

SESSION 1

Called to a Loving Encounter with Jesus in the Church



CATHOLIC EXTENSION

OBJECTIVES

- Share experiences of encounter with Jesus and how he seeks us out first so we can see.
- Deepen our understanding of our baptismal call to be missionary disciples.
- Prepare as missionary disciples to give priority to those who need it most.

SYMBOLS

Blindfolds, the *V Encuentro Mission and Consultation Journal*, V Encuentro Wristbands

PREPARING THE SETTING

Before starting the session, prepare the space where the small group will meet. Arrange the chairs in a circle and place the image of a path in the center. Place the blindfolds near the path symbolizing all those things that prevent us from seeing. Ideally, there should be one blindfold per participant. There should also be a basket with V Encuentro wristbands. These will be distributed at the end of the session.

PRAYER

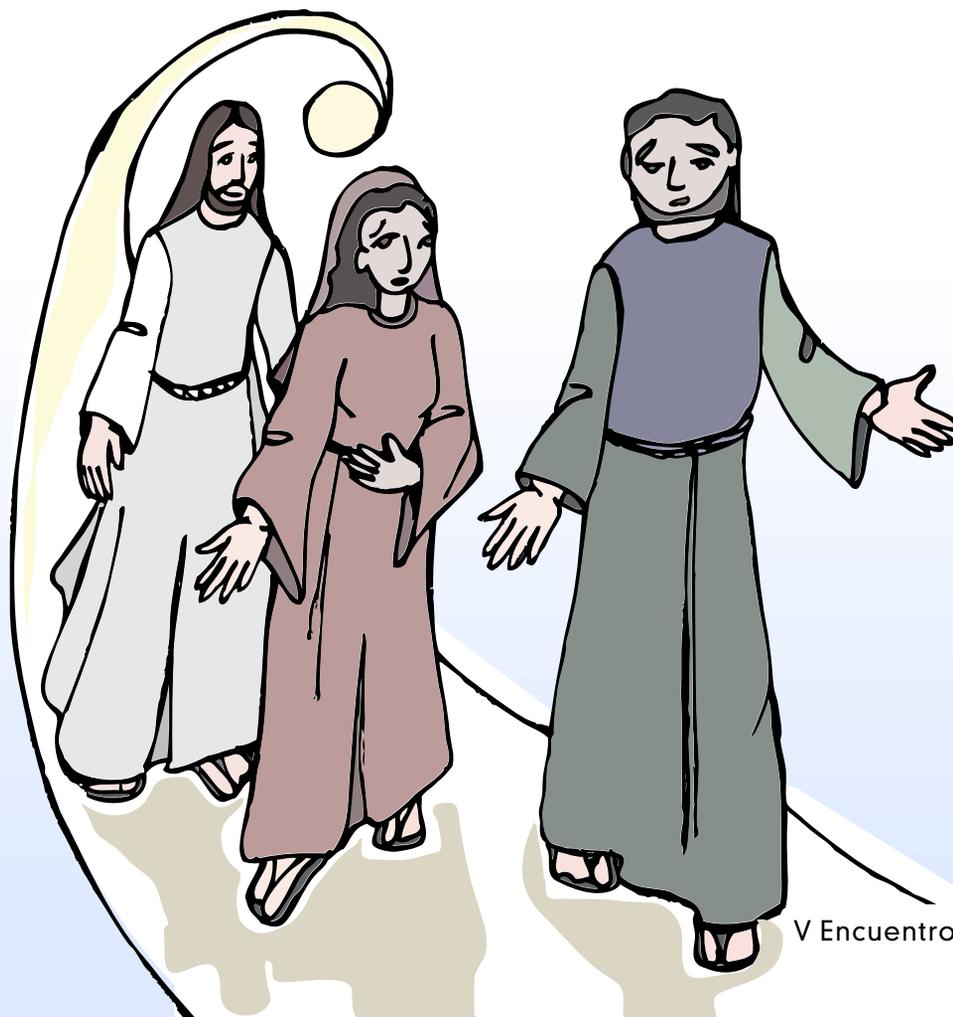
 **Song:** *Alma Misionera* and with the *Prayer of the V Encuentro*.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first session of the V Encuentro process. In these five weeks we will make our own journey with Jesus, following the various moments of the passage of Emmaus. We will also prepare to reach out to those who most need to hear the good news of Jesus and feel the loving embrace of the Church. In this first session we will focus on how Jesus reaches out to the disciples, taking the first step in coming forth to meet them.

The session starts with the following reading from the Scriptures:

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem, called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. (Luke 24:13-15)





CATHOLIC EXTENSION

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

Reach out, take the first step (Primerear)...

In the biblical passage of the disciples on their way to Emmaus, Jesus comes forth to meet these two disciples who are returning from Jerusalem filled with fear, anxiety, and frustration. Jesus actively looks at the reality affecting his disciples and inserts himself in it. Jesus knows all his disciples have been traumatized by the death of their teacher, friend, and Lord. His death deeply disturbed them and filled them with fear. Their master had been arrested, tried, and found guilty of a crime deserving the death penalty, according to the laws of the time. The passage indicates that these two disciples remained three days in Jerusalem after the death of Jesus before deciding to leave town. It is possible that, during those days, they were in hiding out of fear of being recognized as disciples of the executed one, as Peter feared when three times he painfully denied knowing and even being a disciple of Jesus. They finally decide to leave the city, to get far away from that place of death, and return to their lives, to what they were doing before following Jesus.

The first action Jesus takes in this passage is to join the disciples in their walk. With this action, Jesus takes the first step, *primerear*. He gives priority to the disciples by reaching out to them and coming forth to meet them. Jesus approaches them with deep respect in order to listen to what they are saying, grasp their feelings, and perceive their reaction to the events. He reaches out to them, and listens to them, knowing their thoughts and feelings, and how much they have endured.

The biblical narrative indicates that the disciples did not recognize the stranger who joined them along the way because “*something prevented their eyes from recognizing him.*” We do not know how close to the disciples Jesus was walking, or for how long. What we do know is that Jesus is listening to what they say, and he recognizes their gestures of discouragement and sadness. This action of anonymous accompaniment shows great respect to the mourning the disciples are experiencing due to the death of such a beloved person in whom they had placed all their hopes. Deep in their sorrows, the disciples also face the harsh temptation that they may have wasted their time by following someone who turned out not to be who they thought he was. It is very likely that it was precisely this pain and confusion that prevented them from recognizing Jesus.

SEE

The facilitator invites the group to share in light of the following questions:

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, making comments, or giving advice. The person simply listens with all his or her senses and heart.

1 Let us consider a moment in our personal history:

Share an experience in which you felt Jesus took the initiative to reach out to you. What were the blindfolds that prevented you from recognizing Jesus (e.g., tiredness, worries, the need to survive, the lack of reflection, isolation...)?

Who was walking by me? Who joined me in solidarity? Who gave me a friendly hand? Who or what restored my hope?

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

2 Let us remember how the Lord first reached (*primereó*) out to the Hispanics/Latinos community:

The history of the Hispanic community in this country has many lights and shadows. For many Hispanics, this has been an experience of struggle, both in the Church and in society (phrases like, “*estamos en la lucha*” [“We are in the struggle”] or “we are on the move” are common among Latinos).

One of the most transcendental events through which Hispanics/Latinos see God taking the initiative in their favor

is the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego, an indigenous man, in 1531. The *Guadalupe* message awakens the hope of the indigenous people in the true God, and it opens an ecclesial and human horizon in which all the inhabitants of this earth have a place. Our Lady of Guadalupe sends Juan Diego out as a true missionary disciple in order to promote the conversion of many, including leaders in



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the Church of his time. His was an announcement of hope rooted in the mystery of God who became flesh in the womb of the Virgin so as to offer his life for us.

An important moment of God’s initiative through the Church in recent time was the First National Encuentro of Hispanic Ministry, which took place in 1972. The I Encuentro was like a spark lit by the Holy Spirit in order to enliven the

journey of Hispanic/Latino Catholics in the United States. Since that time, Hispanics/Latinos have walked together as the Church in a process of Encuentro leading to conversion, communion, and solidarity. Other events in the recent history of Hispanic/Latino Catholics in which God has taken the initiative include:

- The ordination of the first bishop of U.S. Hispanic origin, Bishop Patricio Flores, in 1970.
- As of August, 2016, fifty-three Hispanic/Latino bishops have been ordained in the United States.
- The publication of the National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry in 1987.
- The celebration of the First National Encuentro for Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry in 2006.

These and other events in the context of Hispanic ministry have opened paths in many parishes and groups that decided to “reach out first” (*primerear*) to the Hispanic community by establishing Sunday Masses and other pastoral activities in Spanish.

QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

- Do you remember when the Sunday Mass was first celebrated in your parish in Spanish?
- What missionary programs or activities are present in your parish, school, or ecclesial movement that reach out to youth and families who are estranged from the Church?



ENAVE

JUDGE

God seeks us out first through the sacrament of Baptism and calls us to be missionary disciples of God's divine love.

God is the Lord of History. We were called to God's own life, and through the waters of Baptism we rose with Christ to a new life as sons and daughters of God.

Such splendid dignity makes us kings—children of a King; priests—participating in the priesthood of Christ and prophets—proclaimers and messengers of the Word of God in the world. Thus, our Baptism is an urgent call to participate in the life and mission of God. Pope Francis reminds us that, by virtue of our Baptism each member of the People of God becomes a missionary disciple (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 120). In turn, the bishops of Latin America emphasize the urgency of a missionary discipleship “so that these peoples continue to grow and mature in their faith in order to be the light of the world and witnesses to Jesus Christ with their own lives” (*Aparecida Document*, n. 16).

Jesus invites all the baptized to seek others out first (*primerear*) and gives us the Holy Spirit to guide our joyful steps. One of the most popular slogans in Hispanic ministry,

which was part of the III National Encuentro of Hispanic Ministry (1985) is “from pews to shoes,” that is, to become the Church *going forth* that Pope Francis preaches about, a Church that is always ready and willing to take the initiative toward those who have drifted away.

In the apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis tells us that reaching out first, *primerear*, means taking the initiative without fear: be the first to greet, to forgive, to listen, to show mercy, because God loves us first. This demands reaching out to others, to invite the excluded, to offer mercy, and to experience the joy of being a blessing to others. This missionary image of reaching out first calls to mind the prayer of Saint Teresa of Avila that says:

*God has no body on this earth but yours
No hands but yours
No feet but yours
Yours are the eyes with which he looks on the world
with compassion.
Yours the feet with which he walks doing good.
Yours the hands he now has to bless us.*

ACT

Taking the first step

How could we prepare ourselves for mission, what steps should we take, what gestures should we make to be the hands, the feet, and the eyes of God in the world?

Let us follow the example of Jesus in the story of Emmaus. Before joining the disciples who are on the way, Jesus actively looks at the reality affecting them and inserts himself in it. Jesus does not engage his disciples from afar. It is necessary for the Risen Christ to go to the periphery where his disciples are. That physical, political, emotional, and mental periphery has potentially turned them into confused and hopeless followers that may well share the fate of the one who died on the cross. This action teaches us to be present to the particular reality in which people live and, from that presence, to take the blindfolds off our eyes, open our senses, hearts, and minds as a preparation to receive the light of grace and a deeper encounter with one another and the Risen Lord in our midst.

Looking at our own pastoral activity, it becomes clear that we cannot actively engage reality only from behind a desk, at a rectory, or in a classroom. It is necessary to reach out to people in their daily contexts and to join them in their paths with a missionary attitude of deep respect.

In the Gospel According to (Luke 10) we see how Jesus sends seventy-two of his disciples to do missionary work, to go in pairs to preach the Good News to all the cities and places where he would go. Today, we are the disciples being sent, and the places where we should go are those where the people most in need to be “reached out to first” (*primereados*) are. We go to them so that they can experience the unconditional love and the mercy of God.

- What are some of those places where Jesus sends us in pairs today? Who are the people we need to reach out to urgently?
- What attitudes, gestures, and actions can help us encounter one another in daily life at work, school, the neighborhood, public transportation, the supermarket, the faith community, etc.?



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During this week, let us make the missionary commitment to reach out to others. To “put on our shoes” means to get into action. Let us consider where, specifically, we can start to reach out first (*primererar*), to truly be the Body of Christ in the world. Consider these three actions:

- In our daily life, reach out to the people you meet as part of your daily life, particularly Hispanics/Latinos. That includes removing the blindfold of indifference, routine, prejudice, ignorance, fear. Once we take that blindfold off, we can embrace welcoming attitudes, gestures, and actions.
- Identify a specific person you feel has a special thirst, a pain or a need, or is going through difficult moments, a person who needs to experience the tenderness of God and the love of the Church (see outline for missionary action A).
- In pairs, go to a place in the periphery where Hispanics/Latinos congregate. Spend an hour or two there actively contemplating the reality of the place. It could be a market, a neighborhood, a park, a sports activity center, the end of the day at a public school, a busy street in a town or a larger city, a place of business, a welfare office, a farm, a food bank (see outline for missionary action B).

CELEBRATE

 **Song:** *Cristo No Tiene Pies en el Mundo* (Estela García-López y Rodolfo López) or *Pescador de Hombres* (Cesáreo Garabain)

LEADER

Loving Lord, you have taken the first step and reached out to us. You have sought us out in so many ways, through so many events and people in our lives. Sometimes we have covered our eyes with blindfolds of our own making and have failed to see you. But, gently and lovingly, you have walked near us at all times. Allow us now to see and to have the courage to remove the blindfolds from our eyes so that we might see you in our daily life, in our pains and in our joys, in the life around us, in our brothers and sisters, in the thirst for you that those around us experience. Lead us to recognize that your eyes, your feet, and your hands in this world, are our eyes, our feet, and our hands stretched out for others. Others are waiting for us. Send us!

Let us now take a blindfold in our hands and reflect on what hinders us from seeing and recognizing God's action in our lives, or from seeing the need of the love of God that others have.

ALL

Take away, Lord, the blindfold of our self-centeredness, which prevents us from seeing you.

Take away, Lord, the blindfold of our worries about the future, which fill us with fear and prevent us from reaching out to others.

Take away, Lord, the blindfold of indifference, which prevents us from seeing the need to get out of our comfort zones.

Take away, Lord, the blindfold of our pain and disappointment, which prevents us from seeing you walking with us.

Take away, Lord, the blindfold of our obsession with possessions and control, which prevents us from seeing that we depend on you alone and that you are our light and all we need.

Take away, Lord, the blindfold of our doubt that prevents us from seeing you Risen, in all the life around us.

A person from the group then reads:

After this, the Lord appointed seventy [-two] others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. He said to them: "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his

harvest. Go on your way."...

The seventy [-two] returned rejoicing. (Luke 10:1-3, 17a) [and telling all they had seen and heard!]

LEADER

Now let us think of that person whom we need to reach out to (*primerear*). Let us write his or her name on a piece of paper. Let us all pray for him or her:

ALL

Lord, here are the people you love as your children, and who are in pain, thirsting for you. You send us to them, even as weak as we are. The harvest is rich. There are many good people out there, people just longing to recognize themselves as your chosen ones, your possessions. Lead us to them, Lord, and come with us on this journey.

LEADER

I now invite you to look for another person in this group and decide together where you will be going in mission.

We all send each pair on that mission and commit to support and accompany them with our prayers.

ALL

We will go, Lord, in pairs, into the place of the periphery where you send us, to seek out those you love, and those who are longing for you in the midst of their pain and confusion, who may have their own blindfolds preventing them from seeing you.

[Each pair can express where they will be going]

Now we say together the prayer of Saint Teresa of Avila and bless each other's eyes, hands, and feet with the Sign of the Cross.

LEADER

Lord Jesus, you accompany us in all our journeys, make us now aware that we are your good news, your gospel for others. You send us forth, yet you come with us. Thank you, good Jesus.

Every participant receives a copy of the V Encuentro Mission and Consultation Journal and two wristbands, one for them and one for the person they will encounter in their missionary experience.

 **Song:** *Iglesia en Salida/Church on a Mission* (Pedro Rubalcava, Alejandro Aguilera-Titus, Hosffman Ospino) and the prayer for the V Encuentro.

MISSION

Choose one action.

OUTLINE OF MISSIONARY ACTION A

Take the initiative to reach out to someone

1

Look for the best time to meet the person you have chosen to “reach out to first” (*primererar*) this week.

2

Ask simple questions showing interest in the person. Do not start by giving instructions, advice, or talking about doctrine, but by listening intently. The first objective is to join them along their journey and become attuned to their lives.

3

Create a safe space where the person feels confident expressing himself or herself without fear of being judged.

4

Provide some hope or light. Share examples from your own experience.

5

If the person has expressed a need for some concrete help, try to find contacts or resources that could be useful.

6

It might be good to extend an invitation to a parish event or to some celebration in order to get to know the person better.

7

Make sure to stay in touch.

OUTLINE OF MISSIONARY ACTION B

Going into the peripheries

1

Choose a place to go in pairs to actively observe that particular reality.

2

Find a place where you can observe without disturbing or annoying others.

3

Use all your senses to perceive the reality of the place: the persons who are present, their ages, what they do, how they relate to one another, what type of place it is and how it is taken care of; notice if there are any authorities present, what moods people seem to have, how they are dressed, what type of music they listen to, in which language they communicate, what conversations you hear, what they talk about, what is in the air.

4

Upon returning home, share with the missionary companion:

- What you observed, heard, perceived.
- What you felt and thought while you were actively observing reality.
- What surprised you or was difficult in observing reality.
- What new things you learned from this experience.
- How does it prepare you to interact with those people in a second visit to this place?