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The Pope to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: consider how your local Churches can best respond to the growing presence, gifts and potential of the Hispanic community

Pope Francis has sent a video message to the General Assembly of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), currently underway in Baltimore, Maryland from 14 to 17 November, in which he recalls how throughout history the Church has welcomed and integrated immigrants, who have shaped the changing face of the American ecclesial community. He urges his brothers in the episcopate to do everything possible to ensure that the Church responds better to the growing presence, gifts and potential of the Hispanic community.

The following is the full text of the message:

“Dear Brother Bishops,

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to you. Just a year ago, I was with you during my pastoral visit to the United States. There I was impressed by the vitality and diversity of the Catholic community. Throughout its history, the Church in your country has welcomed and integrated new waves of immigrants. In the rich variety of their languages and cultural traditions, they have shaped the changing face of the American Church.

In this context, I would commend the coming Fifth National Hispanic Pastoral Encuentro. The celebration of this Fifth Encuentro will begin in your Dioceses in this coming January and conclude with a national celebration in September 2018.

In continuity with its predecessors, the Encuentro seeks to acknowledge and value the specific gifts that Hispanic Catholics have offered, and continue to offer, to the Church in your country. But it is more than that. It is part of a greater process of renewal and missionary outreach, one to which all of your local Churches are called.

Our great challenge is to create a culture of encounter, which encourages individuals and groups to share the richness of their traditions and experiences, to break down walls and to build bridges. The Church in America, as elsewhere, is called to “go out” from its comfort zone and to be a leaven of communion. Communion among ourselves, with our fellow Christians, and with all who seek a future of hope.

We need to become ever more fully a community of missionary disciples, filled with love of the Lord Jesus and enthusiasm for the spread of the Gospel. The Christian community is meant to be a sign and prophecy of God's plan for the entire human family. We are called to be bearers of good news for a society gripped by disconcerting social, cultural and spiritual shifts, and increasing polarization.

It is my hope that the Church in your country, at every level, will accompany the Encuentro with its own reflection and pastoral discernment. In a particular way, I ask you to consider how your local Churches can best respond to the growing presence, gifts and potential of the Hispanic community. Mindful of the contribution that the Hispanic community makes to the life of the nation, I pray that the Encuentro will bear fruit for the renewal of American society and for the Church's apostolate in the United States.

With gratitude to all engaged in the preparation of the Fifth Encuentro, I assure you of my prayers for this important initiative of your Conference. Commending you, and the clergy, religious and lay faithful of your local Churches, to the prayers of Mary Immaculate, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in the Lord".
