Called for Encuentro & Mission

Based on the United States Catholic Bishops’ Statement Encuentro and Mission: A Renewed Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry

Hispanic ministry has experienced tremendous growth in the United States since the U.S. Catholic bishops issued the 1987 National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry. Its vision calls for living and promoting, by means of a pastoral de conjunto (communion in mission), a model of Church that is evangelizing, communal, and missionary. The 1987 Plan's vision, values, and priorities are still relevant today.

At the same time, our response to the Hispanic presence, coupled with prophetic voices and actions of Hispanic Catholics throughout the country, has brought Hispanic ministry to a crossroads at the beginning of a new century: (1) What model of leadership will Hispanic Catholics offer as they become the majority group within the U.S. Catholic Church? (2) How will this model strengthen the unity of the Body of Christ in increasingly culturally diverse communities?

The U.S. Catholic bishops have responded with Encuentro and Mission: A Renewed Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry, an addendum to the 1987 Plan that renews its response to the Hispanic presence for the new millennium. Hispanic Catholics are a blessing from God, one that has transformed many dioceses and parishes into more vibrant faith communities. A new phase in Hispanic ministry includes further development in three fundamental areas: (1) ministry structures and network, (2) relationship building and collaboration, and (3) active participation in the social mission of the Church.

Remembering the Past with Gratitude

Hispanic ministry leaders have generated a memoria histórica (historical memory) and a unique identity. Over the years, Hispanic ministry leaders have identified guiding values and principles:

- Common faith, culture, and language—Hispanics have emerged from the blending of different races and cultures.
- A culture born Catholic—Since the first Spanish missionaries brought the Catholic faith to the new continent, many of the gospel values and church traditions took root in the cultures of the Latin American people.
- A profound ecclesial vocation—The desire to collaborate with other ministries and ethnic communities has strengthened the ecclesial identity of Hispanic Catholics. Most importantly, this desire has defined Hispanic ministry as integral to the Church.
- A prophetic model of Church—Deeply rooted in the reality of Hispanic peoples, this model calls for a strong commitment to social justice, advocacy and action in favor of new immigrant families and young people, and the empowerment of Hispanics and all Catholics.
- Leadership understood as discipleship—This model, based on Jesus' call to follow him, has two dimensions: (1) the encounter with Christ, leading to conversion and a personal relationship with him, and (2) the commitment to follow Jesus by continuing his mission.
- A pastoral de conjunto (communion in mission)—This principle models and promotes...
collaborative ministry as an effective vehicle for carrying out the mission of the Church.

• A process of consultation—This methodology focuses on the needs and aspirations of the faithful, judges that reality in light of the Scriptures and Tradition, and moves into transforming action.

Living the Present with Enthusiasm

Ministry in the twenty-first century requires a commitment to welcome and foster the cultural identity of the many faces of the Church while building a profoundly Catholic and culturally diverse identity through an ongoing process of inculturation.

Pastoral Dimensions for Hispanic Ministry

Emphasizing the urgency for us to listen to Christ’s message of hope, Pope John Paul II has called for a New Evangelization. Evangelization, the fundamental mission of the Church, is an ongoing process of encountering Christ—one that Hispanic Catholics have taken to heart in their pastoral planning. This process generates a spirituality that leads to conversion, communion, and solidarity, touching every dimension of Christian life and transforming every human situation. Accordingly, the New Evangelization becomes an integral part of the four pastoral dimensions of Encuentro and Mission.

New Evangelization and Formation—An evangelizing catechesis and solid formation are about acquiring wisdom: truth in love.

New Evangelization and Missionary Option—This dimension calls people to move from merely receiving the Good News to being its committed witnesses to those who need to experience its life-giving power.

New Evangelization and Pastoral de Conjunto—This dimension calls for close collaboration and the distribution of resources—“communion in mission”—among ministries and groups. At its most fundamental level, this communion expresses God’s desire that all may be one.

New Evangelization and Liturgy and Prayer Life—The plan promotes liturgical celebrations that are inculturated in the reality of the community that celebrates them, while bringing the many faces of God’s house into greater communion.

A Call to Build and Nurture Community

Every action taken in the life of the faith community should nurture and strengthen the fraternal bonds between all its members. Whether through a formation program, an advocacy strategy, a liturgical celebration, or a whole pastoral plan, fraternal human relationships and a truly Christian experience of community should be strengthened within each cultural group and across all cultures.

Pastoral Responses and Principles in Hispanic Ministry

The following basic pastoral responses are based on principles that have proven useful in developing Hispanic ministry during the last thirty years of a national pastoral effort:

1. Articulate a clear vision of ministry based on unity in diversity.
2. Foster a spirituality of communion in mission (pastoral de conjunto).
3. Promote small ecclesial communities and apostolic movements.
4. Plan with the people, not for the people.
5. Promote and support vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, and consecrated life.
6. Form lay leaders as bridge-builders for today’s culturally diverse Church.
7. Develop relevant stewardship models.
8. Strengthen diocesan, parish, and regional structures.
9. Commit to social justice.
10. Promote intercultural dialogue and collaboration.
11. Give the Church a voice in Spanish.

Looking Forward to the Future with Confidence

As a responsibility of the entire Church, Hispanic ministry calls for the strongest pastoral response from every U.S. diocese and parish where Hispanic Catholics live. This important ministry also calls for an equally strong pastoral response on the part of all Catholic institutions and organizations. The following suggested actions are the fruit of a consultation process guided by the historical memory of Hispanic ministry and by the values and principles of Encuentro 2000: Many Faces in God’s House.

New Evangelization and Formation

1. Commit to the academic and professional development of Hispanics.
2. Foster an integral leadership formation model.
3. Establish solid and accessible faith formation programs.
4. Make the formation of young Hispanics, especially young adult Hispanics, an urgent priority.

New Evangelization and Missionary Option

1. Renew the Church’s commitment to reach out to inactive Catholics.
2. Develop ministry models that serve young people, women, and families.
3. Promote active participation in civic life and advocacy efforts.
4. Intensify social ministry.

New Evangelization and Pastoral de Conjunto

1. Develop a common vision and mission for Hispanic ministry.
2. Strengthen the structures for Hispanic ministry.
3. Develop a strategy for pastoral de conjunto (communion in mission).
4. Foster the development of Hispanic ministry leaders.

New Evangelization and Liturgy and Prayer Life

1. Increase participation in the liturgical life of the Church.
2. Make God’s saving grace more visible in the lives of the faithful.
3. Intensify the formation of liturgical ministers.
4. Create opportunities for all the faithful to celebrate together (popular piety).

Hispanic ministry is the Church’s response to the Hispanic presence. The ministry is an integral part of the life and mission of the U.S. Catholic Church and calls the faithful to live and promote the unity of the Body of Christ. It entails a collaborative effort with the community, includes the perspective and contributions of the people, and honors their history, their faith traditions, and the contributions they have made in service to the Church and society.