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## **When the church finds itself in times of trouble, imitate Mary, bishop says**

DALLAS (CNA) - Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, MSpS, of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, said that the Catholic Church is currently in a “very dark moment” in its history, and that Catholics should look to the example of Mary in reacting to the abuse crisis.

Speaking in a closed session to reporters at the National V Encuentro conference in Grapevine on Sept. 22, Archbishop Gustavo was asked how lay people can work to engage fallen-away Catholics who were upset by the recent sexual misconduct scandals.

Rather than turn away from the crisis, Archbishop Gustavo said that “we need to face how people are dealing with it,” and not just have emotional reactions to the stories of sexual assault and harassment. He acknowledged that the problem of sexual abuse has existed in the Church for a long time, “and painfully.”

Archbishop Gustavo suggested that people “have to evangelize” during this time, despite everything that is happening in the church. He said he’s seen suffering in his own archdiocese, and he has worked to let the survivors of abuse know that he will be there for them. He compared the current abuse crisis to the crucifixion of the Lord.

“People are suffering for many reasons. It is the way of the cross,” he said.

“And Jesus was very bold about it. It is the way of the cross,” he repeated.

The bishop shot down the idea of having to “re-evangelize” people who have fallen away from the church during the crisis, saying that “somebody has to evangelize, (they don’t) need re-evangelization.” He said that they should work on ensuring proper formation for those who have already been exposed to the Church.

He cautioned against the mentality that people do not need to continually experience Christ. People “cannot grasp who he is and his work of love once,” and cannot be satisfied with one singular Church experience.

“We forget,” he said, “that the Holy Spirit will remind us who Jesus is and what is the work of the Kingdom.”

Archbishop Gustavo drew an example from Cardinal Sean O’Malley’s homily earlier that day, when the cardinal spoke of the Blessed Virgin Mary as the first “missionary disciple” of Jesus Christ, before the apostles.

In his homily, Cardinal O’Malley said that Mary was courageous in her “yes” to the Lord, even when Jesus was on the cross.

“Mary was standing, a pillar of strength, courage and faith, even with her broken heart, she said ‘yes Lord, your will and not mine,’” the cardinal said.

Now, Catholics should strive to imitate Mary during “this time of pain and suffering,” including the victims of abuse, and “in mysterious ways, the perpetrators, and the bishops,” Garcia-Siller said.

“All of us, to cope with this, we’ll be needed everywhere,” he noted.

“We need everyone, everyone,” he said, because the Church, as “the Body of Christ -- when one hurts, everybody hurts. When one is joyful everyone should be joyful.”

“May we, by the mercy of God, carry on what He started.”

## **Bishop Cantu to Encuentro Catholics: Don't become spiritual tumbleweeds**

DALLAS (CNA) -- The Hispanic community in the United States produces many fruits, but must be careful to water the roots, Bishop Oscar Cantú warned the crowd at V Encuentro.

Cantú, along with Cardinal Blaise Cupich of Chicago, and three lay speakers on a panel, spent the morning praising the unique gifts of the Hispanic community in the United States, but cautioned against growing too complacent in their faith and ignoring the potential of young people.

Bishop Cantú, who has transferring to the San Jose Diocese in California from New Mexico, related his experience living in Las Cruces with the current state of the Church in the United States and the Latino community in particular.

In Las Cruces, Cantú encountered a tumbleweed for the first time -- a plant that had dried up and detached from its root system and literally tumbled away.

"I wonder sometimes, reflecting on a very changed world, a world that is changing before our very eyes -- so rapidly and so drastically, said Cantú.

"I wonder and I worry, sometimes: Are we becoming spiritual tumbleweeds?"

One risks becoming a "spiritual tumbleweed," he said, if their roots are not sufficiently deep during a dry season, the bishop explained. He spoke during a panel for the National V Encuentro, a gathering of Hispanic Catholics throughout the United States.

"And the dry season is here, my friends, and it will be a long one," said Cantú. Now is the time, he said, for people to "dig deep so that our roots may find water, that our roots may find living water."

Cantú recounted a story from his time in seminary, when he accidentally genuflected when entering a row in a movie theater. He said that people today long for something sacred within their "spiritual DNA," and when they do not encounter this, they end up treating the non-sacred objects things as if they are in fact sacred.

"People are not finding what is truly sacred," he said, and "because they encounter you and me, that are supposed to show signs of the sacred, and maybe they don't see it."

People should strive to tap their roots into the "living water" in order to produce sacred fruit, Cantú advised the crowd.

"The human heart still yearns for what is beautiful, for what is truly beautiful, for what is good, and for what is true. We have that. The church has what is truly good, what is truly beautiful and good. His name is Jesus Christ."

After Cantú spoke, he appeared on a panel with three laypeople--Sean Callahan, president and CEO of Catholic Relief Services; Brenda Noriega, Young Adults Ministry Coordinator, Diocese of San Bernardino; and Wanda Vásquez, Hispanic Ministry Director, Archdiocese of New York--where they discussed the fruits that had emerged from the four-year V Encuentro process.

Vásquez said it was "amazing" how people came together, and how the eight dioceses in her Encuentro region were able to work alongside each other during the planning stages. She particularly highlighted how the more experienced people were able to share their expertise with younger members, and that while "we are a young church, but we also are an experienced Church."

Cantú and Noriega both said that young Hispanics need to be included in leadership positions and reminded of their particular talents. Noriega first began working in Hispanic ministry for her diocese at the age of 25, and she reiterated that it was extremely important to "make sure young people are sat at the table" and given positions on things like parish councils.

Cantú said that he often encounters discouraged youth, and that he himself felt similar growing up in a time where “it was a liability to be Hispanic.” He said that when he was applying to seminary, he was praised by a religious sister for being bilingual and fully immersed in two cultures. This sister told him that he would be “a gift to the Church,” and that he hopes the larger Latino community will “never forget that you are a blessing to the Church.”

Callahan reminded the crowd to keep their doors open to the stranger, and to also be cautious about identifying only as “Hispanic Catholics.” He believes the Latino Catholic community has the ability to lift up the entire Church, and should take steps to build bridges with the rest of the Church in the United States.

He advised people that even though the attendees of the non-Spanish Masses at a parish may look different from them, they should go out of their way to interact with them and get to know them.

“Let’s build a united church, so we can start lifting up everyone in the Catholic Church in the United States,” said Callahan, to loud applause.

Cupich, who led the morning prayer, had a slightly more optimistic look on the future of the Church than Cantú. Cupich said that he feels the Church in the United States is experiencing a “new birth,” and the Latino community is a big part of this panel. The cardinal was critical of what he called an “overly rational, logical, cerebral” approach to God in American culture, and that “faith is not only about what we hold, but it is about who holds us.”

This, explained Cupich, is where Latino culture comes in.

“The Latino experience is reminding us that faith is not only about what we hold, but who holds us,” he said.

Cupich said that while like in any birth there are “pains” and “sacrifices,” but he is convinced that the Church, as well as non-Catholic Americans, “will one day look back at the contribution you (Latinos) are making to our faith, and yes, to our nation, and rejoice at the new birth that has taken place.”

## **Gomez to Encuentro: Jesus sent disciples, Guadalupe sent Juan Diego, God sends you**

DALLAS (CNA) - At the final Mass of the National V Encuentro gathering, Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles encouraged Hispanic and Latino Catholics to go out into the world and be missionary disciples for the Church, like the many holy lay people before them.

“Our reading of today’s Gospel begins with these words: ‘Jesus and his disciples They left from there and started a journey,’” he said, referencing Mark 9:30-37.

“This is our story, yours and mine. This is the history of the Church. We are his disciples.”

Gomez gave the homily on the final day of the National V Encuentro, a meeting of Hispanic and Latino Catholics from throughout the United States that was the culmination of a years-long process of consultation at the parish, diocesan and regional levels.

The theme of this National Encuentro, held Sept. 20-23 in Grapevine was “Discípulos Misioneros: Testigos del amor de Dios” or “Missionary Disciples: Witnesses of the love of God.”

Missionaries are made because they have first encountered Jesus, who then sends them on a journey, Gomez said.

“Your journey is now joined to Jesus. Your story is now part of the story of salvation, the journey of God’s people through history,” he added, like the disciples who spread the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, Asia and Africa.

“The journey of the Church continued towards the American continent with the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, in 1531,” Gomez said.

“We all know that story. We learned it when we were children, and we transmitted it to our little ones. It is a beautiful narration of the tender love of God, manifested in history.”

As Jesus sent the disciples, God through the Virgin of Guadalupe entrusted a mission to San Juan Diego - to go tell the bishop to build a church.

“Think about that, my dear brothers and sisters: Jesus entrusted him with the mission of his Church in the New World to a layman,” he said. “Not to a priest or a bishop. Not a member of a religious order.”

“You are the sons and daughters of the Virgin of Guadalupe in our time; you are the spiritual heirs of Juan Diego. The mission entrusted to him is now entrusted to you.”

Just like Juan Diego, God is calling the Hispanic and Latino Catholics of the United States to be saints, missionary disciples and leaders of the Church, Gomez said.

“He is calling the lay faithful to work together with the bishops to renew and rebuild his Church. Not only in this country, but throughout the continents of the Americas,” he said.

Hispanic and Latino Catholics are being called to lead not for power or ambition, he added, but “to lead by your holiness. True unity in the Church will only come about if every one of us - clergy and laity - is striving to be holy as God is holy.” “Let’s always move forward with confidence. Let’s be men and women of the encounter! What each one of us leads many people to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ,” Gomez said.

“And may Our Lady of Guadalupe always go with us on the journey we make as disciples of Jesus. May she help us to be saints, to be heroes, instruments of unity and healing. These times demand it. And for this is what we were made for.”

## **'We're brothers and sisters in Christ': For Encuentro Catholics, immigration is personal**

DALLAS (CNA) - When Miriam Joyce of the Diocese of Raleigh talks about immigration, her face folds with concern.

Her worry is not for her own wellbeing; she is a United States citizen. But she worries for her friends - they come from El Salvador, they have children, and soon they may have to go back to a violent, unstable country.

"One of my friends has a daughter that is 19 years old, and they came here here with permission, and now with what's going on with the President now they have to leave by January 2019, in less than four months," Joyce told CNA.

Her friends once had Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which was granted to El Salvador in 2001, following a massive earthquake in the country. TPS is granted for countries who are experiencing an ongoing armed conflict, an environmental disaster, or "other extraordinary and temporary conditions that prevent people from safely returning home to the country."

In January 2018, the Department of Homeland Security terminated TPS status for El Salvador, Haiti, Sudan, and Nicaragua.

"They're always worrying that they're going to get a knock on the door and it's the government telling them it's time for you to leave."

Immigration is a tough topic no matter what the crowd. But when that crowd is the National V Encuentro, a gathering of Hispanic and Latino Catholics throughout the United States, the topic is undoubtedly emotional and incredibly personal. Many of the 3,000-some participants are immigrants. Or are related to some. Or are best friends with others.

Andrea Lerma tears up talking about her mother, who is still in Mexico. Although Lerma was born in the United States, she grew up in Mexico until she was 15 years old. She then moved to the U.S. to live with her uncles, whom she hadn't met.

To Latino immigrants, Lerma said she would encourage them to "keep fighting for what you want, and don't forget who you are, who your parents are, or where you come from, because that is going to help you to set up your goals," she said. "And pray, because sometimes we forget to pray. We forget to give thanks to God for another day."

Alejandra Brava, is a young adult immigrant from Vera Cruz, Mexico, is a DACA recipient who now lives in and works as the Hispanic youth and young adult minister for the Archdiocese of Denver.

DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, is an Obama-era policy that protects undocumented immigrants who were brought into the United States as children. The program prevents DACA recipients, also known as "Dreamers," from being deported. It also provides work permits.

Brava said she was able to get a teaching job in the United States thanks to DACA, and it has allowed her to do what she loves.

"I am evidence that I'm not here to hurt someone," Brava told CNA. "I'm here and I came to study and I just wanted to do something with my life, I love teaching and I love doing ministry."

While President Donald Trump has sought to end DACA, there have been legislative efforts to maintain elements of DACA in an immigration law, and DACA recipients may still submit applications to renew their status.

Brava said she hoped other Catholics would see immigrants as their brother or sister in the faith. "We're human beings, there's no difference. Legal status doesn't make a person less worthy," she said.

Many immigrants from Central and South America who come to the United States are Catholic, and Hispanics make up more than 40 percent of Catholics within the U.S.

Because of this, immigrants often look to the Church for help once they arrive in the U.S.

Alfonso Lara is the Director of Hispanic Ministry for the Archdiocese of Denver, Colorado. He said that parishes need to be intentional about welcoming immigrants, “not only with coffee and donuts but also having a committee to welcome them, realizing that they’re another human being coming to your country with a different experience of life and a different experience of the Church.”

He said he would encourage church leaders not to inquire about the legal status of immigrants, but to be “humans receiving humans.”

“We’re welcoming the stranger, that’s what we do,” he said. “When another person comes to church to have an encounter with Jesus, we need to respect that.”

Patricia Zapor is the director of communications for The Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), which is a network of non-profit organizations that provide immigration legal services to their clients.

Zapor told CNA that there are many practical things that parishes can do to support and welcome immigrants in their parish.

“It could be something as simple as collecting money to help people pay the fees that go along with their applications,” she said. Depending on the form, that could be anywhere between hundreds or more than a thousand dollars, which doesn’t include the fingerprint and background check fees.

“They might offer (language classes), or they might host a know your rights event,” Zapor said. CLINIC has resources about the rights of immigrants available in nine languages.

Immigrants often are not sure where to get started in the application process, and there are a “fair amount” of fraudulent companies out there that try to offer immigration services to unwitting clients, so providing proper resources and information is key, Zapor noted.

If a parish really wanted to get involved, they could host a refugee family, Zapor said.

Or they could host something as simple as a rosary with immigration-themed reflections, or a Las Posadas celebration, or other simple ways “of getting a community to think about immigrants and maybe have a conversation about them without being hammered over the head with the politics,” she said.

Ultimately, Catholics should acknowledge immigrants as fellow human beings who should be treated with care and respect, Brava said.

“We need to treat each other as brothers or sisters in Christ,” she said. “We have differences in culture, in ideas, in opinions, but at the end of the day, we believe in the same God. We need to value our neighbors, our brothers and sisters regardless of their status and immigration.”

## **What Catholics learned at V Encuentro, and what they hope their bishops heard**

FORT WORTH (CNA) -- It's a difficult time for the Catholic Church, a fact much-discussed at the National V Encuentro conference, a gathering of Hispanic and Latino Catholics from throughout the U.S. that took place Sept. 20-23 in Grapevine.

The bishops have failed their people and ask for forgiveness, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Houston and president of the U.S. bishops' conference, said in his address at the V Encuentro.

But even at the close of this 'summer of scandals,' the 3,000-some Hispanic and Latino Catholics present for the gathering seemed to relish their time with and attention from the leaders of the Church.

Selfies were snapped, hugs were exchanged, and chants of "We Love You!" were signs of support and appreciation shown to the bishops present for the conference.

Ruby Fuentes, a young adult delegate from the Diocese of Brownsville "in deep south Texas, right above the Mexican border," said she especially appreciated the bishops' dinner and encounter night with young people, where a bishop sat at every table to listen to the needs and concerns of the young delegates.

The issues discussed varied from table to table, Fuentes said, but her particular concerns included suicide and mental health in young people, and immigration issues.

"I thought it was a really good way to be transparent within the Church and try to understand what young people are thinking about, what their concerns are," Fuentes told CNA.

"It was really a pleasant surprise to see that bishops were the ones organizing the dinner and wanted to talk to us and see what we had to say, because oftentimes as young folks we're cast aside, we're not really taken seriously," she said.

Sr. Mary Johanna of the Nashville Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia told CNA that the closeness of the bishops was the thing most-remarked on by the delegates in her group.

"It's been great to have so many Hispanics and Anglos here together, and it's beautiful to see so many bishops here with us and to see the attention that they're giving, how deeply they're listening, and just coming together as a Church," she said.

Besides DiNardo, some of the bishops at the V Encuentro included Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, MSpS of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, Archbishop José H. Gomez of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Archbishop William E. Lori of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Archbishop Wilton Gregory of the Archdiocese of Atlanta, Cardinal Blase Cupich of the Archdiocese of Chicago, and Cardinal Sean O'Malley, O.F.M. Cap, of the Archdiocese of Boston.

Alfredo Portillo, a delegate from Las Vegas, told CNA that the Encuentro was a "heartwarming" experience and "for the bishops to reunite us, to bring us together, to celebrate our Hispanic inheritances, I think it's really great, I'm really proud to be here."

Guadalupe Alba, a delegate from St. Martha's Catholic Church in Huntington Park, California, told CNA that it was encouraging for him to see Catholic leaders, including bishops and non-Hispanic Catholics, attending the conference and listening to what the delegates had to say.



“Even though there’s a lot of Hispanics in the United States, we’re still a minority, you know?” he told CNA.

What the bishops are communicating to Hispanic and Latino Catholics through the Encuentro is that “we know that you’re here, we accept you, and we’re on the same team. Everything in the faith,” Alba said.

Juan Carlos Reyes, a delegate from the Archdiocese of Denver, told CNA that hoped that the bishops have a renewal of a pastoral rather than a political spirit following the Encuentro.

“I feel like many times our Church, the conversation gets framed by the political aspects in the nation, and I think many of our bishops are worried about saying the right thing, being on the right side of things, they’re worried about the politics and they are detached from the people,” he said.

“And they are not congressmen, they’re pastors, so if they could take from this a renewal of a pastoral approach that would be wonderful,” he said. Another concern of Reyes was that there be a more holistic approach within the pro-life movement to the issue of immigration.

“The pro-life movement is all about the abortion issue, and that is urgent and continues to be needed,” he said. “But we march and we pray outside of abortion clinics, but we don’t march and we don’t pray outside of detention centers.”

Evangelization and bridging the cultural divide that exists in some parishes between Hispanic and Anglo Catholics were other frequently-discussed topics of conversation at the V Encuentro.

“We are failing our Church ourselves because we are not bringing people in,” Carlos Mendez from Huntington Park, California told CNA. “But first we have to go and be taught by others how to do it, we have to find the love within us and go with the Holy Spirit and take charge and be there for the ones who feel marginalized.”

Joanne Reinhardt, a delegate from Toledo Ohio, said she was leaving Encuentro with a renewed desire to “build bridges” between Hispanic and Anglo Catholics.

She said some things that her parish has done to help bridge the cultural divide is to host bilingual Masses, celebrations for Our Lady of Guadalupe’s feast day, and food and diaper drives for immigrants in the parish.

“Sometimes we want to separate ourselves,” she said. “But we’re one people and when we come together, things will happen.”

## **U.S. nuncio to Encuentro: Missionaries must first know the joy of Christ**

FORT WORTH (CNA) - A missionary disciple is one who has encountered Christ personally and is then able to bring him to others, Archbishop Christophe Pierre said Thursday at the National V Encuentro.

Pierre, the apostolic nuncio to the United States, addressed approximately 3,000 Catholics of Hispanic and Latino background gathered for the summit in Grapevine, Texas, Sept. 20. The event is the culmination of four years of consultation and workshops at the parish, diocesan, and regional levels of the Church in the U.S.

This year, the National Encuentro's theme is "Discípulos Misioneros: Testigos del amor de Dios" or "Missionary Disciples: Witnesses of the love of God."

Pierre said he believes, as do Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, that one must first encounter the person of Christ before one can become a missionary.

"For (Pope Francis), the whole missionary endeavour begins with an encounter with Christ," Pierre said.

"The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus," Pierre said, quoting the beginning of Francis' 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*. "Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew."

Benedict also began his first encyclical reflecting on the personal encounter with Christ which every Christian must have, Pierre noted.

"Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction," Pierre said, quoting Benedict's 2005 encyclical *Deus caritas est*.

This joy of encountering Christ breathes life into the missionary, who is then able to go out and encounter God's people, Pierre said.

A Church filled with "missionary impulse" is one that channels her "customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures...for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation," Pierre noted, referencing *Evangelii gaudium*.

"Just as wind pushes against a sail and causes a boat to move upon the water, so too the Spirit of God pushes the whole Church to go forth into the world, attentive to the signs of the times and the needs of the people, jettisoning that which is obsolete," Pierre said.

The missionary spirit which leads to a conversion of heart must be inspired by belief in the God and the Church, Pierre added.

"We have to believe in the Church, this is important today not to forget...believe in the Church who makes Christ incarnate in the culture and among the people," he said.

This conversion of heart and a missionary spirit must happen within pastors and Church leaders as well, Pierre noted, as they listen to and learn from the different people whom they serve.

“People’s religious experiences, including those of the Latinos, are an authentic place of encounter with God,” he said. “Pastoral conversion means moving from mere conservation to a decidedly pastoral ministry. Pastoral and missionary conversion go hand in hand with a conversion of attitudes and a conversion of statuses.”

A Church full of missionary spirit is one that accompanies people and remains united - in a word, a missionary Church has “synodality,” he said, something that can be seen incarnate in the mission of Encuentro.

“The Encuentro process has shown the effectiveness of synodality in the Church,” Pierre added. “Listening, speaking, participating by asking critical questions and discerning the path forward .if Communion is a sharing of the faithful in the mysteries of faith and mission of the church, synodality is a sign and fulfillment of communion.”

Another characteristic of a missionary Church is joy, Pierre said. It celebrates “even small victories in the work of evangelization” and is nourished by the Eucharist, the sacrament in which “Christ is among us, and the joy that he has won is preserved and shared.”

Finally, Pierre said, a missionary Church is one that is not afraid to go to the “peripheries”, both geographical and cultural, to encounter people and bring Christ to them.

“It is my sincere hope that as we gather for these days, we may be the church that Christ wants us to be,” Pierre concluded.

“With (Jesus) at the center of our lives, our conversations and our ministries, confident that with the Virgin of Guadalupe to accompany us and intercede for us, may we always move forward in hope, making known the joy of the Gospel.”

## **Encuentro Catholics 'heartbroken' by scandals, but unshaken in faith**

DALLAS (CNA) - While the so-called summer of scandals has hit the Church hard both in the United States and throughout the world, the faith of Catholics at the National V Encuentro in Grapevine remains largely unshaken.

"We're heartbroken from what we found out, because it doesn't move my faith," Rocio Portillo, an Encuentro participant from Las Vegas, told CNA. "It doesn't move my belief in my Church, and I'm really proud to be Catholic and to be brought up in that faith and to bring that to my children."

The National V Encuentro, held Sept. 20-23, is the culmination of a years-long process at the parish, diocesan and regional levels of listening to and empowering Hispanic and Latino Catholics.

The public disclosure of allegations of sexual misconduct against former cardinal Theodore McCarrick in June 2018 triggered a succession of public accusations that McCarrick had sexually assaulted or abused seminarians and priests over a period of decades, as well as a further accusation that he had sexually abused a minor.

Since then, numerous bishops in the United States and Rome have faced questions about when accusations against McCarrick had first been made known to Church authorities, and how he had been allowed to continue in ministry despite widespread rumors of his misconduct.

In the midst of this, a grand jury report detailing hundreds of cases of clerical sexual abuse in six dioceses in Pennsylvania was published. While the scandals have not been the focus of the V Encuentro meeting, they have been mentioned numerous times in talks and among participants.

"My friends, we know that this is also a time of pain in our mother Church...as bishops, we have fallen short of what God expects of His shepherds," Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, President of the U.S. Bishop's Conference and head of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, said in his opening remarks at Encuentro on Sept. 20.

"For this, we again ask forgiveness from both the Lord and those who have been harmed, and from you, the People of God. May God grant us the wisdom and resolve to reform and renew His Church. We will continue to support survivors of abuse in their healing. We also commit to stronger protections to ensure the evil of sexual assault and abuse of all kinds is rooted from the Church," he said.

"Amidst this darkness, the Encuentro is a light that shines and illuminates the way forward. The enthusiasm, the passion, the love, and the joy of the Encuentro process is a means of grace, a gift to us as we rebuild the Church," he added.

Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, MSPS, of San Antonio also addressed the scandals in his opening remarks on Thursday, telling participants that they "are right to be heartbroken by the faults of your shepherds," he said.

"In the reading of God's word that we have just heard, Saint Peter tells us that we 'share Christ's sufferings,'" he added. "Let us pray to God for the victims of the crimes that led to this crisis. Do everything you can for the healing of all the victims of these abuses. And pray also for the perpetrators and for us, your shepherds."

Father José Carlos, a priest from Hobbes, New Mexico, reiterated to CNA that Encuentro delegates have to be "a light in the darkness."

Carlos Mendez, an Encuentro delegate from Los Angeles, told CNA that the scandals “would not reduce my faith at all, because I follow the Church, I don’t follow the deeds of other people.”

Alfredo Portillo, Encuentro delegate from Las Vegas, told CNA that while he is saddened by the news of scandals that seems to come “every day,” he was encouraged by what he saw at the Encuentro meeting.

“I think this came at a perfect moment,” he told CNA. “And from this something new is going to grow, and it’s much needed. This is just a great moment for the Church in the whole world.”

## **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.