

In the Heartland
Encuentro V
January Mirror

The Diocese of Des Moines is blessed with a very active and growing number of Hispanics. It is estimated that there are approximately 38,000 among us. Each Sunday there are 14 Masses celebrated in Spanish in the diocese. There are six native Spanish speaking priests from El Salvador, Columbia and Mexico. American priests who are fluent in Spanish also serve the Latino communities. In addition, there are two religious Sisters who minister to families and others in need at Christ the King Parish.

The diocesan ministry to the Hispanics is guided by the Hispanic pastoral commission headed by Chairman Enrique Garcia and Vice-Chair Eren Muñoz. The diocesan office is staffed by Mayra Moriel de Bañuelos and Jessica Maciel Hernandez who coordinates ministry among youth and young adults. The diocese has benefitted from generous grants from The Extension Foundation to make these ministries possible.

As has been the history with previous ethnicities and international immigrants, the first generations to arrive tend to cluster for transitional support until fully adapted to their new home. In terms of religion, they need to maintain their native language for prayers and worship service. It is natural for all of us to relate to the God we were introduced to in terms that are familiar and deeply instilled.

Large segments of the Hispanic population have identified as sub-groups in a number of our parish communities. Over time, the Hispanic and Anglo groups begin to inter-relate and come together eventually in a united community especially as the children develop fluency in English. The outcome is a combined Anglo and Hispanic community benefitting from the rich traditions of each.

Nation-wide, it is estimated that the Hispanics constitute nearly 40% of our Catholic Church. Their presence and integration into the mainstream of our faith have been guided by a series of “Encuentros” or Encounters. These are gatherings dedicated to particular themes over time and have been very instrumental in developing and sustaining the faith of the Hispanics as their numbers increase significantly on the American scene.

The V Encuentro presently being introduced is envisioned as a process beginning with the grass-roots or parish level. It will then rise successively to the diocesan, regional, and finally conclude with a National gathering to take place on September 20-23, 2018 at The Gaylord, Grapevine, Texas in the Diocese of Fort Worth.

“The main goal of the V Encuentro is to discern ways in which the Church in the United States can better respond to the Hispanic/Latino presence and to strengthen the ways in which Hispanics/Latinos respond to the call to the New Evangelization as missionary disciples serving the entire Church.” (V Encuentro Guide, USCCB)

The process will begin in the Diocese of Des Moines on the parish level on March 1, Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. Each parish with Latino services will initiate a process of organizing small faith sharing groups which will be gathered in five sessions to discuss in depth the following themes:

1. Called to a Loving Encounter With Jesus
2. With Words and Actions Do it (AVANTI!)
3. Walking Together With Jesus
4. Bearing Fruits of New Life
5. Celebrating the Joy of Being Missionary Disciples

The theme that pervades the total process is: Missionary Disciples: Witnesses of God’s Love. The notion, Missionary Disciples is derived from the Letter of

His Holiness Benedict XVI To The Bishops of Latin American and the Caribbean, and is a prevalent theme in Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation: Joy of the Gospel.

This theme asserts that our vocation is to be a disciple of Jesus imbibing his teaching and in so doing making it second nature to ourselves. We are then sent "on mission" and through the witness of our very lives bring this good news to others. Our lives have become integrated with that of Jesus and the accompanying good news of the Gospel.

While the plan and resources of the V Encuentro have been developed by the Hispanics in the United States, they are easily applicable to all of our parishes. I am convinced that participation in the process, especially during Lent, will stimulate excellent, life-giving outcomes. It is in this regard that I am encouraging each parish to develop the small faith sharing group process of Encuentro V during Lent. The materials will be provided to the parishes for such an undertaking by our diocesan offices.

The Encuentro process over the past decades has been very effective in developing the faith among our Hispanic brothers and sisters.

Now, we have the opportunity to engage it across all of our parish communities to experience the Holy Spirit guiding us in these critical times, so much in need of the penetrating light of the Gospel.