Latin American Workshop: “Channels of Hope, responding effectively to HIV and AIDS
Bogotá, 3 – 5, Nov. 2010
Go and do likewise…. (Luke 10:37)

Called by the Department of Justice and Solidarity – CELAM for the workshop “Channels of Hope” the faith response to the HIV and AIDS pandemic, in partnership with World Vision¹ responsible of Episcopal Commissions of Health Pastoral Care and other persons involved in this pastoral care from Latin American and Caribbean countries; we call pastors and the faithful of the pilgrim church of this continent and the people of good will to share the following reflections about the topic of great concern of our time.

I."…a Samaritan traveler…saw him and was moved with compassion...” (Luke 10: 33)

We perceive the great sensibility of the Latin American church in its response to the challenge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic of our time. The concern was represented by the vast participation in this workshop. The indicators of the pandemic are growing; putting at risk peoples’ lives. The populations especially vulnerable are those who live in situations of poverty and exclusion. There are several topics which remain taboo in our societies. Among them is the topic of sexuality. This is noted in the fact that there exists an omission of this topic in the formation programs that are part of the maturation process of a person.

In spite of our great efforts, we discovered that the work done in association with this topic is minimal. We are aware that the solution of the problem lies not only in the hands of the Catholic Church. This understanding then leads us to establish a strategic partnership between government and non government organizations. We strive toward ecumenical work with other churches and establishing dialogue with other creeds in order to face this

¹ World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization whose objective is fullness of life of children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by Christian values, World Vision is dedicated to working with the world’s most vulnerable people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender, as an expression of God’s unconditional love of persons.
evil that strikes so many people. To face this great challenge, we are expected to respond with major commitments to include all believers and people of good will who value the life of those who suffer this calamity.

II. “…what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25)

Jesus’ example inspires us. A Good Samaritan, who has compassion for our weaknesses, comes to us; shares our human condition; heals our injuries; and gives us back our dignity.

We are called to make our church a welcome place: a space of care and attention for our brothers infected with HIV. We want to assume the challenge to put into practice the attitudes of the Good Samaritan. We want to respond to those who have fallen by the wayside, as expressed in these seven verbs: see, be compassionate, approach, heal, lift up, take to an inn, and take care. These attitudes identify the commitments of a Christian who feels urged to love until the final consequences.

Jesus identifies Himself with the sick, those who are hungry; thirsty; in need; and those who experience pain and suffering within their bodies and spirit. Each of these suffered faces we can discover, recognize, and serve with full love.

The attitude of the Good Samaritan which brings those who have fallen by the wayside to an inn and commits the owner of the inn also challenges us to reach out to others with humility and to associate with those that struggle with HIV/AIDS. It is possible to minister without creating a loss of dignity. We should serve with clarity of purpose, without prejudice, without borders and with a willingness to take a risk which leads to serving those individuals excluded in our time.

We are convinced that, as disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ in this continent, we do not serve alone. We have the love of God that has been spilled into our hearts. His grace has been given to us as “oil and wine” which allows us to heal injuries, strengthen, and restore the life of those who are sick and in need. The pastoral mission we carry out, by the grace of God, focuses on the entire person and is intended to restore the dignity that Jesus Christ has given to each of us through His passion, death, and resurrection.

III. “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37)

In tune with the Aparecida document, “we consider it a major priority to administer pastoral care to people who live with HIV, in its broad context, and its pastoral meanings. We promote a comprehensive response, to include mercy and a defense of the rights of the infected people. We aspire to use the information available about the disease, promote both education and prevention, using ethical criteria, especially between new generations, to awaken consciousness of all to contain the pandemic” (DA 421)
This challenge launches us into the painful reality of how best to implement our purpose. Taking into account the guidance of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, we propose the following:

a) To live the experience of our personal conversion that leads to a change of mentality: overcoming social and cultural prejudices that still persist in relation to this pandemic. This allows us to express in a sensitive way Christ’s words, gestures, and actions.

b) Motivate the Conferences of Bishops and Dioceses to establish a specific organization that would be responsible for the pastoral care of those infected and who live with HIV that require specialized attention.

c) Address CELAM (Conference of Catholic Bishops for Latin America) and the National Conferences of Bishops in an articulate fashion about this specific pastoral work.

d) Sensitize, inform and strengthen the capacities of all pastoral agents in the area of HIV and AIDS. This includes: lay, religious, disowns, seminarians, priests and bishops.

e) Include people who live with HIV in the pastoral work.

f) Emphasize both the pastoral and liturgical importance of the World HIV/AIDS Day.

g) Create a venue to share experiences and materials developed by different churches within all Latin American and Caribbean countries.

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