



A BLESSING FROM GOD FOR THE CHURCH AND FOR OUR COUNTRY

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The successive waves of Hispanic and Latino migration to the United States have brought, among many other things, significant changes in the size, composition, and profile of the U.S. Catholic Church.

The phenomenon of the already enormous and growing U.S. Hispanic/Latino presence, noted and supported by the Catholic Church, especially in these last seven decades, has advanced from timid, nearly clandestine Eucharistic celebrations in Latin or “half Spanish” in the basements of temples to the celebration of national meetings of the Hispanic Catholic ministry or pastoral ministry in this Nation.

Among other historical milestones, we note these specifically, in the following years: in 1945, the first national office for Hispanic ministry was officially established, and in 1972, 1977, 1985, 2000, and 2018, after hard work, consultation, and much discernment, the five successive national meetings of Hispanic ministry were convened and held.

The beginning of a new year is always an auspicious time for good intentions and good news. In this case, we make known, with these lines, the NATIONAL PASTORAL PLAN FOR HISPANIC/LATINO MINISTRY, presented in a bilingual edition and prepared by the Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and approved and authorized for publication, by the same Conference, in June 2023.

As a result of the long historical trajectory of the Hispanic/Latino presence, of the Church’s welcome and experience, and of what was shared and learned in the aforementioned national meetings, this PLAN aims to be a roadmap, a journey, a path along which the actions of the U.S. Catholic Church and of the Hispanics/Latinos who make pilgrimages in it with their faith advance in building the Kingdom of God, through the commandment of love, for “*a new heaven on a new earth*,” that is, for a better American society and a new, more just, more fraternal and more united world, according to the criteria of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.



The fifth national meeting, focused on the document and Plan of which I am speaking, always in the light of the Gospel, will gather the vision and doctrine of the Church of Pope Francis, especially in the context of the synod on synodality, in addition to aligning with the Catholic Church in Central and South America, from the teachings proclaimed by the Latin American episcopate in Aparecida, Brazil.

The Plan, presented here, contains five parts, which make known what the vision of Hispanic pastoral care in the United States should be and suggest subsequent actions that consider Catholics as missionary disciples, nourished by the Eucharist, sent to proclaim the Gospel and to bear fruit. These actions consider Catholics as disciples animated by the Word who – through encountering Christ – form a prophetic, multicultural, and synodal Church that promotes integration, inclusion, justice, and mercy.

But, also, this National Pastoral Plan points out some pastoral priorities to be considered in parish and diocesan pastoral projects: formation in faith, accompaniment of families, youth ministry, immigration, and pastoral care for those on the periphery, among others.

As CEO of SOMOS Community Care, I note the absence of health as an issue of priority in the Pastoral Plan of the Catholic Church. Although I can understand and excuse this omission, due to the relative youth of our Hispanic/Latino community, the issue of health is, nevertheless, an issue that cannot be forgotten because, without it, there is no life or “abundant life” (Jn 10:10), because etymologically and theologically speaking “salvation” is synonymous with “health,” because Jesus of Nazareth dedicated a large part of his public ministry to it. An evangelizing and pastoral task that does not belong to the public, which is incomplete, and not all-encompassing or holistic for the whole man and for all men, betrays the universal and integral salvation that God gives us in Jesus Christ.

This Plan is clearly, an effort – for which we are grateful – by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to summarize experiences and to illuminate the life of the Hispanic/Latino community present in the United States with the light of the Gospel that is Christ himself. However, above all, it is an effort to have a method (path), a common agenda of lines of pastoral action that point out to us the path that we must all walk together (synodality).



This Plan is also a sign of the sensitivity, interest, welcome, and concern that the Catholic Church in the United States, as “*Mother and Teacher*,” has had and still has towards Hispanic immigrants. It is also, at the same time, a tribute to all ordained and lay ministers who, during so many decades, have made greater, in so many ways, the presence of the Hispanic/Latino community in this society and the Catholic Church in the United States. May we all feel represented in this National Pastoral Plan, and may our grateful memory go to all.

As this new year begins, it is my hope that we will achieve this document in parishes or directly through the contacts of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). May we know this Pastoral Plan. May we all actively participate in it. May we be agents of change and good news. May this Plan be a working tool and a way for all of us – in society and the ecclesial community – to “be one” (Jn 17:20-23) in respect for the differences that, instead of dividing us, enrich us, so that we may live integration and unity in diversity. It is a tool and method for us to realize the fraternal communion and participation that results from the Gospel. This is a Plan, method, and instrument “to walk together as joyful missionary disciples going forth, in solidarity and mercy” (Plan, Part 1, P. 7) and so that, in the end, we may live “catholicity,” that is, the universal brotherhood willed by Jesus Christ, our “Way, Truth and Life.”

The National Pastoral Plan document presented here begins by saying that “the Hispanic/Latino presence is a blessing from God for the Church and for our country.” I wish and propose that in 2024, and during the next ten years, the Plan contemplates, and always, every Hispanic/Latino man and woman present in the United States, feels welcomed and capable of welcoming everyone. I hope that Hispanics/Latinos feel responsible and capable of transmitting, with deeds and words, the best of our values, traditions, and culture. With our daily actions, may we be builders of a better Church and a better society.

Happy New Year everyone! Happy Pastoral Plan to all! Happy Christian and ecclesial journey! Good wind and good sea!

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