



**CCEE PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

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**CELAM, COMMITTED TO INCREASING COLLEGIALLY IN A SYNODAL  
PERSPECTIVE**

As President of CELAM, I wish to address all the members of the Plenary Assembly of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences on the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary dedicated to the theme: **"CCEE, 50 years serving Europe, memory and perspectives in the context of Fratelli tutti"**. I also wish to express my gratitude for the invitation to address you.

I would like to share some thoughts on "enhancing collegiality in a synodal perspective" within the process of Renewal and Reorganisation that CELAM has been involved in since May 2019, and also in view of the forthcoming First Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean on Aparecida, Memory and Challenges, to be held from 21 to 28 November next.

Vatican II focused attention on an ecclesiological understanding of "Catholicity" as *unity in diversity* that requires mutual and ongoing communication between different local Churches, always open to the action of the Spirit that operates through the mutual giving and receiving of gifts, inspiration and testimonies of faith rooted in different environments.

Thus, the different parts of a same body are tuned to "fullness in unity" (LG 13). We are encouraged by the words in Peter's first letter: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 Pt 4,10).

Since the very start of his papacy, pope Frances has promoted, through "increased listening" and openness to a "broad dialogue", inculturation of the Christian faith in the different social, cultural and existential contexts of the current world, requiring a very strong focus on the signs of our times

In underlining the importance of an ongoing emphasis on the signs of the times and the necessary "updating", Vatican II has provided us with a new and extremely important theological, ecclesiological and pastoral category that may be summarised as follows: *faith should always become incarnate*.

In his post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, the Holy Father reminds us that "Everything that the Church has to offer must become incarnate in a distinctive way in each part of the world (...). Preaching must become incarnate, spirituality must become incarnate, ecclesial structures must become incarnate" (QA 6).

After the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops (Medellín), the Church took significant steps to develop a specific identity and generate its own pastoral style, so much so that it has become a source of inspiration for other local Churches and continents and also for the universal Church.

At Medellín (1968) it was underlined that this scrutiny of the signs of the times, as expressed in social, economic, political, cultural and ecclesial conditions, is essential in order to discern God's will, define the fundamental pastoral priorities and carry out integral evangelisation in the light of the preferential option in favour of the poor and care for our common Home (LS).

For this reason, since Medellín, the Latin American and Caribbean Church has embraced a method that consists of:

1. "seeing" – to which, during the Synod for the Amazon, "listening" was added
2. "judging", "enlightening".
3. "acting", "celebrating".

Another significant contribution provided by Vatican II is the principle of *episcopal collegiality*, to which the Latin American and Caribbean Church attached great importance already before Vatican II, with the creation of CELAM as a "cooperation body" as a result of the First General Latin American Bishops' Conference in Rio de Janeiro (1955).

From the start, to avoid centralism, its organisational structures were established according to new needs and new pastoral challenges. It was necessary to facilitate *collegial practice* in the region to strengthen continental cooperation and develop the pastoral mission and activities.

## Renewal and reorganisation in a synodal perspective

A careful reading of the social, ecclesial and pastoral reality of Latin America and the Caribbean prompted CELAM, in May 2019, to *launch a process of renewal and reorganisation in a synodal perspective for the purpose of creating greater coordination and more synergies* between the different CELAM areas and between Bishops' Conferences.

Pursuing the *synodal spirit*, for two years Latin American and Caribbean bishops promoted intense listening activities and careful discernment, involving several ecclesial players such as lay persons, members of religious Life, presbyters and also various ecclesial institutions and networks such as, among others, CLAR, Caritas (SELACC), CLAMOR, REPAM, REMAM, OSLAM and ODUICAL.

This process led to the development of a new management model that takes into account “three reciprocally complementary elements”:

- 1.- **Structures** together with pastoral centres, specifying their functions and the relevant hierarchical relationships,
- 2.- **Decision-making bodies** that include the connecting and decision-making elements.
- 3.- **The organisational culture** in a synodal perspective.

Through Renewal and Reorganisation, CELAM intends to promote and reinforce *a synodal culture* in our Latin American and Caribbean Church, in terms of both working methods and decision-making and implementation processes in different ecclesial environments, as well as in relation to developing different forms of pastoral care.

This process entails a synodal life and practice that nourishes our faith and our way of being a Church, generates a transformation by strengthening the will to overcome a clerical mentality and attitude, opening us up to joyfully welcoming synodal and ecclesial practices and preparing us to experience the integral conversion towards growing synodality.

The desire to pursue new pastoral structures for CELAM has been reinforced by experience of the innovative synodal and ecclesial processes that several local Churches have attempted to promote in order to encourage participation on the part of different sectors and bodies in the Church and

society that have established a horizontal relationship with each other *on equal terms*.

### **Inspiration for new synodal practices**

An example of this is provided by the *national assemblies* that are preceded by parish, diocesan and provincial level assemblies. Parish-level assemblies enrich the national assemblies. Throughout all this, it is possible to perceive the breath of the Spirit that is renewing the Church, given the emergence of new structures and practices that are unprecedented even in a synodal perspective.

Another significant example is provided by the process of *creation of the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Conference (CEAMA)*, in response to the request for a synodal process for the Amazon (IL 129), that aims to develop and implement "a collaborative ministry, with differentiated priorities" (QA 97) in accordance with the circumstances of the local Churches of the Amazon (QA 82).

Annexed to the Presidency of CELAM, CEAMA is a mixed body, which includes the participation of 7 Bishops' Conferences of the Amazon countries and ecclesial organisations such as CARITAS (SELACC), CLAR and REPAM, in addition to representatives of the indigenous peoples and experts appointed by the CEAMA Presidency and the Holy Father.

A model for renewing collegiality in the light of synodality is taking shape and it involves walking together as brothers and sisters in faith, as members of God's people.

### **Let us walk in synodality**

On behalf of CELAM, I wish to reaffirm that we Bishops want to walk together with our brothers and sisters in faith, whether they are lay, belong to the priesthood or to religious life.

The CELAM structures have been created for the purpose of learning more and more to discern together what the Holy Spirit says to our Latin American and Caribbean Church (Ap 2,11), so as to offer a generous and well-structured response to His calling.

Through the new structures we seek to promote collegiality, and also "co-responsibility and participation by all of God's people" in the Church's life and mission (see International Theological Commission, nos. 6-7).

Undoubtedly, **the First Latin American and Caribbean Ecclesial Assembly**, to be held from 21 to 28 November next, with its Listening Process - whose essential phase has just been completed - and with the start of the process for drafting the Discernment Document, will be a key step in the journey towards an increasingly synodal Church, through processes that go “from the peripheries” to the centre, to discover God’s will.

With the prophet Isaiah, we can gratefully acknowledge that, once again, in our Latin American and Caribbean Church “something new is springing forth” (see Is 43,19). Throughout this process we remained attentive and open to the "*sensus fidei* of the holy people of God who also have a ‘nose’ to perceive the new pathways that the Lord opens up for the Church” and that we should welcome and promote.

Peace and good wishes to you all,

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