

Five Aspects to “Be a Disciple and Then Go Make Disciples”

Pope John Paul II developed a *strategic outline of a plan for renewal* regarding the formation of missionary disciples in the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*. Subsequent documents by Pope Benedict and Pope Francis have been fully supportive, including the summary of the original plan listed below by Archbishop Bergoglio in 2007 in the Aparecida Document for the 5th General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean.

1) Encounter: The starting point of evangelization is an encounter with the living Jesus Christ. Those who will be His disciples are already seeking Him (cf. Jn 1:38), but it is the Lord who calls them: “Follow me” (Mk 1:14; Mt 9:9). The deeper meaning of the search must be discovered, and the encounter with Christ that leads to Christian initiation must be fostered. This encounter must be constantly renewed by personal testimony, proclamation of the *kerygma*, and the missionary action of the community.

2) Conversion: It is the initial response of those who have listened to the Lord in wonder, who believe in Him through the action of the Spirit, and who decide to be His friend and go with Him, changing how they think and live, accepting the cross of Christ, conscious that dying to sin is attaining life. In Baptism and the Sacrament of Reconciliation Christ’s Redemption is actualized for us.

3) Discipleship: The person constantly matures in knowledge, love, and following of Jesus the master, and delves deeper into the mystery of His person, His example, and His teaching. Ongoing catechesis and sacramental life are of fundamental importance for this stage; they strengthen initial conversion and enable missionary disciples to persevere in Christian life and mission in the midst of the world that challenges them.

4) Communion: There can be no Christian life except in community: in families, parishes, communities of consecrated life, other small communities, and movements. The disciples take part in the life of the Church, and in the encounter with brothers and sisters, living the love of Christ in *solidarity*, in fraternal life. They are accompanied and encouraged by the community and its shepherds as they mature in the life of the Spirit.

5) Mission: As they get to know and love their Lord, disciples experience the need to share with others their joy at being sent, at going to the world to proclaim Jesus Christ, dead and risen, to make real the love and service in the person of the neediest, in short, to build the Kingdom of God. Mission is inseparable from discipleship.