

**ADDRESS OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO,
TO THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA
JUNE 14, 2017**

Dear Brothers in Christ,

I am very happy to be with you here in Indianapolis. In a special way, I wish to thank Cardinal DiNardo, the President of the Episcopal Conference, as well as Monsignor Bransfield and the Staff of the USCCB, for the opportunity to address you. I assure you of the Holy Father's closeness, prayers, and gratitude for your ministry as you engage in the New Evangelization.

One year ago, I began my mission in the United States. It has been an eventful year, filled with many blessings, affording me the opportunity not only to meet you but also your people as I have traveled from Washington to California to Louisiana to Alaska! I continue to be impressed by the faith of the people and their dedication to their parishes and local churches, despite the many challenges they face in living the faith in an increasingly secular culture that values efficiency and productivity over spiritual values. With each journey, I learn more about the geographical, social and cultural context of the different states, dioceses, and peoples that constitute this country – a context in which the Gospel must be announced joyfully.

The first anniversary of my mission in the United States led me to reflect upon where I was ten years ago. I had just arrived as Nuncio in Mexico. It was the time of the *Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano y del Caribe* in Aparecida. For me, the final document of Aparecida was a source of life for my mission and for the whole Church in Latin America.

The Aparecida document gave an analysis of the rapid secularization of society and proposed a pastoral strategy to respond to the situation. The Latin American bishops recognized that they were living in an era of dramatic change:

Our cultural traditions are no longer handed on from one generation to the next with the same ease as in the past. This 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. (V Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano y del Caribe, Documento conclusivo, CELAM, Aparecida 2007, n. 37.)

The final document of Aparecida in attempting to address this situation strongly emphasized:

- the person of Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life *and* the need to encounter Him;
- the need for a greater sense of discipleship as a way of living this encounter with Him in the Church;
- the call to be a missionary disciple – continuing to be a disciple while exercising the prophetic task of forming new disciples through ongoing pastoral activity, conversion, and joyful proclamation of the Gospel even at the peripheries;

- the need to be a Church that goes forth – in a permanent state of mission, building a world with more justice, reconciliation, and solidarity – a world which values and affirms the dignity of every person, and furthers a genuine culture of encounter; and
- the desire to undertake a continental mission to promote life, love, and peace.

It is no secret that after the election of Pope Francis, his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* attempted to bring this approach to evangelization to the universal Church. The experience of Aparecida cannot be imposed upon the Church in the United States; rather, in light of its vision set forth by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, we are invited to discern how its approach might be incarnated in our cultural and religious context, addressing the concrete realities of our flocks. I know that many of you will be gathered in Orlando at the beginning of July to discuss this very theme, while others are already developing and discerning new strategies for their respective dioceses.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis reminded the whole Church of the ideas of his predecessors, recalling Benedict XVI's idea that the Church grows, not by proselytizing, but by attraction, and John Paul II's idea that "missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church." (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 15) To these, the Holy Father added:

What would happen if we were to take these words seriously? We would realize that missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church's activity*. Along these lines the Latin American bishops stated that we "cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings"; we need to move "from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry."

I know that many of you, along with your people, have already adopted this missionary attitude, remembering, of course, that we are first disciples, called to deeper communion with the Master. In this year, I have seen the fruits of your labors in the defense of human life, conscience and religious liberty, in your genuine concern for refugees and migrants, both here and throughout the world, as well as your zeal for families and your work for adequate access to healthcare.

The opportunity to evangelize is itself a gift. Over the past few years, with the Synods on the Family and *Amoris Laetitia*, we have been given a wonderful point of departure for accompanying families and strengthening them in their witness. Pope John Paul II famously stated that "the future of humanity passes through the family." Pope Benedict too reminded us that "the new evangelization depends largely on the Domestic Church." In light of the Tradition and his predecessors, the Holy Father wants the entire Church to continue the mission of evangelization in the family – not simply to move from one task to another. In your respective dioceses, what is new in your approach to ministering to and accompanying families?

I wish to encourage you in your ever-deepening commitment to evangelization. As we undertake our pastoral activities, we are asked to examine the way in which evangelization is carried out. For example, when the Holy Father writes, "The Joy of the Gospel fills the hearts of those who encounter Christ," (cf. *EG*, 1), we could ask ourselves: do we carry out the mission with joy, having encountered the Lord and received His love?

To evangelize more effectively, Pope Francis calls the whole Church to listen more. Do we listen – even to those with whom we disagree – so that we might propose the essentials of the Gospel in a more persuasive, life-changing way? It is important to listen to the laity, who have a particular expertise, real faith and devotion, to the clergy and religious, and to one another as

bishops, acting in a collegial and synodal way, to produce the best pastoral response to the challenges of our times.

Despite the various advances in technology and social communications, it seems that the mission of evangelization is stifled because often we only speak with those with whom we agree and do not listen enough to those at the margins of the Church and society. The call to be a missionary disciple demands moving beyond our comfort zone to the peripheries, as the Holy Father teaches:

“Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel.” (EG, 20)

I have witnessed you ministering as Shepherds at the peripheries, whether it is in the preparation of the very important *Encuentro* or the Mass at the Border, where your presence provides comfort and strength. At the March for Life when so many young people gather to give witness, your presence strengthens their own commitment to solidarity and to those women and children who find themselves vulnerable. Last November in Baltimore, your presence at historic St. Peter Claver Church sent a powerful message in a time of racial tension that minorities will not be forgotten and that they enrich the whole Church; the upcoming Twelfth National Black Catholic Congress is another opportunity to reaffirm those at the margins.

As I mentioned last November, with the approaching Synod on Youth, Faith, and Vocational Discernment, listening to and appreciating the perspectives of young people – who find themselves at the periphery of the Church – is critical if we are to reach them. I suspect that many of you have already begun your preparations for this synod, but I wish to encourage you to be pro-active in ministering to our young people and in learning from them as you listen and evangelize.

At times our efforts to evangelize are hampered by having “tunnel vision”, that is, by not taking an integrated approach to evangelization, an approach which sees an essential unity and integrity between worship, doctrine, life and pastoral practice. How often division in the Church, sometimes along political lines, occurs because issues are placed against each other rather than within the larger framework of Catholic Social Doctrine, which necessarily promotes a consistent ethic and culture of life and opposes the “throwaway” culture lamented by our Holy Father!

Do we accept the challenge of encountering another, and, allowing them to encounter the Lord, even when we are not comfortable? The need to foster, especially among our people, a culture of encounter and a willingness to meet those from other cultures, countries, and faiths, as a way of promoting peace and understanding, could not be greater. Accepting this challenge means fostering and embracing the virtue of solidarity. Solidarity, born from an encounter, can push humanity to search for true justice without forgetting the least of our brothers and sisters.

Solidarity demands recognizing the common, inherent human dignity of each person, refusing to accept the throwaway culture. It thereby becomes a condition for peace. The idea of welcoming another, especially someone fleeing persecution or “certain death”, as is the case with so many migrants, is the common work of humanity, helping us recognize that we are part of the same human family.

The Holy Father reminds us that “solidarity in its deepest and most challenging sense, thus becomes a way of making history in a life setting where conflicts, tensions, and oppositions can achieve a diversified and life-giving unity.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 228)

This idea of solidarity, so prominent in the Pontificate of John Paul II, is significant in the pastoral ministry of Pope Francis. In recent years, for example, Latin American countries have grown in fraternity, seen on a political scale, but even demonstrated by the collegial working of their bishops, giving rise to a true unity in diversity, which the Church can be universally. Why could the Church in the United States not generate positive results, in the Church and in the world, framing and influencing the direction of dialogue on the fundamental issues of our day?

Fraternity and solidarity should be distinguished from the uniformity imposed upon peoples and nations under the guise of unity, a uniformity which does not respect the values and priorities of the people. Part of the Church’s mission involves bringing unity and peace to the world and defending peoples against an ideological colonization.

The genuine unity of the human family and of the members of the Church can only be achieved in the Truth, who is a Person. The proof of our unity and solidarity – of being of one heart and mind – will be in the love experienced by the members of the human family.

My brothers, I know that we are at the beginning of our journey together and that the tasks of the new evangelization and of building a culture of encounter and solidarity seem daunting. Take courage. Recently, Vatican Radio interviewed Professor Guzman Carriquiry, Vice President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America and a close collaborator of Pope Francis. He recalled that at the time of Aparecida when everything seemed a bit chaotic that “Cardinal Bergoglio would always say: ‘We must continue to gather everything that the bishops are producing in order to know which times the Holy Spirit is bringing us through.’ And, in fact, at the end, in the Final Document, the bishops wrote: ‘The Holy Spirit has brought us slowly but decisively to the finish line.’”

He continued, “Further, we must think that Aparecida was that time of grace through which the Providence of God brought Jorge Mario Bergoglio to the See of Peter.”

Perhaps, this is how we should view these times – not as a time of impossible challenges but as a time of grace.

Thank you. May God bless you all.