

Pope Francis welcomes V Encuentro as ‘instrument of grace’

DALLAS (CNA) - Pope Francis welcomed thousands of representatives gathered in Texas this week for the Fifth Encuentro, a national meeting of Hispanic-background Catholics aimed at encounter and leadership.

National V Encuentro is “an instrument of grace that has led to the conversion of many people’s hearts and above all to the pastoral conversion of situations and to the pastoral conversion of local Churches, parishes, schools, and of all kinds of ecclesial encounters,” he said in a video message to the gathering.

National V Encuentro is the culmination of four years of consultation and workshops from local to regional levels across the U.S. Delegates from 165 dioceses were selected for the event, and nearly 250,000 people participated in the local process over the past year.

Taking place in Grapevine Sept. 20-23, the event expected as many as 3,000 Catholics of Hispanic background. This year’s theme is “Discípulos Misioneros: Testigos del amor de Dios” or “Missionary Disciples: Witnesses of the love of God.”

The meeting has five primary goals: to encounter the needs and aspirations of Catholics of Hispanic background; to promote leadership opportunities for them; to develop new ways to form and encourage them in their vocations; to invite all Catholics to accompany Catholics of Hispanic background; and to develop “initiatives that prepare Hispanic Catholics to share and celebrate the Good News of Jesus Christ and to become leaven for the Reign of God in society.”

The first National Encuentro in the United States was held in 1972, and it is a process that has continued at local, regional, and national levels ever since. The most recent Encuentro prior to the Grapevine meeting was held in 2000, with a related youth meeting held in 2006.

The preparatory discussions for National V Encuentro have explored topics such as the accompaniment of immigrants, access to higher education, community outreach, and the formation of lay leaders.

“I know that the experience of this Fifth Encuentro is a comfort to many immigrants living in situations of fear and uncertainty,” Pope Francis said in his welcome video message.

“The Fifth Encuentro has given them a greater sense of community, friendship, and support.”

Hispanics currently make up one of the largest contingents of the Catholic Church in the U.S., about 40 percent, and an even greater percentage of young adults in the Church.