin America and the world today have a peculiar characteristic. They affect not only all our peoples in a similar manner but in order to be confronted they require an overall comprehension and joint action. We believe that “one factor that can make a notable contribution to overcoming the pressing problems today affecting this continent is Latin American integration.”²⁸³
522. On the one hand, a global reality is taking shape that makes possible new ways of knowing, learning, and communicating. It places us in daily contact with the diversity of our world and creates possibilities for a closer union and solidarity regionally and worldwide. On the other hand, new kinds of impoverishment, and injustice are being produced. The continent of hope must achieve its integration on foundations of life, love, and peace.
523. We recognize a profound vocation to unity in the “heart” of each human being, because all have the same origin and Father, and because all bear in themselves the image and likeness of the same God in trinitarian unity (Cf. Gen 1:26). In the teachings of Vatican II the church recognizes itself as “sacrament of unity of the human race,” conscious of Christ’s paschal victory, but living in a world that is still under the power of sin, with its consequences of contradictions, dominations, and death. The ambiguity of the current globalization process is perceived from this faith-inspired interpretation of history.
524. God’s Church in Latin America and the Caribbean is sacrament of communion of its peoples. It is dwelling of its peoples; it is house of God’s poor. It calls together and gathers all in its mystery of communion, with no discrimination or exclusion by reason of sex, race, social condition, or national identity. The more the Church reflects, lives, and communicates this gift of astonishing unity which finds its source, model, and destiny in trinitarian communion, the more meaningful and incisive is its action as agent of reconciliation and communion in the life of our peoples. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the indispensable and decisive motherly presence in the gestation of a people of children and siblings, of disciples and missionaries of her Son.
525. The dignity of recognizing ourselves as a family of Latin American and Caribbean peoples involves a singular experience of closeness, fellowship, and solidarity. We are not merely a continent, simply a geographical fact with an unintelligible mosaic of contents. Nor are we a totality of peoples and ethnic groups in juxtaposition. One and plural, Latin America is the common house, the great homeland of brothers and sisters “of peoples,” whom, as His Holiness John

²⁸² BENEDICT XVI, General Audience, Apostolic Visit to Brazil, May 23, 2007.

²⁸³ SD 206.

Paul II said in Santo Domingo “*the same geography, Christian faith, language and culture have joined together definitively in the course of history*”²⁸⁴

It is a unity that is very far from being reduced to uniformity, but rather it is enriched with many local, national and cultural diversities.

526. The Third General Conference of Latin American bishops already proposed to “put fresh vigor into its work of evangelizing the culture of our peoples and the various ethnic groups,” so as to see “the faith of the Gospel, source of our communion, projected into forms of just integration in each nationality, of a great Latin American homeland.”²⁸⁵ The Fourth Conference in Santo Domingo again proposed “the ongoing rejuvenation of the ideal of our founders for a Great Homeland.” The Fifth Conference in Aparecida expresses its firm intention to pursue this commitment.
527. There is certainly no other region that has so many factors of unity as Latin America, one of which is the fact that the Catholic tradition is the foundation on which it is built. However, it is a unity torn apart because it is permeated by deep dominations and contradictions, still incapable of bringing together into itself “all the races” and overcoming the gap of tremendous inequality and marginalization. It is our great homeland, but it will be really “great” only when it is so for everyone, with greater justice. Indeed, it is a painful contradiction that the continent with the largest number of Catholics is also the one with the greatest social inequity.
528. We appreciate significant and promising advances in the process and systems of integration in our countries in the past twenty years. Trade and political relations have intensified. New and closer communication and solidarity now exists between Brazil and the Spanish-speaking and Caribbean countries. However, very serious blockades bogged down these processes. Trade integration is weak and ambiguous. That is also the case when it is reduced to a matter for political and economic elites, and does not sink roots in the life and participation of peoples. Setbacks in integration tend to aggravate poverty and inequality, whereas drug trafficking networks are more integrated beyond any border. Even though political language goes on a great length about integration, the dialectic of counterposition seems to prevail over the drive of solidarity and friendship. Unity is not built by standing in opposition to common enemies, but by achieving a common identity.

10.8 INTEGRATION OF INDIGENOUS AND AFRO-AMERICANS

528. As disciples of Jesus Christ incarnate in the life of all peoples, with faith we discover and recognize the “seeds of the Word”²⁸⁶ present in the traditions and cultures of the indigenous peoples of Latin America. We esteem their deep

²⁸⁴ JOHN PAUL, *Opening Address at Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops No. 12* October 12, 1992.

²⁸⁵ PD 428.

²⁸⁶ Cf. SD 245.

communal appreciation for life, present in all creation, in everyday existence, and in the age-old religious experience which energizes their cultures, and which reaches its fullness in the revelation of the true face of God by Jesus Christ.

530. As disciples and missionaries in the service of life, we accompany the indigenous and native peoples in strengthening their identities and their own organizations, the defense of their territory, bilingual intercultural education, and the defense of their rights. We also pledge to create awareness in society about the situation of the indigenous and their values, through the media and other areas of opinion. On the basis of the gospel principles we support the denunciation of attitudes contrary to full life for our native peoples, and we commit ourselves to pursue the work of evangelization of the indigenous people, and to strive for educational and work-related learning with the cultural transformations entailed in it.
531. The Church will remain vigilant in the face of efforts to uproot the Catholic faith from indigenous communities, whereby they would be left defenseless and confused in facing the assaults of the ideologies of some alienating groups, which would undermine the well-being of those very communities.
532. Following Jesus in our continent also involves acknowledging Afro-Americans as a challenge posed to us to live the true love of God and of neighbor. Being disciples and missionaries means taking on the Father's attitude of compassion and care, which are manifested in the liberating action of Jesus.

*The Church defends the genuine human values of all peoples, especially of those who are oppressed, defenseless, and excluded as they confront the overwhelming power of the structures of sin manifested in modern society.*²⁸⁷

Being familiar with the cultural values, history, and traditions of Afro-Americans, and entering in fraternal respectful dialogue with them is an important step in the Church's evangelizing mission. In doing so, we find company in the witness of St. Peter Claver.

533. Hence, the Church denounces the practice of discrimination and racism in its different expressions, because it is an offense against what is deepest in human dignity created in the "image and likeness of God." We are concerned that few Afro-Americans have access to higher education, thereby making it harder for them to reach decision-making levels in society. In its mission as advocate of justice and of the poor, it stands in solidarity with Afro-Americans in their claims for the defense of their territories, in the affirmation of their rights, citizenship, their own development projects, and black consciousness. The Church supports dialogue between black culture and Christian faith and their struggles for social justice, and encourages the active participation of Afro-Americans in the pastoral actions of our churches and CELAM. With its preaching and sacramental and pastoral life, the Church should help ensure that the cultural wounds unjustly

²⁸⁷ SD 243.

suffered in the history of Afro-Americans do not absorb or paralyze from within the drive of their human personality, ethnic identity, cultural memory, and social development in the emerging new situations.

10.0 PATHS OF RECONCILIATION AND SOLIDARITY

534. The Church has to encourage each people to build in its homeland a house of brothers and sisters where all have a dwelling for living and coexisting with dignity. This vocation requires the joy of wanting to be and forging a nation, an evocative historic project of shared life. The Church must educate and lead ever more toward reconciliation with God and with one's brothers and sisters. What is required is addition not division. Wounds must be healed, and manichaeistic contrasts, dangerous frustration, and polarization must be avoided. The dynamisms of decent, just, and equitable integration within each country favors regional integration and at the same time is motivated by it.
535. Among our peoples, educating and fostering all deeds, works and paths of reconciliation and agreement in society, cooperation and integration are required. The communion attained in Christ's reconciling blood gives us the strength to be bridge-builders, proclaimers of truth, and balm for wounds. Reconciliation is at the heart of Christian life. It is God's own initiative in the pursuit of friendship with us, which entails the necessary reconciliation with each other. This is a reconciliation that we need in various realms and among all, and between all our countries. This fraternal reconciliation presumes reconciliation with God, sole source of grace and forgiveness, which reaches its expression and embodiment in the sacrament of Penance which God gives us through the Church.
536. In the heart and life of our peoples there beats a strong sense of hope, despite living conditions that seem to obscure all hope. It is experienced and nourished in the present, thanks to the gifts and signs of new life which is shared; it brings commitment to the construction of a future of greater dignity and justice and yearns for "the new heavens and the new earth" that God has promised us in his eternal dwelling.
537. Latin America and the Caribbean should not only be the continent of hope but must also chart the way toward the civilization of love. So stated Pope Benedict XVI at the Marian shrine of Aparecida:²⁸⁸ for our common house to be a continent of hope, love, life and peace, like Good Samaritans we must go out to meet the needs of the poor and those who suffer and create "just structures" which "are a condition without which a just order in society is not possible." These structures, the Pope continues, "neither arise nor function without a moral consensus in society on fundamental values, and on the need to live these values with the necessary sacrifices, even if this goes against personal interest" and "where God is absent . . . these values fail to show themselves with their full force, nor does a consensus arise concerning them."²⁸⁹ Such just structures arise and function when

²⁸⁸ IA 4.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

- society perceives that man and woman, created in the image and likeness of God, possess an inviolable dignity at the service of which the fundamental values that govern shared human life should be conceived and acted. This moral consensus and change of structures are important for lessening the galling inequity now existing in our continent, among other things through well directed government policies and social expenditures, as well as in curbing excessive profits by large companies. The Church encourages and fosters exercising an “imagination of charity” to allow for effective solutions.
538. All authentic transformations take shape and are forged in the heart of persons and radiate in all dimensions of their existence and shared life. There are no new structures unless there are new men and new women to mobilize and bring about convergence in peoples ideals and powerful moral and religious energies. The Church responds to this demand by forming disciples and missionaries.
539. The church fosters and encourages the reconstruction of the person and its bonds of belonging and shared life, out of a dynamism of friendship, gratuity, and communion. Processes of social decay and atomization are thereby counteracted. To that end, the principle of subsidiarity must be applied at all levels and structures of social organization. Indeed, the state and the market do not satisfy, nor can they satisfy, all human needs. Appreciation and encouragement is due to volunteer endeavors in society, the various forms of popular free self-organization and participation, and charitable, educational, hospital, and cooperative work projects and other projects promoted by the church that adequately respond to these needs.
540. Disciples and missionaries of Christ promote a culture of sharing at all levels, as opposed to the dominant culture of selfish accumulation, seriously taking on the virtue of poverty as sober way of life for going out to encounter and aid in the needs of brothers and sisters living in want.
541. The Church should also help consolidate fragile democracies, in the positive democratization process in Latin America and the Caribbean, although today there are grave challenges and threats of authoritarian deviations. It is important to educate for peace, give seriousness and credibility to the continuity of our civic institutions, defend and promote human rights, be especially vigilant for religious freedom, and cooperate to bring about greater national consensus.
541. Peace is a precious but precarious good that we must all care for, educate toward, and promote in our continent. As we know peace, is not reduced to the absence of war and the exclusion of nuclear weapons from our common space—significant achievements in themselves—but it entails generating a “culture of peace” which flows from sustainable and fair development that respect creation (“development is the new name of peace” said Paul VI), thereby enabling us to confront together the assaults of drug trafficking and consumption, terrorism, and the many types of violence prevailing today in our society. The Church, sacrament of reconciliation and peace, wants the disciples and missionaries of Christ, wherever they are, to be “builders of peace” among the peoples and nations of our continent. The Church

- is called to be continually a school of truth and justice, and of forgiveness and reconciliation for building genuine peace.
543. An authentic evangelization of our peoples entails fully assuming the radicality of Christian love, which is embodied in following Christ on the Cross; in suffering for Christ for the sake of justice; and in forgiveness and love of enemies. This love surpasses human love and shares in divine love, the only cultural axis that can build a culture of life. In the Trinity-God, diversity of Persons does not generate violence and conflict, but is itself the source of love and life. An evangelization that places Redemption at the center, that is born out of a crucified love, is capable of purifying the structures of violent society and generating new ones. The radicality of violence is resolved only in the radicality of redeeming love. Evangelizing based on self-surrendering love as solution to conflict must be the “radical” cultural thrust of a new society. Only thus can the continent of hope reach the point of truly becoming the continent of love.
544. We reaffirm the importance of CELAM and recognize that it has been a prophetic venue for the unity of Latin American and Caribbean peoples, and has shown the viability of its cooperation and solidarity out of ecclesial communion. Hence, we commit ourselves to continue to enhance its service in the collegial collaboration of bishops and on the path of achieving Latin American and Caribbean ecclesial identity. We invite the bishops of countries involved in the various regional integration subsystems, including those in the Amazon Basin, to enhance their bonds of reflection and cooperation. We also support continuing to enhance bonds for the relationship between the Latin American episcopacy and the episcopacies of the United States and Canada in the light of the Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*, and with the European episcopacies as well.
545. Conscious that the mission of evangelization cannot proceed separated from solidarity with the poor and the promotion of their comprehensive development, and aware that some ecclesial communities lack the necessary resources, it is imperative to help them, in imitation of the early Christian communities, so that they will really feel loved. Thus, a solidarity fund between the churches of Latin America and the Caribbean, at the service of their own pastoral initiatives, must be created.
546. As we face such serious challenges, we draw encouragement from the words of the Holy Father:
- Certainly, the restoration of justice, reconciliation and forgiveness are the conditions for building true peace. The recognition of this fact leads to a determination to transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God's image and likeness. . . . As I have had occasion to say, it is not the proper task of the Church to engage in the political work of bringing about the most just society*

*possible; nonetheless she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the struggle for justice.*²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ SCa 89.

CONCLUSION

547. “It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. . .” (Acts 15:28). The experience of the apostolic community in the beginning shows the very nature of the Church as mystery of communion with Christ in the Holy Spirit. His Holiness Benedict XVI pointed out this original “method” to us in his homily in Aparecida. As we conclude the Fifth General Conference of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, we note that this is, by God’s grace, what we have experienced. In nineteen days of intense prayer, exchanges, and reflection, dedication, and weariness, our pastoral care took shape in the final document which became increasingly dense and mature. The Spirit of God led us along, gently but firmly, toward the goal.
548. This Fifth Conference, recalling the command to go and make disciples (cf. Mt 28:20), wishes to awaken the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean toward a missionary impulse. We cannot let this hour of grace slip by. We need a new Pentecost! We need to go out to meet individuals, families, communities, and peoples to communicate to them, and share the gift of encounter with Christ, who has filled our lives with “meaning,” truth and love, joy and hope! We cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings, but we must move out in all directions to proclaim that evil and death do not have the last word, that love is stronger, that we have been liberated and saved by the Lord’s paschal victory in history, that He calls us into Church, and wants to multiply the number of his disciples and missionaries in building his Kingdom in our continent. We are witnesses and missionaries: in large cities and the countryside, in the mountains and jungles of our Americas, in all the areas of shared social life, in the most varied “Aeropagus” settings of the public life of nations, in the extreme situations of existence, assuming *ad gentes* our concern for the Church’s universal mission.
549. In order to become a Church full of drive and evangelizing boldness, we have to be evangelized and faithful disciples once more. Conscious of our responsibility for the baptized who have left this grace of participation in the paschal mystery and incorporation into the Body of Christ under a layer of indifference and neglect, we must care for the treasure of the popular religiosity of our peoples so that the “precious pearl” that is Jesus Christ may shine ever more within it, and it may be newly evangelized in the faith of the Church and by its sacramental life. The faith must be strengthened, for it “has some serious challenges to address, because the harmonious development of society and the Catholic identity of these peoples are in jeopardy.”²⁹¹ We are not to take anything for granted or disregard anything. All of us who are baptized are called to “begin again from Christ,” to recognize and follow his Presence with the same reality and newness, the same power of feeling, persuasion, and hope produced by his encounter with the first disciples along the banks of the Jordan two thousand years ago, and with the “Juan Diegos” of the New World. Only thanks to such encounter and following,

²⁹¹ IA 1.

which becomes familiarity and community out of overflowing gratitude and joy, are we rescued from our solitary consciousness and do we set out to communicate to everyone true life, happiness and hope that we have been given to experienced and enjoy.

550. It is Pope Benedict XVI himself who has invited us to “a mission of evangelization capable of engaging all the vital energies present in this immense flock,” which is the people of God in Latin America and the Caribbean: “priests, the men and women religious and the laity who work so generously, often in the face of immense difficulties, in order to spread the truth of the Gospel.” It is a missionary zeal and proclamation that have to pass from person to person, house to house, community to community. The Holy Father continues:

In this work of evangelization the ecclesial community should be clearly marked by pastoral initiatives, especially by sending missionaries, lay or religious, to homes on the outskirts of the cities and in the interior, to enter into dialogue with everyone in a spirit of understanding, sensitivity and charity.

This evangelizing mission embraces all with the love of God, especially the poor and those who suffer. Hence, it cannot be separated from solidarity with the needy, and the promotion of their integral human development:

If the persons they encounter are living in poverty, it is necessary to help them, as the first Christian communities did, by practicing solidarity and making them feel truly loved. The poor living in the outskirts of the cities or the countryside need to feel that the Church is close to them, providing for their most urgent needs, defending their rights and working together with them to build a society founded on justice and peace. The Gospel is addressed in a special way to the poor, and the Bishop, modeled on the Good Shepherd, must be particularly concerned with offering them the divine consolation of the faith, without overlooking their need for "material bread".

551. This missionary awakening in the form of a Continental Mission, the fundamental lines of which have been examined by our Conference, and which we hope will bring a wealth of teachings, guidelines, and priorities, will be considered even more concretely during the next CELAM Plenary Assembly in Havana. It will require the decided collaboration of the Bishops Conferences and of each diocese in particular. It will seek to place the Church permanently in a state of mission. Let us head out to sea in our boats, under with the powerful gust of the Holy Spirit, with no fear of storms, assured that God’s Providence has great surprises in store for us.

552. Let us thus recover

our fervor of spirit. Let us preserve the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow. May it mean for us—as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other

*apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelizers all through the Church's history—an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench. May it be the great joy of our consecrated lives. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world.*²⁹²

Let us recover apostolic courage and boldness.

553. We are aided with the company, ever close at hand, full of understanding and tenderness, of Mary Most Holy. May she show us the blessed fruit of her womb and teach us to respond as she did in the mystery of the annunciation and incarnation. She teaches us to go out of ourselves on a journey of sacrifice, love, and service, as she did in the visitation to her cousin Elizabeth, so that as pilgrims on the road, we may sing the wonders that God has done in us as he promised.
554. Guided by Mary, we fix our gaze on Jesus Christ, author and perfecter of faith, and we tell him with the Successor of Peter:

“Stay with us, for it is towards evening, and the day is now far spent” (Lk 24:29).

Stay with us, Lord, keep us company, even though we have not always recognized you. Stay with us, because all around us the shadows are deepening, and you are the Light; discouragement is eating its way into our hearts: make them burn with the certainty of Easter. We are tired of the journey, but you comfort us in the breaking of bread, so that we are able to proclaim to our brothers and sisters that you have truly risen and have entrusted us with the mission of being witnesses of your resurrection.

Stay with us, Lord, when mists of doubt, weariness or difficulty rise up around our Catholic faith; you are Truth itself, you are the one who reveals the Father to us: enlighten our minds with your word, and help us to experience the beauty of believing in you.

Remain in our families, enlighten them in their doubts, sustain them in their difficulties, console them in their sufferings and in their daily labors, when around them shadows build up which threaten their unity and their natural identity. You are Life itself: remain in our homes, so that they may continue to be nests where human life is generously born, where life is welcomed, loved and respected from conception to natural death.

Remain, Lord, with those in our societies who are most vulnerable; remain with the poor and the lowly, with indigenous peoples and Afro-Americans, who have not always found space and support to express the

²⁹² EN 80.

*richness of their culture and the wisdom of their identity. Remain, Lord, with our children and with our young people, who are the hope and the treasure of our Continent, protect them from so many snares that attack their innocence and their legitimate hopes. O Good Shepherd, remain with our elderly and with our sick. Strengthen them all in faith, so that they may be your disciples and missionaries!*²⁹³

²⁹³ IA 6.

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**HOLY MASS FOR THE INAUGURATION
OF THE FIFTH GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE BISHOPS
OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Square in front of the Shrine of Aparecida
Sixth Sunday of Easter, 13 May 2007*

*Dear Brother Bishops,
Dear priests, and all of you, brothers and sisters in the Lord!*

There are no words to express my joy in being here with you to celebrate this solemn Eucharist on the occasion of the opening of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean. I greet each of you most warmly, particularly Archbishop Raymundo Damasceno Assis, whom I thank for the words he addressed to me in the name of the entire assembly, and the Cardinal Presidents of this General Conference. My respectful greeting goes to the civil and military Authorities who have honoured us with their presence. From this Shrine my thoughts reach out, full of affection and prayer, to all those who are spiritually united with us, especially the communities of consecrated life, the young people belonging to various associations and movements, the families, and also the sick and the elderly. To all I say: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*1 Cor 1:3*).

I see it as a special gift of Providence that this Holy Mass is being celebrated *at this time and in this place*. The *time* is the liturgical season of Easter; on this Sixth Sunday of Easter, as Pentecost rapidly approaches, the Church is called to intensify her prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The *place* is the National Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, the Marian heart of Brazil: Mary welcomes us to this *Upper Room* and, as our Mother and Teacher, helps us to pray trustingly to God with one voice. This liturgical celebration lays a most solid foundation for the Fifth Conference, setting it on the firm basis of prayer and the Eucharist, *Sacramentum Caritatis*. Only *the love of Christ*, poured out by the Holy Spirit, can make this meeting an authentic ecclesial event, a moment of grace for this Continent and for the whole world. This afternoon I will be able to discuss more fully the implications of the theme of your Conference. But now, let us leave space for the word of God which we have the joy of receiving with open and docile hearts, like Mary, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, so that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ may once again take flesh in the “today” of our history.

The first reading, taken from the *Acts of the Apostles*, refers to the so-called “Council of Jerusalem”, which dealt with the question as to whether the observance of the Mosaic Law was to be imposed on those pagans who had become Christians. The reading leaves out the discussion between “the apostles and the elders” (vv. 4-21) and reports the final decision, which was then written down in the form of a letter and entrusted to two delegates for delivery to the community in Antioch (vv. 22-29). This passage from *Acts* is highly appropriate for us, since we too are assembled here for an ecclesial meeting. It reminds us of the importance of community discernment with regard to the great problems and issues encountered by the Church along her way. These are clarified by the

“apostles” and “elders” in the light of the Holy Spirit, who, as today’s Gospel says, calls to mind the teaching of Jesus Christ (cf. *Jn* 14:26) and thus helps the Christian community to advance in charity towards the fullness of truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13). The Church’s leaders discuss and argue, but in a constant attitude of religious openness to Christ’s word in the Holy Spirit. Consequently, at the end they can say: “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” (*Acts* 15:28).

This is the “method” by which we operate in the Church, whether in small gatherings or in great ones. It is not only question of procedure: it is a reflection of the Church’s very nature as a mystery of communion with Christ in the Holy Spirit. In the case of the General Conferences of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, the first, held in 1955 in Rio de Janeiro, merited a special Letter from Pope Pius XII, of venerable memory; in later Conferences, including the present one, the Bishop of Rome has travelled to the site of the continental gathering in order to preside over its initial phase. With gratitude and devotion let us remember the Servants of God Paul VI and John Paul II, who brought to the Conferences of Medellín, Puebla and Santo Domingo the witness of the closeness of the universal Church to the Churches in Latin America, which constitute, proportionally, the majority of the Catholic community.

“To the Holy Spirit and to us”. This is the Church: *we*, the community of believers, the People of God, with its Pastors who are called to lead the way; together with the *Holy Spirit*, the Spirit of the Father, sent in the name of his Son Jesus, the Spirit of the one who is “greater” than all, given to us through Christ, who became “small” for our sake. The Paraclete Spirit, our *Ad-vocatus*, Defender and Consoler, makes us live in God’s presence, as hearers of his word, freed from all anxiety and fear, bearing in our hearts the peace which Jesus left us, the peace that the world cannot give (cf. *Jn* 14:26-27). The Spirit accompanies the Church on her long pilgrimage between Christ’s first and second coming. “I go away, and I will come to you” (*Jn* 14:28), Jesus tells his Apostles. Between Christ’s “going away” and his “return” is the time of the Church, his Body. Two thousand years have passed so far, including these five centuries and more in which the Church has made her pilgrim way on the American Continent, filling believers with Christ’s life through the sacraments and sowing in these lands the good seed of the Gospel, which has yielded thirty, sixty and a hundredfold. *The time of the Church, the time of the Spirit*: the Spirit is the Teacher who trains *disciples*: he teaches them to love Jesus; he trains them to hear his word and to contemplate his countenance; he conforms them to Christ’s sacred humanity, a humanity which is poor in spirit, afflicted, meek, hungry for justice, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaking, persecuted for justice’s sake (cf. *Mt* 5:3-10). *By the working of the Holy Spirit, Jesus becomes the “Way” along which the disciple walks*. “If a man loves me, he will keep my word”, Jesus says at the beginning of today’s Gospel. “The word which you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me” (*Jn* 14:23-24). Just as Jesus makes known the words of the Father, so the Spirit reminds the Church of Christ’s own words (cf. *Jn* 14:26). And just as love of the Father led Jesus to feed on his will, so our love for Jesus is shown by our obedience to his words. Jesus’ fidelity to the Father’s will can be communicated to his disciples through the Holy Spirit, who pours the love of God into their hearts (cf. *Rom* 5:5).

The New Testament presents *Christ* as the *missionary of the Father*. Especially in the Gospel of John, Jesus often speaks of himself in relation to the Father who sent him into the world. And so in today's Gospel he says: "the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me" (*Jn* 14:24). At this moment, dear friends, we are invited to turn our gaze to him, for the Church's mission exists only as a prolongation of Christ's mission: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (*Jn* 20:21). The evangelist stresses, in striking language, that the passing on of this commission takes place in the Holy Spirit: "he breathed on them and said to them: 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (*Jn* 20:22). *Christ's mission* is accomplished *in love*. He has kindled in the world the fire of God's love (cf. *Lk* 12:49). *It is Love that gives life*: and so the Church has been sent forth to spread Christ's Love throughout the world, so that individuals and peoples "may have life, and have it abundantly" (*Jn* 10:10). To you, who represent the Church in Latin America, today I symbolically entrust my Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, in which I sought to point out to everyone the essence of the Christian message. The Church considers herself the *disciple and missionary of this Love*: missionary only insofar as she is a disciple, capable of being attracted constantly and with renewed wonder by the God who has loved us and who loves us first (cf. *1 Jn* 4:10). The Church does not engage in proselytism. Instead, she grows by "*attraction*": just as Christ "draws all to himself" by the power of his love, culminating in the sacrifice of the Cross, so the Church fulfils her mission to the extent that, in union with Christ, she accomplishes every one of her works in spiritual and practical imitation of the love of her Lord.

Dear brothers and sisters! This is the priceless treasure that is so abundant in Latin America, this is her most precious inheritance: *faith in the God who is Love*, who has shown us his face in Jesus Christ. You believe in the God who is Love: this is your strength, which overcomes the world, the joy that nothing and no one can ever take from you, the peace that Christ won for you by his Cross! *This is the faith that has made America the "Continent of Hope."* Not a political ideology, not a social movement, not an economic system: faith in the God who is Love—who took flesh, died and rose in Jesus Christ—is the authentic basis for this hope which has brought forth such a magnificent harvest from the time of the first evangelization until today, as attested by the ranks of Saints and *Beati* whom the Spirit has raised up throughout the Continent. Pope John Paul II called you to a *new evangelization*, and you accepted his commission with your customary generosity and commitment. I now confirm it with you, and in the words of this Fifth Conference I say to you: *be faithful disciples, so as to be courageous and effective missionaries.*

The second reading sets before us the magnificent vision of the *heavenly Jerusalem*. It is an image of awesome beauty, where nothing is superfluous, but everything contributes to the perfect harmony of the holy City. In his vision John sees the city "coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God" (*Rev* 21:10). And since the glory of God is Love, the heavenly Jerusalem is the icon of the Church, utterly holy and glorious, without spot or wrinkle (cf. *Eph* 5:27), permeated at her heart and in every part of her by the presence of the God who is Love. She is called a "bride", "the bride of the Lamb" (*Rev* 20:9), because in her is fulfilled the nuptial figure which pervades biblical revelation from beginning to end. The City and Bride is the locus of God's full communion with

humanity; she has no need of a temple or of any external source of light, because the indwelling presence of God and of the Lamb illuminates her from within.

This magnificent icon has an *eschatological* value: it expresses the mystery of the beauty that is *already* the essential form of the Church, even if it has *not yet* arrived at its fullness. It is the goal of our pilgrimage, the homeland which awaits us and for which we long. Seeing that beauty with the eyes of faith, contemplating it and yearning for it, must not serve as an excuse for avoiding the historical reality in which the Church lives as she shares the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted (cf. Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 1). If the beauty of the heavenly Jerusalem is the glory of God—his love in other words—then it is in charity, and in charity alone, that we can approach it and to a certain degree dwell within it even now. Whoever loves the Lord Jesus and keeps his word, already experiences in this world the mysterious presence of the Triune God. We heard this in the Gospel: “we will come to him and make our home with him” (*Jn* 14:23). Every Christian is therefore called to become a living stone of this splendid “dwelling place of God with men”. What a magnificent vocation!

A Church totally enlivened and impelled by the love of Christ, the Lamb slain for love, is the image within history of the heavenly Jerusalem, prefiguring the holy city that is radiant with the glory of God. It releases *an irresistible missionary power* which is *the power of holiness*. Through the prayers of the Virgin Mary, may the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean be abundantly clothed with power from on high (cf. *Lk* 24:49), in order to spread throughout this Continent and the whole world the holiness of Christ. To him be glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

**RECITATION OF THE HOLY ROSARY AND MEETING WITH PRIESTS,
MEN RELIGIOUS, WOMEN RELIGIOUS, SEMINARIANS AND DEACONS**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Basilica of the Shrine of Aparecida
Saturday, 12 May 2007*

*My Venerable Brothers in the College of Cardinals,
in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Beloved Religious and all of you who have lovingly followed Christ in response to sound
of his voice,
Dear Seminarians, preparing for the priestly ministry,
Dear Members of Ecclesial Movements and all you lay people who bring the power of the
Gospel into the world of work and culture, in the heart of your families
and your parishes!*

1. Just as the Apostles, together with Mary, "went up to the upper room" and there, "with one accord devoted themselves to prayer" (*Acts 1:13-14*), so too we are gathered here today at the Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, which at this time is our "upper room" where Mary, Mother of the Lord, is in our midst. Today it is she who leads our meditation; it is she who teaches us to pray. It is she who shows us the way to open our minds and hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit, who comes to fill the whole world.

We have just prayed the rosary. Through these sequences of meditations, the divine Comforter seeks to initiate us in the knowledge of Christ that issues forth from the clear source of the Gospel text. For her part, the Church of the third millennium proposes to offer Christians the capacity for "knowledge—according to the words of Saint Paul—of God's mystery, of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (*Col 2:2-3*). Mary Most Holy, the pure and immaculate Virgin, is for us a school of faith destined to guide us and give us strength on the path that leads us to the Creator of Heaven and Earth. The Pope has come to Aparecida with great joy so as to say to you first of all: "Remain in the school of Mary." Take inspiration from her teachings, seek to welcome and to preserve in your hearts the enlightenment that she, by divine mandate, sends you from on high.

How beautiful it is to be gathered here in the name of Christ, in faith, in fraternity, in joy, in peace and in prayer, together with "Mary, the mother of Jesus" (*Acts 1:14*). How beautiful it is, my dear Priests, Deacons, Consecrated men and women, Seminarians and Christian families, to be here in the National Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, which is God's Dwelling-place, the House of Mary and the House of the Brothers; and in the coming days it is also to serve as the setting for the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean. How beautiful it is to be here in this Marian Basilica, towards which, at this time, the gaze and the hopes of the Christian world are turned, especially for the Christians of Latin America and the Caribbean!

2. I am glad to be here with you, in your midst! The Pope loves you! The Pope greets you affectionately! He is praying for you! And he implores the Lord's choicest blessings upon

the Movements, Associations and new ecclesial realities, a living expression of the perennial youth of the Church! Be truly blessed! From here I address my truly affectionate greeting to the families who are gathered here to represent all the dearly beloved Christian families present throughout the world. I rejoice especially with you and I offer you an embrace of peace.

I am grateful for the welcome and the hospitality of the Brazilian people. Ever since my arrival I have been received with great affection! The various manifestations of appreciation and the greetings show how much you love, esteem and respect the Successor of the Apostle Peter. My Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, mentioned on numerous occasions your affability and your spirit of fraternal welcome. He was completely right!

3. I greet the dear priests who are present, and I keep in my thoughts and prayers all the priests spread throughout the world, especially those in Latin America and the Caribbean, including the *Fidei donum* priests. What great challenges, what difficult situations you have to face, with such generosity, self-denial, sacrifices and renunciations! Your faithfulness in the exercise of the ministry and the life of prayer, your search for holiness, your total self-giving to God at the service of your brothers and sisters, as you expend your lives and energy in order to promote justice, fraternity, solidarity and sharing—all this speaks powerfully to my pastoral heart. The witness of a priestly life well lived brings nobility to the Church, calls forth admiration among the faithful, and is a source of blessings for the community; it is the best way to promote vocations, the most authentic invitation to other young people to respond positively to the Lord's call. It is true collaboration in building the Kingdom of God!

I thank you sincerely and I encourage you to continue living in a manner worthy of the vocation you have received. May the missionary fervour, the passion for an increasingly contemporary approach to evangelization, the authentic apostolic spirit and the zeal for souls always be present in your lives! My affection, my prayers and my thanks go also to the elderly and infirm priests. Your conformation to Christ Suffering and Risen is the most fruitful apostolate. Many thanks!

4. Dear Deacons and Seminarians, you have a special place in the Pope's heart, and so I extend to you too my most fraternal and heartfelt greetings. Your exuberance, enthusiasm, idealism and encouragement to face new challenges boldly serve to give the People of God a renewed openness, make the faithful more dynamic and help the community to grow, to progress, and to become more trusting, joyful and optimistic. I thank you for the witness that you bear, working together with your Bishops in the pastoral activities of your dioceses. Always keep before your eyes the figure of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*Mt 20:28*). Be like the first deacons of the Church: men of good reputation, filled with the Holy Spirit, with wisdom and with faith (cf. *Acts 6:3-5*). And you, seminarians, give thanks to God for the call that he addresses to you. Remember that the Seminary is the cradle of your vocation and the first place where you experience communal life (cf. *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests*, 32). I ask you, with God's help, to be holy faithful and happy priests in the service of the Church!

5. I now turn my gaze and my attention to you, dear consecrated men and women, gathered here in the Shrine of the Mother, Queen and Patron of the Brazilian people, and also to those who are spread throughout the whole world.

Dear religious men and women, you are an offering, a present, a divine gift that the Church has received from her Lord. I give thanks to God for your lives and for the witness that you offer the world of faithful love for God and for your brethren. This unreserved, totally, definitive, unconditional and impassioned love is manifested in silence, in contemplation, in prayer and in the most varied activities that you undertake in your religious families, in favour of humanity and especially of the poorest and most abandoned. All this calls forth in the hearts of the young the desire to follow Christ the Lord more closely and radically, and to offer their lives so as to bear witness before the men and women of our day to the fact that God is Love, and that it is worth allowing oneself to be conquered and entranced in order to devote one's life exclusively to him (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, 15).

Religious life in Brazil has always been important and has had a key role in the work of evangelization, from the very beginnings of the colonial era. Only yesterday, I had the great joy of presiding at the eucharistic celebration which included the canonization of Saint Antônio de Sant'Ana Galvão, a Franciscan priest and religious and the first saint to have been born in Brazil. Alongside him, another admirable witness to the consecrated life is Saint Pauline, foundress of the Little Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. I could quote many other examples. May all of them together serve as an incentive to you to live out your total consecration. God bless you!

6. Today, on the eve of the opening of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, at which it will be my pleasure to preside, I want to tell each of you how important it is to maintain our sense of belonging to the Church, which leads us to grow and to mature as brothers and sisters, children of the one God and Father. My dear men and women of Latin America, I know that you have a great thirst for God. I know that you follow the Lord Jesus who said: "No one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn 14:6). The Pope therefore wants to say to all of you: *The Church is our home! This is our home!* In the Catholic Church we find all that is good, all that gives grounds for security and consolation! Anyone who accepts Christ, "the way, the truth and the life" in his totality, is assured of peace and happiness, in this life and in the next! For this reason, the Pope has come here to pray and to bear witness with you all: *It is worth being faithful, it is worth persevering in our faith!* The coherence of the faith also requires, however, a solid doctrinal and spiritual formation, which thus contributes to building a more just, humane and Christian society. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, together with its abridged version published under the title of "Compendium", will be of help here because of the clear notions it provides concerning our faith. Let us ask straight away that the coming of the Holy Spirit may be for all people like a new Pentecost, so that it may illumine our hearts and our faith with the light that comes down from above.

7. It is with great hope that I turn to all of you assembled here within this majestic Basilica, and to all who took part in the Holy Rosary from outside, to invite you to

become profoundly missionary and to bring the Good News of the Gospel to every point of the compass in Latin America and in the world.

Let us ask the Mother of God, Our Lady of Aparecida, to protect the lives of all Christians. May she, who is the Star of Evangelization, guide our steps along the path towards the heavenly Kingdom:

"Our Mother, protect the Brazilian and Latin American family!

Guard under your protective mantle the children of this beloved land that welcomes us,

As the Advocate with your Son Jesus, give to the Brazilian people constant peace and full prosperity,

Pour out upon our brothers and sisters throughout Latin America a true missionary ardour, to spread faith and hope,

Make the resounding plea that you uttered in Fatima for the conversion of sinners become a reality that transforms the life of our society,

And as you intercede, from the Shrine of Guadalupe, for the people of the Continent of Hope, bless its lands and its homes,

Amen."