

SESSION 5

# Celebrating the Joy of Being Missionary Disciples



GIULIO NAPOLITANO / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

## OBJECTIVES

- Share the wisdom learned from the missionary experience during the previous week.
- Celebrate an important event in the life of each member of the small group.
- Reflect on the importance of celebrating great and small events in life with gratitude and joy.
- Prepare for the fifth missionary action, with emphasis on celebrating.

## SYMBOL

The V Encuentro Cross

## PREPARING THE SETTING

Before starting the session, prepare the place where the small group will meet. Arrange the chairs in a circle and place the image of a path in the center. Near that image, place a candle and an open Bible. Prepare a basket with the crosses of the V Encuentro to be distributed among all members of the small group during the final prayer.



## PRAYER

 **Song:** *Santa María del Camino* (Juan Antonio Espinosa) and the *Prayer of the V Encuentro*

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this fifth and final session of the process of the V Encuentro. We have walked together as a small group and now have become a small missionary community. Our focus today is to celebrate with gratitude and joy the achievements and worthy moments of our lives, big and small. In this session we are sent once again to reach out to those who are most in need. We also begin the process of preparation to celebrate our Parish Encuentro [or in Note: *If your group did not meet in the context of a parish, you should plan an Encuentro gathering with other small groups that also met in the particular context where you are (e.g., school, prison, etc., using the Parish Encuentro model).*]

**The session starts with the following reading from the Scriptures:**

*“Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?” So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. (Luke 24:32-35)*

**After a few moments of reflection in silence, a person from the group shares the following reflection on the reading:**

*Celebrating the joy of being missionary disciples . . .*

The last thing Jesus does in this passage is to vanish from the sight of the disciples shortly after they recognized him. However, the passage shows the disciples excited and ready to be missionary disciples once again. The disciples are full of joy because they recognized Jesus. Their eyes and hearts are open to the truth of the Resurrection. The certainty that Jesus is alive leads them to realize that Jesus has been with them practically the entire day, and they are not surprised or disturbed when he vanishes. On the contrary, the disciples remain joyful and share with one another how they felt along the way while the stranger was interpreting the Scriptures. With astonishment, they exclaim: “*Were not*

*our hearts burning . . . ?*” This confirms that their faith was rekindled by first hearing the Word of God. This experience of conversion touches the minds and hearts of the disciples and prepares them to recognize the Risen Jesus in the breaking of the bread. It especially prepares them to understand that they, with the entire community of disciples, constitute, from this moment, the Body of Christ, the Church in the world.

Jesus has been with them practically the entire afternoon. It took about two or three hours to walk the distance between Jerusalem and Emmaus. What else could Jesus do to give example and to teach his disciples everything they need to know and do in order to carry out their mission? Jesus vanishes from their sight at the exact moment when his disciples no longer need to see him to believe that he is risen. He does not need to explain the Scriptures again or tell them how to resume their mission of announcing the Good News, or what to do at that moment. By the enduring grace of the presence of the Risen Christ in their midst, they are entrusted with making decisions in the future, starting with their immediate return to Jerusalem. Jesus knows that this encounter, this intimate moment in which they recognize him, will lead them to conversion, to build the community of disciples, to live in solidarity with one another, and to embrace permanently the mission of proclaiming the Good News to all nations, moved by their burning hearts.

This urgent call to be missionaries is what leads the disciples to immediately rise from table and set out on their journey back to Jerusalem. Imagine the difficulties of walking for several hours in the darkness of night on a solitary and potentially dangerous road. The urgency to meet the rest of the disciples to share with them the great news about the Risen Jesus cannot wait until the following day. Their burning hearts light up the road from within them and their faith in Jesus frees them from fear and any fatigue they may have felt. Any dangers they may face, including the possibility of dying on the way, are now perceived from a very different perspective in light of the promise of the Resurrection.

The lives of these disciples have acquired a new meaning in light of the recent events. The fear, disbelief, doubt, and sadness with which they left Jerusalem only a few hours before have now completely disappeared from their minds and hearts. As they return to Jerusalem, they see with their eyes wide open and are moved by joy (what a great joy!) and hope, overflowing with faith and love for Jesus, for the other disciples, and for the life that has conquered death. The disciples know that they are

now the eyes, the feet, and the hands of Jesus in the world. They are now the strangers reaching out to those without hope on the journey of life, whom they must accompany with closeness and tenderness, sharing the Scriptures with them, accepting their invitation to stay with them, and sharing the bread of love in the Risen Christ.

The return of the disciples to Jerusalem is a great inspiration for our missionary commitment. At the end of the celebration of the Eucharist, we are sent to encounter others on their own life journeys to accompany them. We do this just as Jesus did it with the disciples of Emmaus and countless Christian disciples have been doing from generation to generation for nearly two thousand years. This missionary activity implies making a decision to go forth and reach out to others, to accompany them as the missionary disciples of today. It implies to live and understand the mission of the Church as a community that goes forth inspired by a pastoral commitment to encounter and accompany. This is the



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vision of Church that Pope Francis lives and proposes to us in each action, gesture, and message of his life. His secret consists in the deep and free conviction that he, and all the baptized, are the hands and feet of Jesus in the world.

The last scene in this passage shows the disciples of Emmaus sharing with other disciples in Jerusalem the Good News that they have seen the Risen Jesus. Other disciples have also seen Jesus, and there is great joy among all of them. It is important to highlight that the disciples who just arrived from Emmaus, most likely exhausted after a long journey, share specifically that Jesus interpreted the Scriptures for them and that they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. These two realities, Word and Sacrament, are inseparable in the encounter with the Living Jesus Christ that leads to conversion, communion, and solidarity within the community of missionary disciples gathered in Jerusalem.

## SEE

The facilitator invites participants to get ready to share in light of their experience and to listen with an attentive heart.

*This sharing can happen in pairs, making sure that while a person is sharing his or her experience, the other one is listening without judging, without making comments, or giving advice. The person simply listens with all his or her senses and heart.*

As missionary disciples of Jesus Christ, we recognize that we have received many blessings and now are called to share about these with others through our witness. Let us share with enthusiasm the importance of celebrating the wonders that God has done in our lives.

For what are you grateful to God at this moment in your life (mention one or two reasons)? How do you celebrate important moments with your family and friends? How would you describe the joy you feel when you celebrate an important moment in your life or in the life of someone you love? What elements of our Christian faith invite us to celebrate?

Do you know someone who is experiencing difficulties or sadness? What can you do to share the joy that God has brought to your life with that person and thus accompany him or her?

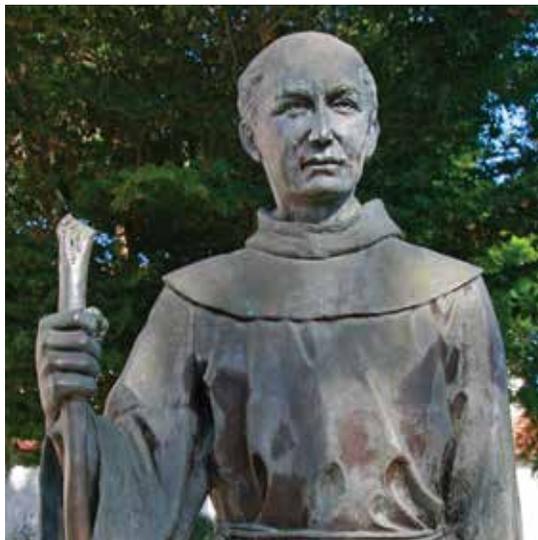
*Once participants have offered their thoughts, the facilitator shares with the group the following examples of accompaniment from the historical memory of Catholic Hispanic/Latino people in the United States.*

A core characteristic of Hispanic cultures is the profound sense of *fiesta* with which Hispanics/Latinos celebrate many events in their lives. Such sense of celebration is closely associated to the influence of Catholicism in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Hispanic/Latino cultures in the United States. Many are the reasons to celebrate: the birth of a child, the passage from one stage of life to the next, the memory of those who are already in God's eternal presence. It is not an exaggeration to say that Hispanic Catholics always find an excuse to celebrate, even at the most difficult moments.

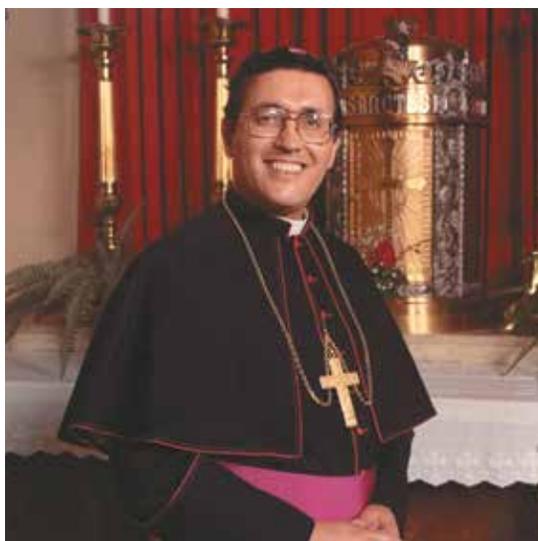
Although the Hispanic/Latino presence has been integral in the shaping of the experience in the United States, in the Church, and in the larger society, such presence has not always been properly recognized. Every time a Hispanic/

Latino person achieves a major goal is an opportunity to celebrate.

The canonization of the first Hispanic Catholic, the Franciscan priest Fray Junípero Serra, reminds us that there are many Latinos whose holiness and commitment have made a great difference in the United States. Venerable Bishop Alphonse Gallegos (1931-1991), former auxiliary



THE CROSIERS



AUGUSTINIAN RECOLLECTS

bishop of Sacramento, known as the "Bishop of the Barrio" for his unyielding commitment to the poor, is currently on the path to beatification. Most likely, we all know many Latinos whose lives deserve being celebrated.

In recent history many of the marches advocating for better working conditions for Hispanic/Latino farm and factory workers, or seeking a comprehensive immigration reform, are characterized by having a celebratory and religious nature. The marches often look like processions preceded by vigils, the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is almost always present, religious hymns are sung, and many religious leaders accompany their people. Marian devotions from each of the Latin American and Caribbean countries are also cause of great joy, hope, and consolation for millions of Catholics with roots in those countries now living in the United States.

During the last half century, the number of parishes with Hispanic ministry has rapidly increased in the United States. Today, nearly 4,500 parishes celebrate Mass with a unique festive spirit incorporating

the music, preaching, and expressions of Hispanic/Latino cultures. To those celebrations we must add the many expressions of popular Catholicism that also give joy to our communities and are an explicit way for Hispanics/Latinos to bear witness of their faith in Jesus Christ.

A fast-growing number of lay ecclesial movements, which are true fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit, sustain the spiritual lives of countless Hispanics/Latinos.

## JUDGE

To participate in a *fiesta* is to celebrate what is important to us as individuals and as a community. It is a profoundly human expression that demands that we be present to one another. It is interesting that the first miraculous sign in Jesus' public ministry took place at a wedding, an event that normally involves music, food and drink, dancing, and much joy. Pope Francis affirms that "an evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always. It celebrates every small victory, every step forward in the work of evangelization. Evangelization with joy becomes

### QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS



CATHOLIC EXTENSION

- Do you know a Hispanic person in your family or in another context who has done something extraordinary that deserves to be celebrated? Was that accomplishment inspired by his or her Christian faith?
- What is the biggest celebration in your faith community? Describe it. What makes that celebration so special?
- What can your parish or community do to more fully incorporate the ways in which Hispanic Catholics celebrate?
- How does your community incorporate the expressions of popular religiosity and the cultural traditions of Hispanics/Latinos as well as those of other groups? What would you recommend to the new generations of Catholics to help them better appreciate these religious and cultural expressions?

beauty in the liturgy, as part of our daily concern to spread goodness. The Church evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy, which is both a celebration of the task of evangelization and the source of her renewed self-giving" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 24).

Our liturgy, as well as the rituals of popular Catholic devotion, recognize the Risen Christ. They also affirm the new life we have received through his death and resurrection. Along with the celebration of the Eucharist, Baptism, Matrimony, and the rest of the sacraments, there are many other religious expressions that help us celebrate that God walks with us and has done great things in our lives. These include religious images of Jesus, Mary, and the saints, special celebrations within the liturgical year, such as Advent, Christmas, All Saints, All Souls Day, Epiphany (and the Spanish tradition of *la Rosca de Reyes*, a special bread that resembles a crown), Our Lady of Guadalupe, Lent, Easter, etc.

A Christian disciple is grateful for all the good that comes from God, and he or she celebrates. Today we are invited in a special way to be grateful for creation. To celebrate is to recognize that we need God and that we need to give thanks through our encounter with others in a festive way, in our achievements as well as in our failures. God walks with us. A Church that goes forth is a Church that celebrates that the



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CATHOLIC EXTENSION

Lord accompanies it, and, because of that presence, it yields many fruits.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus received grace and strength from the mysterious gift of the Risen Christ among them, and he manifested himself fully at the breaking of the bread. The parish Sunday Eucharist is exactly where we as disciples from many cultures and backgrounds receive the grace and strength to go forth to be missionary disciples. In the Sunday Eucharist, Jesus the Lord himself teaches us the Scriptures, enlightens us to recognize his presence, nourishes us by his sacrifice, and sends us forth. It is at the Eucharist that we are formed into the gift we receive, the Body of Christ. The mission he gives us depends at every turn on his grace accompanying us as we move forward.

In what way can my celebration and respect for my neighbor help me to be a Christian witness and bear fruit in our society? Do I recognize that Jesus is the reason for which I celebrate? Do I remember the poor and those most in need when I celebrate? Did I seek reconciliation with someone with whom I had a difficulty before I celebrate?

## ACT

In this last session of the V Encuentro process we reflect on our experience as missionary disciples reaching out to our brothers and sisters. We ask the Holy Spirit to inscribe the Word of God in our minds, our hearts, and our whole being. We also ask to be deeply rooted in the Church, walking in faith, love, and hope with our Holy Father, our bishops, our pastors, and all the saints as we take to heart the great command: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:18-20).

We are never alone as we go forth into the mission as a community! Christ is always present in an evangelizing community! He does not say “Go” individually, but “Go as a community!” Go without fear and without doubts for Christ will be with us until the end of time!

Doubts may linger in the heart of some lay leaders: Do I have the talents and the capacity to carry out the mission? Should this not be something I need to leave in the hands of people better prepared than me? Should I just share my faith with people from my own parish or ethnic community? No! This is the vocation of everyone who is part of the Church of Christ! The V Encuentro is a New Pentecost experience in the life of the Church of the United States, a Pentecost from which no one is to be excluded.

The Spirit moves us to be protagonists in the work of the Church in the United States and beyond. All Catholics have a responsibility to know and sustain, to the best of our ability, the local faith community: parish, movement, etc. At the same time, we are all called to live in solidarity making a preferential option for the poor and most vulnerable in the world and to support the evangelizing mission of the Church in all nations.

One way to bring our lives into action is by celebrating in simple ways, in the rhythm of our daily routines, the fact that God calls us to be missionary disciples. This week...

- Plan a special celebration with your family by preparing a special dinner, going out together, toasting with your loved ones to acknowledge the blessings from God during the past year, etc.
- Invite your relatives, particularly the young person with whom you shared this V Encuentro experience, to go to Mass together.
- Invite the group of young people or the group of people in the periphery with whom you shared during the past few weeks out for coffee or tea or snacks, or to share a meal. Invite them to an activity or a celebration in the parish—it could be the Parish Encuentro. Perhaps they are willing to go to Mass.
- Offer to help in the preparation and celebration of the Parish Encuentro.
- Use some of the missionary actions proposed in Session 4 that you might not have taken yet.
- Discern, list, and prioritize the things that we can do as a parish to grow in being missionary disciples and identify areas of priority that need to be addressed at the diocesan level.

# CELEBRATE

**With this sign we will conquer!**

 **Song:** *Guíame, Señor* (Estela García-López) or *Porque Me Ha Ungido* (Jaime Cortez)

*[Place a large cross in a central place visible to all. On a side table, place a wreath with flowers or a similar flower arrangement along with a white cloth. Each participant receives a white paper cross.]*

## LEADER 1

Sisters and brothers: As we conclude our fifth session in this process of the V Encuentro, we are called to contemplate the cross. The Church invites us to venerate the cross not as an object or as a decoration, but as a symbol of life. The cross is the greatest proof of Jesus's love, his ultimate "yes" to the Father, his seal of love for his people. The crucified Jesus is a bridge between God and humanity that invites us to follow the true way. The Cross leads to life.

## LEADER 2

We all participate in the mystery of Jesus Christ's Death and Resurrection. Saint Paul repeatedly taught that the Cross sums up the saving work of Christ. The Cross is the Tree of Life that bears fruit of new life through the Resurrection.

Let us write some of the signs of life and resurrection we have discovered as part of our journey together during the past five weeks.

*[Brief silence to write on the paper crosses.]*

Let us now place our crosses on the Cross of Jesus to share in its mystery.

*[Pieces of tape will be provided. While singing, participants paste their paper crosses on the large cross.]*

## LEADER 1

The first Christian communities reflected on the Cross as the Tree of Life. Adam had lost God's friendship because of the fruit of a tree, but Jesus restores that friendship, bringing us salvation by the forgiveness of our sins through the tree of the Cross. One of the most ancient Christian hymns invites us to contemplate the tree of the cross as the best tree, a tree for which the nails and blood of our Savior

were its leaves, flowers, and fruits: "Sweet tree where life begins!"

I invite you to turn your eyes toward this tree in awe. The Cross must fill us with awe. The tenderness and love of God for us was so great. Let us contemplate also the fruits of the efforts of Hispanics and many other Catholics who have dedicated their lives to proclaiming the Good News in the United States. Their prophetic voices and commitments are a true sign that the Cross of Christ continues to give life.

*[One or two participants place the wreath with flowers and the white cloth on the cross.]*

## LEADER

*"To be evangelizers of souls, we need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people's lives and to discover that this is itself a source of greater joy. Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people. When we stand before Jesus crucified, we see the depth of his love which exalts and sustains us, but at the same time, unless we are blind, we begin to realize that Jesus' gaze, burning with love, expands to embrace all his people. We realize once more that he wants to make use of us to draw closer to his beloved people. He takes us from the midst of his people and he sends us to his people; without this sense of belonging we cannot understand our deepest identity" (Evangelii Gaudium, n. 268).*

## VOICES FROM AMONG THE ASSEMBLY

- Lord, we bring to you the life of our families, communities, and friends; let us share with them the fruits of your Cross.
- Lord, we have shared along the way the fire in our hearts with those we have met. May we continue to be witnesses of the mystery of your Cross.
- Lord, you saved us by giving your life for us; by uniting our lives to your Cross, may we be instruments of your salvation in the world.
- Lord, you broke open the Scriptures for the disciples on the road to Emmaus to explain the mystery of your Passion; may your Word be our light on the journey.
- Lord, walking with you has filled our hearts with joy;