

Attendees return home from Encuentro with hopes, eagerness to share gifts

WASHINGTON — Fifth National Encuentro participants returned to their dioceses and parishes with many challenges and hopes.

Among them, they were called to share their gifts and reach out across race and language barriers in their own parish and diocesan communities; at the same time, they also urged the rest of non-Hispanic Catholics to recognize their presence and open doors to their gifts and contributions.

Carl Anderson, supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus, stressed that call to Catholic organizations and institutions. He told participants, “One of the missions of Encuentro is to tell the other Catholics in this country: Hispanics have many gifts to give you, open the doors, and let them give these gifts and do not be ashamed of their traditions.”

Hispanics represent about 40 percent of U.S. Catholics and nearly 60 percent of millennial Catholics, according to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. Over 3,200 diocesan delegates or representatives, bishops and other Catholic leaders participated in the national gathering in Grapevine, Texas, in the Diocese of Fort Worth.

While there is a more vivid awareness in recognizing the opportunities in the gifts that Hispanics can bring to the table, part of the reality is that circumstances are different from region to region and even from parish to parish, and awareness must continue at all levels, said Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas.

“It’s really a deepening of the awareness of the whole people of God, catechists, parish secretaries, pastors and diocesan structures, about thinking differently about what their local situation is to invite people in. That’s an attitudinal reality,” Bishop Flores said in an interview with Catholic News Service.

V Encuentro, as it also is known, is a sign of great progress but there is still a lot of work to be done particularly in Catholic institutions of higher education, Bishop Flores added.

The V Encuentro process has made inroads in initiating dialogues, opportunities for encounter and collaborations among Hispanics, across cultures and across ministries in over 2,500 parish communities, and more than 150 dioceses around the country. It also has identified and prepared over 25,000 new ministry leaders, according to organizers.

The call to include Hispanics in other ministries and positions within the church not limited to Hispanic ministry, was voiced out particularly among young adults.

“We need more people like us, who are not afraid to meet people where they are and to bring others into the conversation,” said participant Lia Salinas, who manages Hispanic ministry for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Many agree that the challenge is not easy, it needs deep awareness and commitment, added Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, whose diocese is over 80 percent Hispanic.

“It’s not a matter of the dominant culture just being nice and Christian and opening the doors. It’s a matter of everyone recognizing that we have in the Latino culture and the Latino tradition of faith tremendous riches that will reinvigorate the whole church in the United States,” Bishop Seitz told CNS. He adds that Hispanics must embrace their gifts and not be timid about reaching out.

Bishop Seitz is already looking into ways of adapting new concepts learned from the gathering to further recognize the contributions of this group in his diocese, particularly from Hispanic youth and young adults.

Father Jose Eugenio Hoyos, director of the Hispanic Apostolate for the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia, considers that the outreach must begin in every parish and with those who make budget decisions.

“We need to be selling the V Encuentro to every pastor, especially the English-speaking ones, because they are the ones who work with and manage the budgets.

And the Hispanic community has to learn how to give a little more, so that all these programs and dreams we have can be accomplished,” Father Hoyos said.

The contributions of Hispanic women serving as volunteers and leaders was also highlighted during the Encuentro. They were the backbone, assuring every stage of the multiyear process would reach completion in their parishes, dioceses and regions. Along the way, many more rose up as new leaders, organizers reported.

“I certainly hope that through this V Encuentro other cultures and the main culture in the United States realizes the importance of Hispanic women — they’re the ones that typically pass on the faith. Today, Hispanics are almost already half of the Catholic church in the U.S.” said Lucia Baez Luzondo, a national Catholic leader and speaker, who was also an Encuentro delegate for the Archdiocese of San Antonio.

Ana Sanchez, a parishioner of St. Patrick Parish in the Diocese of Providence, Rhode Island, captured the spirit going forward of the thousands of Encuentro participants and those reached by it.

“If we don’t experience in our own feet the presence of God’s love in us and have that encounter with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, we won’t be able to bring this light to others,” she said.

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