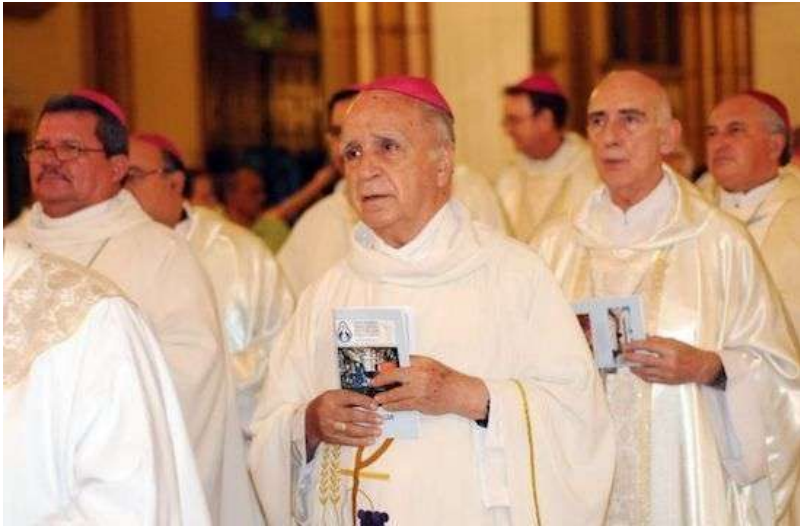


Latin American Church plans unprecedented assembly

An "ecclesial assembly" in November will discuss issues facing 377 million Catholics in 46 countries.



The Catholic Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM), a major player in the formation of liberation theology, is planning an unprecedented "ecclesial assembly" to discuss issues affecting the 377 million Catholics in the region.

The gathering is scheduled to take place in Mexico City from Nov. 21-28 and will involve bishops, priests, religious, and lay men and women to study issues faced by Catholics in some 46 countries.

The first phase of the ecclesial assembly has started in local Churches in Latin America. "We are all missionary disciples on the move" is the theme of the assembly.

Although ecclesial assemblies involving representatives of all categories of membership in the Church have been held at the diocesan-level in several parts of the world, an assembly of this scope is unprecedented in the Church.

No other regional bishops' forums in the world has reportedly conducted such a continental-level assembly involving all sections of the Church so far. The Latin American bishops' conference says the assembly aims to "contemplate the reality of our peoples and reflect more deeply on the challenges of the continent."

As part of the ecclesial assembly, a "listening process" was launched in early April, urging local churches to chalk out their plans through online platforms after complying with COVID-19 restrictions. The listening process will help "accompany Jesus incarnated today among the people, in their 'sensus fidei' which is their sense of faith," says the assembly's website.

The ecclesial assembly will also discuss two important anniversaries in 2031 and 2033. The first marks the 500th anniversary of the apparition of Our Lady in Guadalupe. The second is considered the 2,000 anniversary of Christ's death and resurrection.

The decisions of the Fifth Latin American Episcopal Conference held in May 2007 in Aparecida, Brazil, will figure prominently in discussion.

Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio (now Pope Francis) chaired the drafting committee of the conference's final document. Some 200 bishops met for 20 days during the 2007 assembly, taking vital decisions on the future of the Church in Latin America.

Pope Francis gave final approval of Aparecida text in 2013 after he was elected Bishop of Rome. Archbishop Eduardo Eliseo Martin of Rosario (Argentina) has urged people throughout Latin America to participate in the ecclesial assembly.

"The Church wants to listen to all the laity, to all the faithful, to the greatest number, to be able to evaluate through all of you which is the path we have to follow," he said in a video message.

The assembly is scheduled to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic, the environment, violence, migration issues, as well as the increase in the number of people who declare themselves agnostic, non-believers or atheists and the growth of evangelical churches on the continent.

The challenges of the family, participation of young people in the Church and prevention of clerical sexual abuses are among other topics listed for discussion. The pope sent a video message to Latin American Church leaders on January 24 in which he asked them not to be ideological elites, but to remain close to the people of God.

"We have much to learn," the 84-year-old Francis said in the video. CELAM was created in 1955 and is recognized for its enthusiastic support for the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), especially the Church's social teachings.

The organization held two major conferences in 1968 and 1970 seeking ways to implement teachings of Vatican II in Latin America.

Liberation theology, which stressed social justice and human rights, is said to have taken shape out of the officially recognized ideas of CELAM.

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