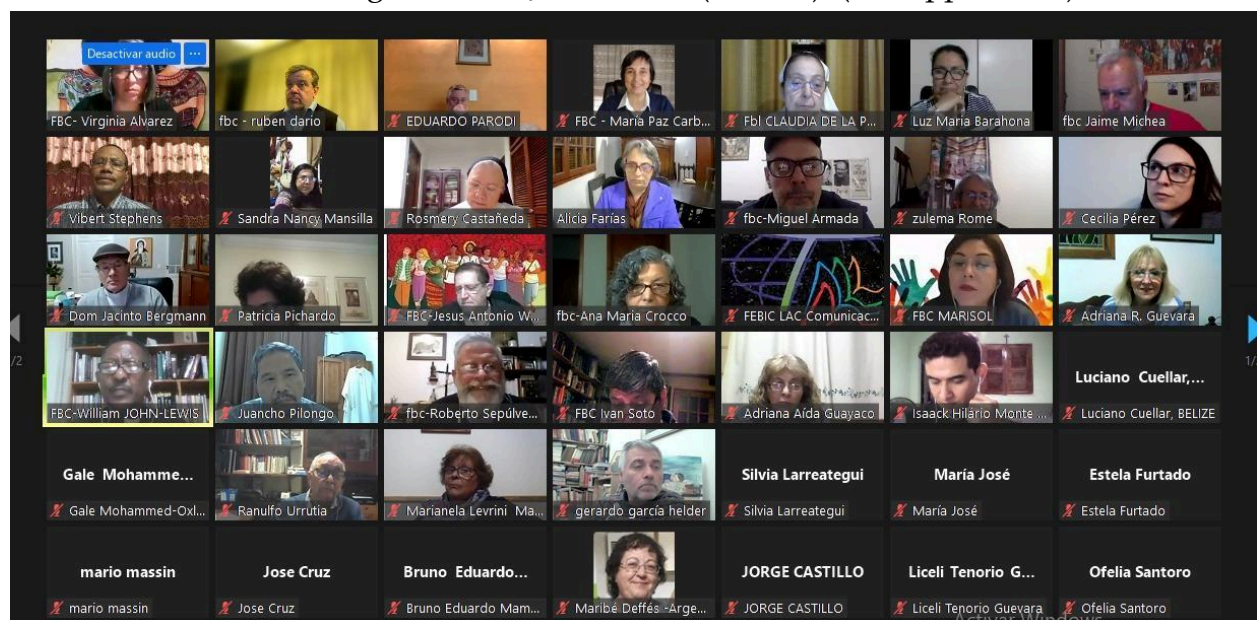


FEBIC LAC holds virtual Encounter on Synodality -- Msgr. William John-Lewis

On the 30th of September, the Feast of St. Jerome, to mark both the Feast and the Closing of the Month of the Bible, FEBIC LAC, (Federacion Biblica Latinoamericana y Caribena – The Biblical Federation of Latin America and the Caribbean) held a virtual Encounter with the theme: Synodality.

Among the forty-nine (49) participants from various Counties of South America. Panama, Mexico, Costa Rica, Spain and the United States, were five from the Antilles Zone – Lauren Branker (AEC) and Gale Oxley, (Archdiocese of Port of Spain), Luciano Cuellar (Belize), Fr. Vibert Stephens (Bridgetown), Fr. Juancho Pilongo (Curacao) and the zonal coordinator, Msgr. William John-Lewis (Roseau). (sse Appendix 2).



In his opening remarks, Fr. Jesus Antonio Weisensee, the Regional Coordinator of FEBIC LAC reminded the participants that this Encounter was in a sense the continuation of a similar Encounter held on the same date last year, marking the Closing of the Year of the Word of God. The present Encounter is our way of answering the call of the Holy Father, Pope Francis to reflect on this new way of being church, i.e. Synodality, a way of the people of God journeying together while listening to each other and listening to what the Holy Spirit is asking of the Church. He also paid homage to the late Fr. Cesar Herrera who pioneered the Biblical Federation having been the first Regional Coordinator.



Fr. Jesus Antonio Weisensee, Regional Coordinator of FEBIC LC, Msgr. William John-Lewis, zonal coordinator for the Antilles

Fr. Jesus Antonio then gave a brilliant Prezi presentation on Synodaity, the path which God expects of the Church of the third millennium. Beginning with the legacy of the Second Vatican Council, with special reference to Lumen Gentium, he explored the thinking of the Holy Father on the topic of Synodality. (Below is the link for the Preszi presentation)

<https://prezi.com/view/qT73x4S069GdbNIJB0ur/>

Following his presentation, the participants were divided into groups to discuss one of three articles: an excerpt from the document: Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church from the International Theological Commission; the Speech delivered by the Holy Father on 17 October 2015 (commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops), and the Letter from the Holy Father to the People (Pilgrims) of Chile. Each group was asked to reflect on and discuss one or the other of the articles with a view to answering the questions: 1. What does the text generate? How does it inspire or motivate? 2. What new steps does it propose especially with reference to the FEBICLAC? (see Appendix 1).

A summary of the responses of the various groups will be compiled and published as a document which can serve as FEBIC LAC's contribution to the preparation of both the Latin American Ecclesial Assembly due to take place in November 2021 and the Synod of Bishops in 2023.

The general atmosphere was one of tremendous excitement. As usual, language posed a challenge since most of the participants were Spanish-speaking. However, the zonal coordinator for the Antilles was able to do a simultaneous translation for the benefit of our English-speaking participants. The Encounter concluded with a prayer, with each participant praying in his own language.

Appendix 1 The texts that were discussed studied and discussed

1. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION

SYNODALITY IN LIFE AND IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

1. "It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium"[1]: this programmatic commitment was made by Pope Francis at the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops by Blessed Paul VI. He stressed that, in fact, synodality "is an essential dimension of the Church", in the sense that "what the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word 'synod'"[2].

4. Since the first centuries, the word "synod" has been applied, with a specific meaning, to the ecclesial assemblies convoked on various levels (diocesan, provincial, regional, patriarchal or universal) to discern, by the light of the Word of God and listening to the Holy Spirit, the doctrinal, liturgical, canonical and pastoral questions that arise as time goes by.

Communion, synodality, collegiality

6. Although synodality is not explicitly found as a term or as a concept in the teaching of Vatican II, it is fair to say that synodality is at the heart of the work of renewal the Council was encouraging.

The ecclesiology of the People of God stresses the common dignity and mission of all the baptised, in exercising the variety and ordered richness of their charisms, their vocations and their ministries. In this context the concept of communion expresses the profound substance of the mystery and mission of the Church, whose source and summit is the Eucharistic synaxis[11]. This is the *res* of the *Sacramentum Ecclesiae*: union with God the Trinity and unity between human persons, made real through the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus[12].

In this ecclesiological context, synodality is the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelising mission.

7. 7. While the concept of synodality refers to the involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church, the concept of collegiality defines the theological significance and the form of a) the exercise of the ministry of Bishops in the service of the local Church entrusted to the care of each of them, and b) of the communion between local Churches at the heart of the one universal Church of Christ, brought about by means of the hierarchical communion of the College of Bishops with the Bishop of Rome.

Collegiality is thus the specific form in which ecclesial synodality is manifested and made real through the ministry of Bishops on the level of communion of the local Churches in a region, and on the level of communion of all the Churches in the universal Church. An authentic manifestation of synodality naturally entails the exercise of the collegial ministry of the Bishops.

A new threshold in the wake of Vatican II

8. The fruits of the renewal promised by Vatican II in its promotion of ecclesial communion, episcopal collegiality and thinking and acting 'synodally' have been rich and precious. There is, however, still a long way to go in the direction mapped out by the Council[13]. In fact, today the drive to find an appropriate form for a synodal Church – although it is widely shared and has been put into practice in positive ways – seems to be in need of clear theological principles and decisive pastoral orientations.

9. Hence the new threshold that Pope Francis invites us to cross. In the wake of Vatican II, following in his predecessors footsteps, he insists that synodality describes the shape of the Church that emerges from the Gospel of Jesus, which is called to become incarnate today in history, in creative fidelity to Tradition.

In conformity with the teaching of Lumen Gentium, Pope Francis remarks in particular that synodality "offers us the most appropriate framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself" [14] and that, based on the doctrine of the *sensus fidei fidelium*[15], all members of the Church are agents of evangelisation[16]. Consequently making a synodal Church a reality is an indispensable precondition for a new missionary energy that will involve the entire People of God.

SPEECH BY HOLY FATHER FRANCIS

Saturday 17 October 2015

What the Lord asks of us, in a certain sense, is already contained in the word "Synod." Journeying together - laity, pastors, Bishop of Rome - is an easy concept to put into words, but it is not so easy to put it into practice.

After having reaffirmed that the People of God is made up of all the baptized, "consecrated as a spiritual house and holy priesthood" [6], the Second Vatican Council proclaims that "all the faithful who have the anointing of the Holy One (cf. 1 Jn 2, 20 and 27) cannot err in faith. This peculiar property of his is manifested in the supernatural sense of the faith of all the people: when "from the bishops to the last of the Christian laity" they show they are in complete agreement on questions of faith and morals "[7]. That famous infallible «in credendo».

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* I have underlined how "the People of God is holy by this anointing that makes it infallible" in credendo "" [8], adding that "each one of the baptized, whatever their function in the Church and the degree of instruction in their faith is an evangelizing agent, and it would be inappropriate to think of an evangelization scheme carried out by qualified actors where the rest of the faithful people are only receptive to their actions "[9]. The *sensus fidei* prevents a rigid separation between *Ecclesia docens* and *Ecclesia dicens*, since the flock also has its "nose" to find new paths that the Lord opens to the Church [10].

This is the conviction that guided me when I wanted the People of God to be consulted in the preparation of the double synodal appointment on the family as has generally been done with each «Lineamenta». Certainly, a query of this type could in no way be enough to hear the *sensus fidei*. But, how would it be possible to talk about the family without questioning the families, listening to their joys and hopes, their sadness and anguish? [11] Through the responses to the two questionnaires sent to the particular Churches, we have had the possibility of listening to at least some of them about issues that affect them very closely and about which they have a lot to say.

A Synodal Church is a Church of listening, with the awareness that listening "is more than hearing" [12]. It is a reciprocal listening in which each one has something to learn. Faithful people, episcopal college, Bishop of Rome: one listening to the others; and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:17), to know what he "says to the Churches" (Ap 2,7).

The Synod of Bishops is the point of convergence of this dynamism of listening carried into all areas of the life of the Church. The synodal journey begins by listening to the people, who "also participate in the prophetic role of Christ" [13], according to a principle highly esteemed in the Church of the first millennium: "*Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari debet*". The path of the Synod continues listening to the Pastors.

Through the Synod Fathers, the bishops act as authentic custodians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church, who must know how to distinguish carefully from the often changing flows of public opinion. At the vigil of the Synod last year, I said: "Let us ask first of all the Holy Spirit, for the synod fathers, the gift of listening: listening to God, until we listen with him to the cry of the people; listen to the people, until we breathe in them the will to which God calls us »[14]. Furthermore, the synodal journey culminates in listening to the Bishop of Rome, called to pronounce himself as "Pastor and Doctor of all Christians" [15]: not on the basis of his personal convictions, but as the supreme witness of the *fides totius Ecclesiae*, "guarantor of the obedience and conformity of the Church to the will of God, to the Gospel of Christ and to the Tradition of the Church" [16].

3. LETTER FROM THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS

TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD WHO ARE PILGRIMS IN CHILE

1. Appealing to you, asking for your prayer was not a functional resource, nor was it a simple gesture of goodwill. On the contrary, I wanted to frame things in their precise and precious place and put the subject where it needs to be: the condition of the People of God "is the dignity and freedom of the children of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in a temple »[5]. The faithful Holy People of God are anointed with the grace of the Holy Spirit; Therefore, when reflecting, thinking, evaluating, discerning, we must be very attentive to this anointing. Every time that as a Church, as pastors, as consecrated persons, we have forgotten this certainty, we have missed the path. Every time we try to supplant, silence, ignore, or reduce to small elites the People of God in its

totality and differences, we build communities, pastoral plans, theological accentuations, spiritualities, structures without roots, without history, without faces, without memory, without a body, in short, without lives. Uprooting ourselves from the life of the people of God precipitates us into the desolation and perversion of the ecclesial nature; fighting a culture of abuse requires a renewal of this certainty.

As I said to the young people in Maipú, I want to say it in a special way to each one: «Today the Holy Mother Church needs the faithful People of God, it needs them to challenge us [...] The Church needs you to obtain the adult identity card, spiritually mature, and have the courage to tell us, 'I like this', 'I think this path is the right one', 'this is not right... Let them tell us what they feel and think "[6]. This is capable of involving us all in a Church with a synodal atmosphere that knows how to put Jesus at the center.

Among the People of God there are no first, second or third class Christians. Their active participation is not a question of concessions of good will, but is constitutive of the ecclesial nature. It is impossible to imagine the future without this anointing operating in each one of you that certainly demands renewed forms of participation. I urge all Christians not to be afraid of being the protagonists of the transformation that is demanded today and to promote creative alternatives in the daily search for a Church that wants to put what is important at the center every day. I invite all diocesan organizations - in whatever the area they may be - to consciously and lucidly seek spaces for communion and participation so that the Anointing of the People of God finds its concrete mediations to manifest itself.

Renewal in the ecclesial hierarchy by itself does not generate the transformation to which the Holy Spirit prompts us. We are required to jointly promote an ecclesial transformation that involves all of us.

A prophetic and, therefore, hopeful Church demands from everyone a mystique with open eyes, questioning and not asleep [7]. Do not be robbed of the anointing of the Spirit.

2. «The wind blows wherever it pleases: you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. The same thing happens with everyone who has been born of the Spirit "(Jn 3,8). This is how Jesus responded to Nicodemus before the dialogue they had about the possibility of being born again to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

At this time, in the light of this passage, it does us good to see our personal and community history again: the Holy Spirit blows where he wants and how he wants with the sole purpose of helping us to be born again. Far from allowing itself to be locked into schemes, modalities, fixed or outdated structures, far from resigning itself or "lowering its guard" in the face of events, the Spirit is continually on the move to widen narrow gazes, make those who lost hope dream [8], do justice in truth and charity, purify from sin and corruption and always invite the necessary conversion. Without this look of faith, everything we can say and do would fall on deaf ears. This certainty is essential to look at the present without evasions but with courage, with courage but wisely, with tenacity but without violence, with passion but without fanaticism, with perseverance but without anxiety, and thus change everything that today puts the integrity and the dignity of each person at risk; since the solutions that are needed

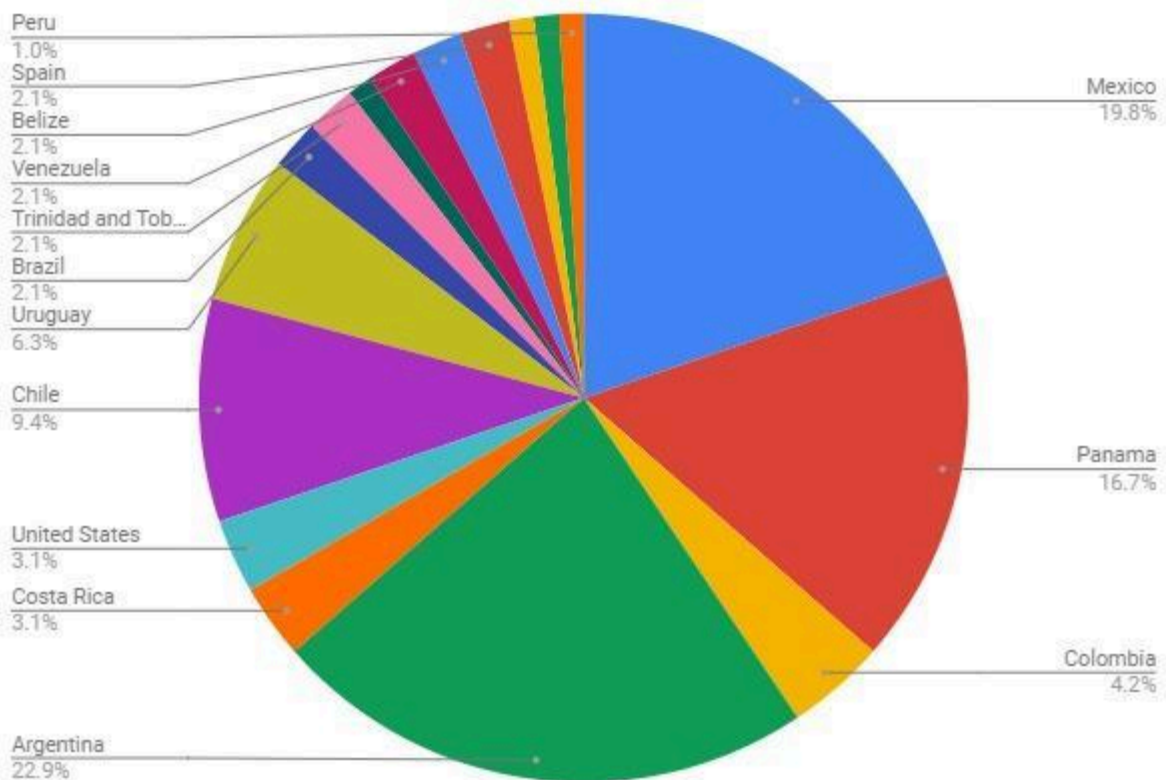
demand to face the problems without being trapped in them or, what would be worse, to repeat the same mechanisms that we want to eliminate [9]. Today we are challenged to face, assume and suffer the conflict, and thus be able to resolve it and transform it into the link of a new journey [10].

Vatican May 31, 2018, Feast of the Visitation of Our Lady.

Francis

Appendix 2

Recuento de Country/Region Name



Appendix 1 The texts that were discussed studied and discussed

INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION

SYNODALITY IN LIFE AND IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

SPEECH BY HOLY FATHER FRANCIS

3. LETTER FROM THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS

TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD WHO ARE PILGRIMS IN CHILE

Appendix 2