
The History of the Nacional Encuentro for Hispanic Ministry

The process of Encuentro for Hispanic/Latino ministry is a deeply ecclesial experience. It is motivated by reading the signs of the times and convened by the bishops, who call the Hispanic/Latino Catholic community to raise their prophetic voices. In the context of this dialogue between the bishops and the community, we live a spirit of pastoral ministry illuminated by an ecclesiology of communion and a missionary vocation that seeks to reach out to those who find themselves estranged from the life and vision of the Gospel.

The main objective of the process of Encuentro is to discern how the Church in the United States responds to the Hispanic/Latino presence, and to strengthen the way in which Hispanics/Latinos respond as a Church.

The **I Encuentro** (1972) allowed us to gain visibility and to express our needs, aspirations, and contributions as baptized members of the Church in the United States.

In the **II Encuentro** (1977), we identified ourselves as a community of Hispanic Catholics, yet unified by a common faith, history, culture, and language. We also established a way of being a Church based on the ecclesiology of communion and a preferential focus the poor and those who have fallen away. With the II Encuentro we identified ourselves as Pueblo Hispano: Pueblo de Dios en Marcha.

The **III Encuentro** (1985) allowed us to articulate a clear direction of the Church's response to the Hispanic presence and our response as an integral part of that Church. This vision was recorded in the National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry (1988) and in a model of a Church that is evangelizing, communitarian, and missionary. With the III Encuentro, we recognized ourselves as Pueblo Hispano: Voz Profética.

The **Encuentro 2000** (IV Encuentro) allowed us to host and share the experience of Encuentro with all of the cultures and ethnicities that make up the Church in the United States. The vision of a Church where all are welcome emerges from our most profound identity as a mestizo people that recognizes itself as a pilgrim people called to solidarity and to unity in diversity, as expressed in its overall theme Many Faces in God's House, Unity in Diversity.

The **Primer Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral Juvenil** (2006) allowed us to listen to the voices of Hispanic/Latino youth and to discern the best ways to respond to their needs and aspirations, as well as to recognize their contributions as privileged protagonists of the present and future Church in the United States.

The **V Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral** will encourage us to continue our walk as God's people, to raise our prophetic voice once more, and to discern pastoral priorities and strategies that are most appropriate to the present time. With the V Encuentro, we are called to be a Pueblo Hispano: Alegres Discípulos en Misión.

More than 165 dioceses were selected among nearly 250,000 people participated in the local process over the past year. Over 130 bishops lead diocesan delegations. Also there were international representatives from CELAM, the Holy See, the Conference of the Mexican Episcopate, the Conference of the Canadian Episcopate, and representatives of the organizations, major donors and collaborators from all over the country. The event had the characteristics of a full-fledged International Conference. The V National Encuentro of Hispanic Ministry encourage us to continue our walk as God's people, to raise our voice once more, and to discern our pastoral priorities and strategies that are most appropriate at the present time.

About 3,500 Catholics, mostly Hispanic, gathered in Texas last week to attend the climax of a four-year discernment and mission process that took place in every diocese in the United States. It ended on a high note, with a call from Los Angeles' Archbishop José H. Gomez for laity to become the driving force of the Church.

“[God] is calling the lay faithful to work together with the bishops and the priests to renew and rebuild his Church,” Gomez said in a homily closing the V Encuentro on Sunday. “Not only in this country, but throughout the Americas.”

In these coming months the coordinators of V Encuentro will put together the final Documents and share a taste what came out of the four-year discernment process that concluded in Texas. The V National Encuentro was not an ending in of itself but the beginning of what comes next for the Church in the United States; where the high presence of young people is central in this endeavor of looking ahead to continue working in the Evangelization, with the help of the Catholic Family, and the and with their sights on the new objectives of Formation and Education.