



# TOPIC 4 CHRIST'S WITNESSES IN A CONTEXT OF DIFFERENCES

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### CHRIST'S WITNESSES IN A CONTEXT OF DIFFERENCES

#### I. INTRODUCTION

In this theme we would like to propose some contents that allow us to deepen and meditate on the meaning of the invitation made to us in CAM6 to **be witnesses of the person of Jesus in the midst of a world characterized by cultural, social, religious, economic, and political diversity.**

In this experience of CAM6, we wish to **promote the Church's mission ad gentes with new ardor, walking together as we listen to the Spirit, to be witnesses of faith in Jesus Christ in the reality of our peoples to the ends of the earth.**

#### II. DEVELOPMENT

##### The Witnesses of Christ

John the Baptist was the first witness cited by Christ. He was the forerunner who had prepared the way for the coming of the Lord in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies (Is. 40:3-5). (Mal. 3:1). To the same John the Baptist Jesus referred when He said that he was the doorkeeper who was to open the door to the true Shepherd of the sheep (Jn. 10:1-3). We can recognize that John the Baptist is welcomed by the mission of God expressed in events and vocations that are part of the historical journey of the people of God. In Jesus, revelation and mission reach their culminating moment.

The disciples, having lived so closely with Jesus and having met him again after the Resurrection, are sent by him to offer their testimony. Mary Magdalene is sent to "go to her brothers" to announce the Resurrection. The women to whom Jesus manifests himself risen go to communicate to the apostles that they have seen him. On various occasions the Risen Jesus makes himself present in the midst of his disciples: on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13ff), when they are gathered in the Upper Room (Jn 20:19ff), by the lake (Jn 21:1ff). From these encounters in the word of Jesus, the disciples are now welcomed by the same mission.

It will be the Apostles who will have to proclaim the Gospel to the entire world, baptize and teach. They receive, therefore, the task of evangelizing. Thus, the whole Church, born of Christ's Passover, is set on mission. In Luke's Gospel, in the account of the Ascension, we find Jesus sending them out to preach "in his name conversion and forgiveness of sins" (Lk. 24:47). In Matthew's testimony, just before the Ascension, Jesus assures the apostles that he will remain with them until the end of the world (Mt. 28:30).

We too, the baptized, receive this invitation from the Lord to proclaim the Gospel by word and by the witness of our lives throughout the centuries. The Church, of which we are a part through baptism, offers the witness of Jesus, even to the point of giving her life for him.

Witnesses, men, and women, experience the transformation of their own lives through the work of the Spirit, they are receptive as far as they are willing and open to grace, and moved by the same grace they donate their own lives. Called to be witnesses of Jesus, Good News for humanity, we exercise ourselves in the constant knowledge of witness from the Scriptures and the life of the communities. In this sense, we know abundant missionary experiences in our continent, where the testimony and the surrender of life encourage us to deepen our knowledge and gratitude for them. In them, we learn that the coherence between the content of the proclamation and the way of life is the best missionary expression.

In the process that we have lived towards CAM6 we have had the living testimony of missionaries in different regions of the world that have given us keys to understand the mission today in the entire world. It is hoped that this reflection will encourage us to seek and know the testimony of the martyrs in each continent.

### **Context of differences: pluriculturality and interculturality**

The plurality of cultural forms and experiences that coexist in the complex web of life of the peoples offers us the need to ask ourselves the question about the how of the mission. The intercultural scenario favors the exchange of different worldviews and the development of processes that can break down communication barriers and reduce social, economic, and other gaps. At this point we assume that we are dealing with a complex phenomenon in itself that involves different factors. We do not intend here to develop a deep analysis of the intercultural reality, recognizing the need for a constant exercise of observation and reflection.

It seems appropriate to recall the constant exhortation of Pope Francis who invites us to study "the signs of the times" in the perspective of evangelical discernment. That is, the readiness to examine the reality around us in the light of the principles and way of life formulated by the Gospel and the Spirit that animates it (cf. FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et misera*, November 20, 2016).

### **The reality of our continent**

Our American continent is a true geographical, cultural, social, political, and economic mosaic. The variety of situations shows a clear wealth of resources that are not always fairly distributed. As in other continents, it is easy to observe the progressive phenomenon of urbanization, which is causing a real cultural and social transformation that challenges the models of evangelization. As for the interrelation of people, ethnic groups, organizations and states, it is identifiable the plurality that does not always manifest experiences favorable to the dignity of people: social fragmentation, scandals of different kinds, weakening of institutions, increase of violence, drug trafficking and organized crime, are some of the strongest experiences. The significant change in the integration of families is highlighted, as well as the growing phenomenon of migration and the accentuation of poverty.

This brief overview of the Americas reflects regional trends (inequality, violence, impunity, citizen empowerment, political alternation, indignation, and social organization) but at the



same time shows us the very marked differences between countries, and between regions within the same countries.

### **The phenomenon of globalization**

The reality and awareness that we are part of a single planet is becoming ever stronger and more evident. The phenomenon of globalization is that “web of relations at the planetary level”, which is “a sign of its profound aspiration to unity.” We are in a globalized world. This could raise some questions about how we are interrelated at the economic, social, and political levels, among others. Situations that may occur on one side of the world, in a perhaps unknown region, today touch us, affect us, challenge us on the other side of the world.

Events such as the pandemic (due to COVID-19) or the war in Ukraine, or phenomena such as migrations in various continents, the search to reduce inequalities between countries, growing awareness of the situation of poverty, repercussions of climate change, have a strong impact on us.

Our vocation to the service of the common good and our fidelity to the mission leads us to assume a responsible attitude of “going forth”, serving those causes common to the whole human family: “...the Church is in Christ as a sacrament or sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race... The conditions of these times add to this duty of the Church a greater urgency, so that all men, united today more intimately by all kinds of social, technical, and cultural relations, may also attain full unity in Christ.”

Our belonging to the mission invites us to travel the road, as people of God, open to encounter and fraternal cooperation with all those who, believers or not, are committed to the transformation of the whole reality, moving towards a full life for all.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

After having considered the strength of the testimony, the reality of pluriculturality and interculturality, and a brief observation of the continental and global reality, we dare to focus on what could be a possible response.

#### **Evolution in missionary understanding and praxis: contributions of missionary institutes.**

In the process towards the VI American Missionary Congress, the Institutes of Missiological Formation provided valuable contributions on the way forward in this missionary awareness of the Church. We gather some of their concerns and challenges: professional formation of pastoral agents, sharing of local missionary projects and experiences that can help at the international level, concrete projects that emerge from the Congresses, greater use of the virtual world for evangelization, among other challenges.

They also recommended broadening the vision and awareness of missionary identity,

integrating the contribution of the disciplines of knowledge in reflection, creating communication that transcends borders, promoting international solidarity and uniting efforts, resources, and wills to enrich ecclesial life. As challenges and proposals, the following stand out:

- To encounter and embrace the reality of the Church in North America.
- To prepare missiologically and missiologically a significant number of agents that can impact the pastoral ministry in the continent.
- Open more and better channels of communication to know the reality of the sister Churches; and
- Establish concrete and real formation plans that include missionary experiences.

### **Witnesses to Christ in interreligious dialogue**

We consider it opportune in this topic to recall the principles outlined by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue that can serve as a guide for missionary awareness:

“In their commitment to fulfill Christ’s mandate in an appropriate way, Christians are called to adhere to the following principles, especially within interfaith contexts.

1. **Acting in God’s love.** Christians believe that God is the source of all love and, consequently, in their witness they are called to live lives marked by love and to love their neighbors as themselves (cf. Matthew 22:34-40; John 14:15).
2. **Imitate Jesus Christ.** In all aspects of life, and especially in their witness, Christians are called to follow the example and teachings of Jesus Christ, sharing his love, giving glory and honor to God the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 20:21-23).
3. **Christian virtues.** Christians are called to behave with integrity, charity, compassion, and humility, and to overcome all arrogance, condescension, and contempt (cf. Galatians 5:22).
4. **Acts of service and justice.** Christians are called to practice justice and to love tenderly (cf. Micah 6:8). They are also called to serve others and, in so doing, to recognize Christ in the least of their sisters and brothers (cf. Matthew 25:45). Acts of service such as providing education, health care, primary care, and acts of justice and public advocacy are an integral part of witnessing to the Gospel. Taking advantage of situations of poverty and need has no place in the outreach of Christianity. Christians should denounce and refrain from resorting to any kind of lure, including financial incentives and rewards, in their acts of service.
5. **Discernment in healing ministries.** As an integral part of their witness to the Gospel, Christian’s exercise ministries of healing. They are called to exercise discernment when carrying out these ministries, with absolute respect for human dignity and ensuring that people’s vulnerability and need for healing are not exploited.

6. **Rejection of violence.** Christians are called in their witness to reject all forms of violence, including psychological and social violence, including the abuse of power. They also reject violence, unjust discrimination, or repression by any religious or secular authority, including the violation or destruction of places of worship and sacred symbols or texts.
7. **Freedom of religion and belief.** Religious freedom, which includes the right to profess, practice, propagate and publicly change one's religion, derives from the very dignity of the human person, founded on the creation of all human beings in the image and likeness of God (cf. Genesis 1:26). Therefore, all human beings are equal in rights and responsibilities. Wherever a religion is instrumentalized for political ends or where religious persecution takes place, Christians are called to engage in prophetic witness in denouncing such things.
8. **Solidarity and mutual respect.** Christians are called to commit themselves to collaborate with all people in mutual respect, jointly promoting justice, peace and the common good. Interreligious cooperation is an essential dimension of this commitment.
9. **Respect for all people.** Christians recognize that the Gospel both challenges and enriches cultures. Even when the Gospel challenges certain aspects of cultures, Christians are called to respect all people. Christians are also called to discern the elements of their own culture that are challenged by the Gospel.
10. **Renouncing false witness.** Christians should express themselves with sincerity and respect; they should listen in order to know and understand the beliefs and practices of others; they are encouraged to recognize and appreciate what is true and good in them. Any commentary or critical attitude should take place in a spirit of mutual respect, taking care not to raise false witness about other religions.
11. **Ensuring personal discernment.** Christians must recognize that changing one's religion is a decisive step that must be accompanied by sufficient time for adequate reflection and preparation, through a journey that guarantees full personal freedom.
12. **Building interfaith relationships.** Christians must continue to build relationships of respect and trust with people of different faiths to facilitate deeper mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation for the common good."

We conclude our theme with the following challenge: How to know the cultural, social, religious, economic, and political diversity in our own land and the global influence in our country and in the countries where we go as missionary disciples and witnesses of Christ?

## WORKSHEET 4: WITNESSES OF CHRIST IN A CONTEXT OF DIFFERENCE

### I. GUIDING ELEMENTS OF CAM6

- **Biblical text:** Jesus said to his disciples: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth". Acts 1:8
- **Theme:** Evangelizers with Spirit to the ends of the earth
- **Motto:** America, with the power of the Spirit, witnesses to Christ
- **Objective:** To promote the Church's mission ad gentes with new ardor, walking together in listening to the Spirit, in order to be witnesses of faith in Jesus Christ in the reality of our peoples to the ends of the earth.
- **Hymn:** Witnesses of the Living Christ  
Let's sing the chorus together...

*Look how they love each other! Look how they walk!*

*America, with the power of the Spirit.  
America, witnesses of the Living Christ.*

### II. OBJECTIVE FOR THIS FOURTH WORKING MEETING

Specific Objective: To reflect on the invitation made to us at the Sixth American Missionary Congress to be witnesses to the person of Jesus in the midst of a world characterized by cultural, social, religious, economic, and political diversity.

This meeting poses the necessary reflection on how to carry out missionary action.

### PRAYER FOR THE SIXTH AMERICAN MISSIONARY CONGRESS

We unite ourselves to the prayer that Pope Francis gave us for this Sixth American Missionary Congress highlighting what it implies for us in this meeting. In the highlighted fragments we can have a brief moment of silence to deepen the prayer. During or after the prayer, you can share some resonance that has touched your heart.

O merciful Father,  
that you revealed in your Son the "Good News",  
announced in these lands of America by so many missionaries, with words and deeds; help us to rediscover our vocation as baptized people to give a new impetus to our missionary action proclaiming, like them, the joy of the Gospel.

Oh my,  
that you pour out your Holy Spirit to renew the face of the earth,  
hurt by injustice and suffering;  
**GIVE US STRENGTH TO WALK AS GOD'S PEOPLE, IN SYNODALITY AND MUTUAL LISTENING, TOWARDS THE NEXT AMERICAN MISSIONARY CONGRESS, WITNESSING TOGETHER THE LOVE THAT CONQUERS THE WORLD.**

O God and our Father,  
that you chose Mary as a model for evangelization to offer Christ to all mankind;  
imitating his example of dedication, let us and sustained by her maternal and provident care, let us always be your missionary disciples to the ends of the earth.  
Amen.



### IV. ILLUMINATING TEXT

1 Jn. ,1- 1-3

*“What existed from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands touched concerning the Word of life, for the Life was manifested, and we have seen it and testify and announce to you the eternal Life, which was turned to the Father and was manifested to us - what we have seen and heard, we announce to you, so that you also may be in communion with us. And we are in communion with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ”.*

### V. BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Mission belongs to the very nature of the Church. Proclaiming the Word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. Through the scriptures we discover the testimony about Christ. This witness will be what Jesus will invite his disciples to share to all the ends of the earth. In this context Jesus presents himself as the Witness of the Father. He presents himself as Merciful, Just and Sent.

It has been mentioned above that the “ends of the earth” can be understood from the context of horizons, borders, and peripheries. Witnessing also implies dialogue with others across religions and cultures. In some contexts, living and proclaiming the Gospel is difficult, impeded or even forbidden. However, Christians have received from Christ the mandate to continue to witness faithfully to Him in solidarity with one another. The missionary is responsible for bearing witness to Christ and from there the Holy Spirit sends him to proclaim Him. This is why the missionary must recognize that the Spirit blows where He wills, as St. Paul discovered in the midst of the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-34).

The invitation to be a witness of Christ also implies having the ability to see, read and interpret the “signs of the times”. Pope Francis’ proposal is evangelical discernment. In paragraph 154 of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, he says about preaching: “the preparation of preaching becomes an exercise of evangelical discernment, where one tries to recognize - in the light of the Spirit - “a call that God makes heard in a given historical situation; in it and through it God calls the believer”. This invitation to recognize the voice of God in the midst of differences challenges us not to fall into exclusion or even exclusivity but to be able to enter into a dialogue that allows us to respond with a merciful and just heart to the reality of today’s world.

Our American continent is a true geographical, cultural, social, political, and economic mosaic. The variety of situations shows a clear wealth of resources that are not always fairly distributed. As in other continents, it is easy to observe the progressive phenomenon of urbanization, which is causing a real cultural and social transformation that challenges the models of evangelization.







### VIII. MARIAN PRAYER

Jesus gives witness of love, fidelity, and obedience to the Father, just as Mary and John keep in the same line of witness before the Son who gives his life for the salvation of the world. The context of witnessing action takes place in a world that has rejected difference and is hostile to diversity. Let us invoke Mary so that, like her, we may remain faithful in our witness.

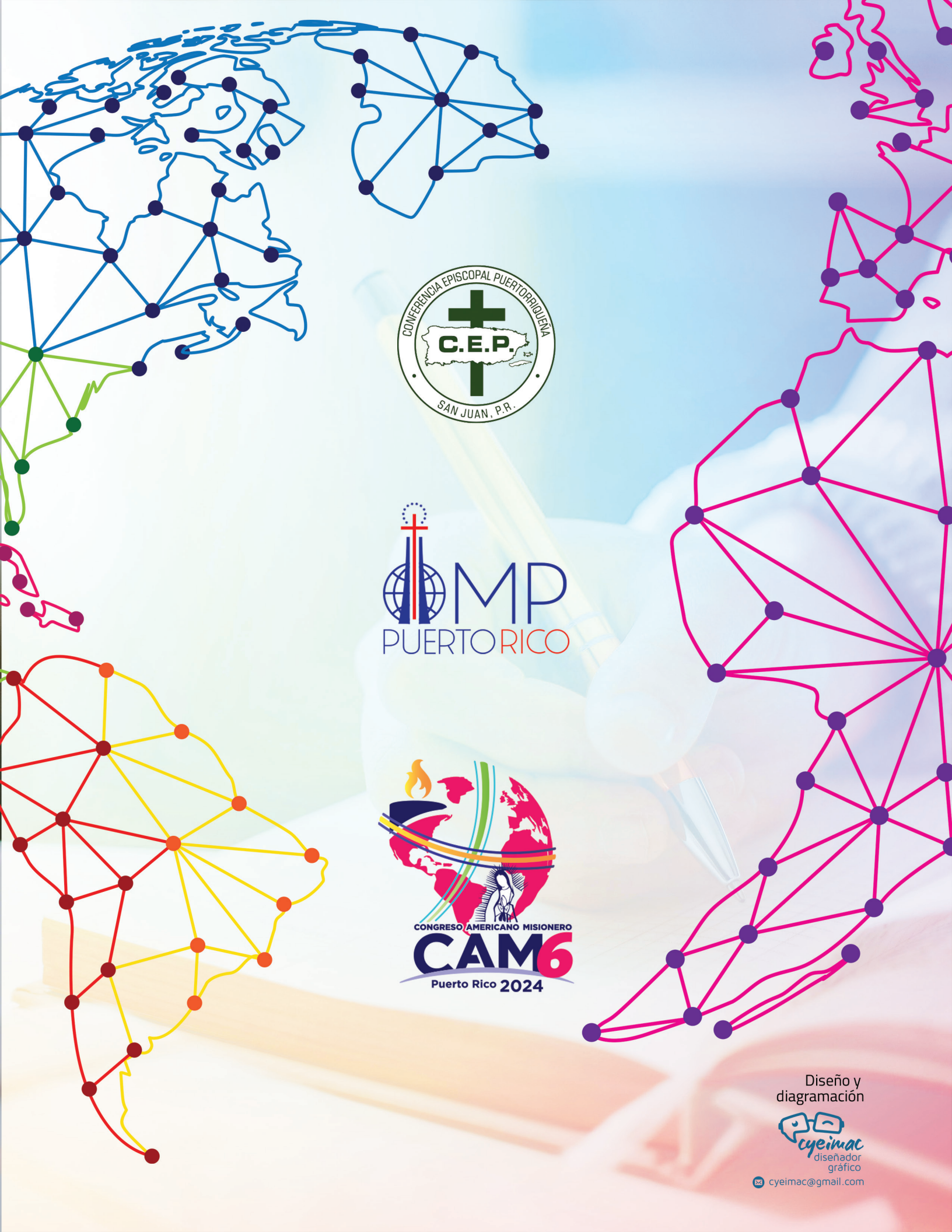
Excerpt from Pope Francis' prayer in *Evangelii gaudium* #288  
Mary, Standing at the foot of the cross  
with unyielding faith,  
you received the joyful comfort of the resurrection,  
and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit  
so that the evangelizing Church might be born.

Obtain for us now a new ardour born of the resurrection,  
that we may bring to all the Gospel of life  
which triumphs over death.  
Give us a holy courage to seek new paths,  
that the gift of unfading beauty  
may reach every man and woman.

amos po







Diseño y diagramación



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