



5th General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops  
Aparecida – Brasil  
May 13 – 31, 2007

## **MESSAGE OF THE FIFTH GENERAL CONFERENCE TO THE PEOPLES OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARRIBEAN**

Gathered in the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Conception Aparecida, in Brazil, we greet in the love of the Lord all the People of God and all men and women of good will.

From the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup> of May of 2007, we were gathered in the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, inaugurated with the presence and the words of the Holy Father Benedict XVI.

In our works, developed in an environment of fervent prayer, fraternity and affective communion, we have sought to give continuity to the path of renewal that the Catholic Church undertook since the II Vatican Council and in the four prior General Conferences of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean.

At the conclusion of this Fifth Conference we announce that we have embraced the challenge of working to give a new impulse and vigor to our mission in and from Latin America and the Caribbean.

### **1. Jesus the Way, the Truth and the Life**

*“I am the Way and the Truth and the Life”* (Jn 14:6)

In the face of the challenges presented by this new time in which we are immersed, we renew our faith, proclaiming with joy to all men and women of our continent: we are loved and redeemed in Jesus, Son of God, the Risen One who is alive in our midst; through Him we can be free of sin, of all slavery and live in justice and fraternity. Jesus is the way that allows us to discover the truth and to achieve the total fulfillment of our life!

### **2. Called to the Following of Jesus**

*“So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with Him”* (Jn 1:39)

The first invitation that Jesus makes to every person who has lived an encounter with Him, is to be His disciple, so as to follow in His footsteps and to be part of His community. Our greatest joy is that of being His disciples! He calls each one by name, knowing our history in depth (cf. Jn 10:3), so that we may share our lives with Him and be sent forth to continue His mission (cf. Mk 3:14-15).

Let us follow Jesus! The disciple is the one who after having responded to this calling, follows Him step by step through the paths of the Gospel. As we follow Him, we hear

and see the happening of the Kingdom of God, the conversion of each person, starting point for the transformation of society, at the same time that the paths to eternal life are opened to us. In the school of Jesus we learn a “new life”, moved by the dynamism brought by the Holy Spirit and reflected upon the values of the Kingdom.

Identified with the Master, our life is moved by the impulse of love and in the service to others. This love implies a continuous option and discernment to follow the path of the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-26). Let us not be afraid of the cross, intrinsic in the faithful following of Jesus, because it is illuminated by the light of the Resurrection. In this way, as disciples, we open paths of life and hope to our peoples who suffer from sin and all kinds of injustice.

The calling to be disciples-missionaries demands from us a clear option for Jesus and His Gospel, coherence between faith and life, embodiment of the values of the Kingdom, insertion in the community and to be a sign of contradiction and novelty in a world that promotes consumerism and disfigures the values that dignify the human being. In a world that is closed to the God of love, we are a community of love, not of the world but in the world and for the world! (cf. Jn 15:19; 17:14-16).

### **3. Missionary Discipleship in the Church’s Ministry**

*“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations”* (Mt 28:19)

We see how the path of missionary discipleship is a source of renewal of our ministry in the Continent and a new starting point for the New Evangelization of our peoples.

#### **A Church that Becomes a Disciple Herself**

In the parable of the Good Shepherd we learn to be disciples who are nourished from the Word: “The sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice” (Jn 10:4). May the Word of Life (cf. Jn 6:63), tasted in Prayerful Reading and in the celebration and living of the gift of the Eucharist, transform and reveal to us the living presence of the Risen One who walks with us and acts in history (cf. Lk 24:13-35).

With firmness and decision, we will continue to exercise our prophetic task, discerning where the way for the truth and the life is; raising our voices in the social spheres of our peoples and cities, and especially in favor of those who are excluded in society. We want to stimulate the formation of Christian politicians and legislators, so that they may contribute in the building of a society more just and fraternal according to the principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church.

#### **A Church which Forms Disciples**

Everyone in the Church is called to be disciples and missionaries. It is a duty to form ourselves and to form all of God’s People in order to fulfill this task with responsibility and boldness.

The joy of being disciples and missionaries can be seen in a special way in the places where we create fraternal communities. We are called to be a Church with open arms, who knows how to welcome and value each one of her members. Therefore, we

encourage the efforts made in the parishes to become “home and school of communion”, animating and forming small communities and basic church communities, as well as in the lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities.

We commit to strengthen our presence and proximity. Thus, in our pastoral service we invite to dedicate more time to each person, to listen to them, to be with them in the important events of their lives, and with them, to help seeking the solutions for their needs. Let us bring about that everyone, in feeling valued, may also experience the Church as their own home.

As we reaffirm the commitment with the formation of disciples and missionaries, this Conference decided to pay closer attention to the stages of the first announcement, of Christian Initiation and of growth in the faith. With the reinforcement of Christian identity, let us help each brother and sister to discover the service that the Lord asks of them in the Church and in society.

In a world thirsty for spirituality and aware of the centrality of the relationship with the Lord in our life as disciples, we want to be a Church who learns to pray and teaches how to pray. A prayer that springs from our life and heart, and which is the starting point for lively and participative celebrations which animate and nourish the faith.

#### **4. Missionary Discipleship to the Service of Life**

*“I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly”* (Jn 10:10).

From the cenacle of Aparecida we commit to begin a new stage in our pastoral journey, declaring ourselves **in permanent mission**. With the fire of the Spirit we will inflame our Continent with love: “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

#### **In Faithfulness to the Missionary Commandment**

Jesus invites all to participate of His mission. May no one stay with crossed arms! To be a missionary is to announce the Kingdom with creativity and boldness in every place where the Gospel has not been sufficiently announced or welcomed, especially in the difficult or forgotten environments and beyond our borders.

#### **As Leaven in the Dough**

Let us be missionaries of the Gospel not only in word, but also with our own lives, giving it in service, even to the point of martyrdom.

Jesus began His mission by forming a community of missionary disciples, the Church, which is the beginning of the Kingdom. His community was also part of His announcement. Inserted in society, we must make visible our love and fraternal solidarity (cf. Jn 13:35) and let us promote the dialogue with the different social and religious agents. In an ever more pluralistic society, let us integrate forces in the building of a world with more justice, reconciliation and solidarity.

#### **Servers of a Shared Table**

The acute differences between rich and poor invite us to work with greater effort in being disciples who know how to share the table of life, the table of all the sons and daughters of the Father, an open table, inclusive, in which no one is left behind. Therefore, we reinforce our preferential and evangelical option for the poor.

We commit to defend those who are weak, especially the children, the ill, the disabled, the at-risk youth, the elderly, the imprisoned, the migrants. We watch over for the respect to the right that the peoples have, “defending and promoting the underlying values in all social levels, especially in the indigenous peoples” (Benedict XVI, Speech in Guarulhos, n. 4). We want to contribute so that dignified living conditions, in which the needs such as food, education, housing and work are guaranteed for all.

Faithfulness to Jesus demands from us to fight against the evils that harm or destroy life, such as abortion, wars, kidnapping, armed violence, terrorism, sexual exploitation and drug dealing.

We invite all the leaders of our nations to defend the truth and to watch over the inviolable and sacred right to life and dignity of the human person, from conception until natural death.

We make available to our countries the pastoral efforts of the Church to contribute in the promotion of a culture of honesty that will heal the root of all forms of violence, illegal enrichment and generalized corruption.

Coherent with the project of the Father who is the Creator, we call upon all living forces of society to take care of our common house, the earth threatened of destruction. We want to favor a human and sustainable development based upon a just distribution of wealth and the communion of goods among all peoples.

## **5. Towards a Continent of Life, Love and Peace**

*“This is how all will know that you are my disciples” (Jn 13:35)*

We, participants of the Fifth General Conference in Aparecida, and with the entire Church, “community of love”, want to embrace all the continent to transmit to it the love of God and our own. We hope that this embrace will also reach out to the whole world.

At the closing of this Conference of Aparecida, in the vigor of the Holy Spirit, we summon all our brothers and sisters so that united, with enthusiasm, we may carry out the **Great Continental Mission**. It will be a new Pentecost that impels us to go, in a special way, in search of the fallen away Catholics, and of those who know little or nothing about Jesus Christ, so that we may joyfully form the community of love of God our Father. A mission that must reach everyone, be permanent and profound.

With the fire of the Holy Spirit, let us move forward, building with hope our history of salvation in the path of evangelization, surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses (cf. Hb 12:1), the martyrs, saints and blessed of our continent. With their witness, they have shown us that faithfulness is worthwhile and possible up to the end.

United to all prayerful peoples, we entrust to Mary, Mother of God and Our Mother, first disciple and missionary at the service of life, love and peace, called upon under the titles of Our Lady of Aparecida and Our Lady of Guadalupe, the new impulse that springs from this day onwards, in all Latin America and the Caribbean, under the breath of a new Pentecost for our Church, from this Fifth Conference which we have celebrated here.

In Medellin and Puebla we concluded by saying “WE BELIEVE”. In Aparecida, as we did in Santo Domingo, we proclaim with all our strength: WE BELIEVE AND WE HOPE.

We hope...

*To be a lively Church, faithful and credible, which is nourished from the Word of God and the Eucharist.*

*To live our being Christians with joy and conviction as disciples-missionaries of Jesus Christ.*

*To form lively communities that nourish the faith and encourage missionary action.*

*To value the diverse ecclesial organizations in a spirit of communion.*

*To promote a mature laity, steward in the mission of announcing and making visible the Kingdom of God.*

*To impel the active participation of women in society and in the Church.*

*To maintain our preferential and evangelical option for the poor with a renewed effort.*

*To accompany the youth in their formation and search for identity, vocation and mission, renewing our option for them.*

*To work with all the people of good will in the building of the Kingdom.*

*To strengthen with audacity Family and Respect Life Ministries.*

*To value and respect our Indigenous and Afro-American peoples.*

*To advance in the ecumenical dialogue “so that all may be one”, as well as in the inter-religious dialogue.*

*To make of this continent a model of reconciliation, justice and peace.*

*To be stewards of creation, home of all, in fidelity to the project of God.*

*To collaborate in the integration of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean.*

May this Continent of hope also become the Continent of love, life and peace!

Aparecida – Brazil, May 29, 2007