

# A Synodal Pastoral Proposal and Lines of Action: Latin American and Caribbean Perspectives

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## Abstract

The first Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean offers six pastoral propositions and lines of action: kerygmatic and a missionary, prophetic and formative, spiritual, liturgical and sacramental, synodal and participative, socio-transforming and environmental. People of God in different regions reflect on these dimensions in different ways. This marks the beginning of the synodal march of the People of God. It is, therefore, a historical event. The assembly articulates the missionary spirit of the People of God by compiling contributions from various ministries and callings. It recognizes the challenges and pastoral orientations of the faithful. In this sense, it is also prophetic. A symphony of voices, registers, and tonalities draws on the continent's traditions and cultures. It translates the Gospel of Christ in Latin American and Caribbean style for the universal Church.

*Keywords:* Synodality, Pastoral Propositions, and Lines of Action

## Introduction

The Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean is carried out in stages. This was the most remarkable part of the process: the phase of discernment and propositions. Embracing a synodal approach is an *unprecedented experience* in the Latin American and Caribbean Church. Moreover, it represents a vital contribution to the universal Church and a landmark in pastoral pilgrimage. This is one of the first institutional receptions of Pope Francis' synodal suggestions

(International Theological Commission, 23). The objective is to revive Aparecida, which is reaffirming conciliar renewal and preparing to receive Vatican II from Pope Francis' magisterium. When the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) requested a revised General Conference of Bishops, Pope Francis proposed that they hold an assembly with representatives of all God's people. The purpose of this meeting is to express the faith of believers with which the Spirit anoints Christians. This creates a new space for episcopal collegiality within a broad synodal body (CELAM, 2007). The communion between believers, bishops, local churches, and Episcopal Conferences with the Bishop of Rome is expressed in a novel way. It strives to gather, creatively integrate, theologically arrange, and pastorally project the outcomes of the process with the Spirit of listening. Despite the constraints of the universal Church, God has given us a new window of grace to reignite our love for Jesus and our desire to follow him (*EG*, 120). Hence, this article offers synodal pastoral recommendations and directions of action in a concise manner.

### **First Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean**

On November 21, 2021, the Eucharist was celebrated at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, marking the beginning of the assembly. The discussion started out in the light of the Word, with the following themes: the importance of Jesus Christ and his Word in our pastoral action; integral pastoral conversion and the four prophetic dreams; the Church on a missionary journey for the outpouring of the Spirit; the Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean toward the synod on synodality and Testimonies on the synodality of the People of God. Pope Francis underscored that listening, discussing and discerning processes give dynamism to ecclesial assemblies. It indicates that the Synodal Church is a Church on a journey of trust, hope, and charity (Preparatory Document, 2021). Despite the obstacles, the members marched side by side while acknowledging their various backgrounds and stressing their common participation in the Body of Christ. As they listened to the Word and breaking the Bread, the missionary discipleship hearts rejoiced in the Lord's presence. The Spirit's itinerary was designed for each event. They were able to discern what God is asking of them and seek a more significant commitment with grateful and generous hearts.

Discernment groups were directed through a process of reflection. The members of each group emerged from diverse walks of life,

nationalities, and generations. The basic framework of the journey was a place where their peoples' and specific churches' hopes and anxieties could be voiced. The subsequent processes involved establishing priorities, setting pastoral orientations, and reaching an agreement on issues. This discernment was founded on a solid inner attitude marked by prayer sessions, a sense of the Church, and a spirit-led quest for agreement (*EG*, 123). A commission gathered the developed suggestions and evaluated and assembled them based on commonalities and themes. The initial evaluations emphasized numerous positive features of the synodal experience: the significant number of participants and genuine representation of the People of God; the transparency of the entire process; the measures to foster active participation and collective discernment; the spirituality that accompanied all the stages and the possibility to correlate this experience to the synodal process of the universal Church (CELAM 2021).

Few limitations that hindered a fuller realization of promises were noted: it was unrealistic to include many of the voices; the delegations from every country were unable to reflect the depth and diversity of the Church fully; the members were not as carefully planned as they could have been; the operation of the technological platform and some institutional complexity made it difficult for the groups to work and the composition of the assembly did not correspond to that of the composition of the Church. Rather than being decisive determination, it was an open and ongoing missionary commission. The pastoral measures would empower us to remain on the Synodal path with the universal Church (CELAM, 1968). For this reason, we seek to enhance the impetus driving our fundamental salvific mission and discover innovative approaches to faithfully follow Jesus and share the good news of the Gospel.

### **Pastoral Propositions and Lines of Action**

According to the Second Vatican Council, a holistic and integrative evangelistic action has the following six dimensions: kerygmatic and missionary; prophetic and formative; spiritual, liturgical, and sacramental; synodal participative; socio-transformative and ecological. These magnitudes act as a basic framework for characterizing the pastoral concerns raised by the Ecclesial Assembly. The assembly process was fulfilled in various stages and culminated in pastoral initiatives and lines of action. With the different formulations, we assume these recommendations and courses of action for the universal Church.

## **The Kerygmatic and Missionary Dimension**

The essence of every evangelization act is the kerygmatic and missionary dimension. It originates from the basic nature of the Bible. It must develop into a proclamation, a suggestion, and an accompaniment of faith in Jesus Christ. It must be a passionate proclamation of the person of Christ in all its manifestations to draw people into contact with Him. It culminates in the new commandment of love, which brings about missionary discipleship, fraternal charity, and ecclesial life. The kerygmatic and missionary dimension is expressed in the evolution of the three stages of evangelization: pastoral engagement, which is termed as the first proclamation, catechetical-initiatic action, and missionary action with various objectives and strategies (*EC*, 15-18).

### ***Propositions: The Church being a sign and instrument of the encounter with Jesus Christ***

We need to commit if we desire the efforts of the ecclesial communities to be a space of proclamation and encounter with the risen Christ. Conversion, the desire to become a missionary disciple, spiritual growth, a sense of solidarity with the ecclesial community, and participation in its synodal process result from this experience. Additionally, it is from there that the merciful heart emerges, prompting compassion for the poor and those on the outskirts of human suffering. It reinvigorates the sense of mission that motivates us to extend to others and expose them to the merciful Father with Jesus, sharing with them the joy of our contact with Him (*LG*, 58).

### ***Lines of Action***

- To enhance the encounter with Christ by establishing a creative missionary action that promotes new strategies of reaching and engaging those who are outside the faith and those who claim to believe but are not anxious to engage in a community of faith.
- To adopt a new approach when proclaiming the Gospel to assure that it reaches everyone, highlighting how Jesus loves everyone without discrimination and how he connects both with humans and the natural world.
- To recommend embracing Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, recognizing the seeds of the Word in conversation and making the first proclamation the point of entry to catechesis.

## **The Prophetic Formative Dimension**

One of the bases for transmitting the faith, in line with ecclesiastical tradition and magisterial principles, is the prophetic and formative dimension. In light of the current situation, the Second Vatican Council emphasizes the significance of constant adult and youth education. The Medellin Document improves all the integral formative methods for all pastoral agents and provides elements for integrated and emancipated education. For the enrichment of all who have been baptised, regardless of their position within the Church, the Aparecida Document offers a firm and steadfast option for forming our communities. The contributions addressing the prophetic and formative aspects of the evangelizing action for the future provide a conceptual foundation for the future (*GS*, 73).

### ***Propositions: Formation for Social Commitment in the Light of the Option for the Poor***

We recommend an evangelizing formation that assists in authentic pastoral conversion and community engagement in pursuing a just and fraternal society united in solidarity and respectful of human and natural life. The decades social doctrine of the Church, from *Rerum Novarum* to *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli tutti*, is an integral part of this fields of formation since it must act as a bridge to all pastoral work to address issues of social injustice and environmental degradation (Francis, 2015).

### ***Lines of Action***

- To develop a study on Church social doctrine directed by the Bible and faithful to reality and that supports a prophetic and missionary Church.
- To encourage communication between all of the People of God, to engage in discourse with their needs and realities.
- To encourage communication between all the People of God, to participate in dialogue with their needs and realities.

## **The Spiritual, Liturgical, and Sacramental Dimension**

As Christ continues to reveal the Easter mystery and fulfill his redemptive work, the spiritual, liturgical, and sacramental elements of evangelization reflect ecclesial devotion. The Second Vatican Council maintains that the sanctification of persons in Christ and the

glorification of God, to which the other activities of the Church strive as their end, are obtained through the Eucharist, which is the summit and source of the Christian life. The assembly supported the creation of various festive spaces that would invite people to have close contact with Jesus while also being in a relationship with other believers (*GS*, 52).

### ***Propositions: Popular Religiosity as a Place of Encounter and Evangelization***

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, popular religiosity and devotion are revered. It is emphasized in the voices gathered in the Narrative synthesis as well as at other stages during the assembly. The people of God underlined the commitment of the faithful in actions of popular piety, even during the pandemic. In the shrines that are disseminated throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, popular religiosity has a special part in the expression of faith. Due to their devotion, common people visit the shrine to remember their bond to the Lord and that the God who once loved them remains to do so and travels alongside them on their path through life. Marian shrines are notable places of mercy, prayer, healing, and hope (*QA*, 49).

### ***Lines of Action***

- To be aware of the procedures by which people, as subjects, live and spread their faith.
- To provide pastoral agents with the skills essential to follow people in places where popular religion is expressed with a service-oriented attitude and to spread the Gospel.
- To value the sacred places of popular piety, especially the shrines to Jesus, Mary, and the saints, as a means of reaching out to the common people who are so often away from the organizational institutions of parish pastoral care.

### **The Synodal Participative Dimension**

In contrast to being organized in a synodal method, the First Ecclesial Assembly made synodality one of its major barriers in evangelizing Latin America and the Caribbean. The assembly was conducted both in the stream to the event and after the Synodal Church of the First Millennium is not an unrealistic goal. The assembly prioritized the laity as the ecclesial subject and inserted episcopal collegiality into the core of ecclesial synodality. It is an illustration of how the first-millennium

ecclesial guiding values concerns all must be evaluated, decided, and put into practice (ITC, 45).

### ***Propositions: People of God Church with New Ministries***

The Ecclesial Assembly proposes updating the idea and experience of the Church as the People of God, in harmony with the fullness of its ministry, in light of the Word of God and the Second Vatican Council. It would make it possible to incorporate the laity, generally, women, specifically, and consecrated people so that they might participate and have influence over decisions. We are all invited to live in the dignity and equality our baptism offers. It relates to the ministerial component of the Church from the perspective of circularity, synodality, and co-responsibility. To spread the love of Jesus, it also calls for fostering the joy of consecrated ministry, such as episcopal, presbyteral, and diaconal (LG, 71).

### ***Lines of Action***

- To foster the formation of a prophetic synodal church dedicated to the defense of life in our peoples in all sectors (faculties, seminaries, formation houses, schools of ministries, and institutes).
- To develop various forms of community and participation in parishes, places of worship, and chapels that encourage shared responsibility in missionary activity.
- To transform the biblical model of pastoral ministry into a practical synodal school through the shared devotion to God's word, mutual hearing, discernment, decision-making, and pastoral action evaluation.

### **The Socio-Transforming Dimension**

Jesus himself defines his purpose as being to bring the good news to the poor, declare freedom for captives, restore sight to the blind, liberate the oppressed, and herald the coming of the Lord's favor (Lk 4: 18-19). These are all aspects of the socio-transforming dimension. Since there was never a needy person among the early Christians, they lived in this dimension (Acts 4: 34-35). Charitable activities performed for the more vulnerable are contrasted with those committed to Christ (Mt 25: 31-46). The ecclesial magisterium enables orientations for the faithful to be conscious of making the kingdom of God manifest in our world through the social doctrine of the Church (EG, 43).

### ***Propositions: Prevention and Reparation of Abuses of Body, Power, and Conscience in the Church***

Since the later part of the twentieth century, the subject of abuses has caused a crisis in the Church. In his letters to the People of God, Pope Francis recalls the anguish endured by countless juveniles due to sexual abuse, misuse of authority, and abuse of conscience committed by a substantial number of clerics and consecrated people. Pope Francis has spoken out on the issue numerous times. According to Pope Francis, it is a crime that affects the victims, their families, and the entire community, both believers and non-believers, with deep wounds of anguish and helplessness (*EG*, 47).

#### ***Lines of Action***

- To support diocesan efforts to avoid sexual abuse, abuse of conscience, and misuse of authority, as well as to draw attention to these issues and provide full reparation.
- To support recognition, restitution, and justice processes through interdisciplinary pastoral care.
- To prevent abuse inside and outside the Church by creating safe and healthy situations through effective policies and procedures.

#### **The Ecological Dimension**

A vital component of leading a moral life is the calling to become guardians of God's creation. It is an essential part of the Christian experience and neither optional nor secondary. This mission is a vital component of evangelism. It is important to recognize Indigenous peoples' contributions to environmental protection, which inspire the Church's work in ecology. Their ancestors' knowledge and worldviews offer us new perspectives on how to live in harmony with our common home, other people, and the transcendent. They provide us with strategies to combat those who support a damaging paradigm through their denunciation and resistance in the face of violence (*QA*, 82).

### ***Propositions: Education and Spirituality to Caring for our Common Home***

In our opinion, the issue is less about discussing theories and more about discussing the spiritual inspirations that feed a desire to take care of the earth. Because without a mysticism that animates us and



internal incentives that drive, motivate, encourage and give meaning to individual and collective activity, we will not be able to dedicate ourselves to great things. We must acknowledge that, as Christians, we have not always gathered and developed the riches God gave to the Church. Ecological spirituality calls us to communion with everything around us rather than being divorced from our bodies, nature, or the realities of this world (*LS*, 21).

### ***Lines of Action***

- Establish a pastoral ministry to protect our shared environment that encourages ecological awareness and education.
- To promote pastoral conversion toward life consistency, protection of the common family, and active accompaniment of different generations as they establish their faith.
- To create an ecological transformation that encourages shared responsibility for individual, collective, and institutional acts to maintain the common home.

### **Conclusion**

The Resurrected Jesus Christ has called us once more to acknowledge that we are missionary disciples sent out to share the enthusiasm of our encounter with Him so that all may enjoy life in Him. A task has prompted us to follow a missionary conversion journey, submitting everything to God's sovereignty. We are progressing toward this goal, which calls for more pastoral accountability. We are invited to live our rich diversity and engage in conversation about our hearts of discipleship. The clamor for demolishing the common home and the throwaway culture, which mostly affects women, migrants, refugees, and indigenous people, pains us (*FT*, 34). The presence of the evidence of God's reign gives hope and inspires us to develop new capacities for listening and discerning. The synodal journey is an excellent landmark for encounter and openness to forming social and ecclesial structures that permit us to rekindle the missionary spirit and closeness to the most neglected and disadvantaged. We are encouraged by the religious life, which includes the popular piety in our communities and the women and men who, by living against the current, bear witness to the Gospel.

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