
Mexico. A “mega” diocesan mission in the capital in response to the pandemic

A "mission" as a response to the pandemic. In fact, a "mega-mission", in the enormous urban area of Mexico City, one of the largest cities in the world, probably the one with the highest number of Catholics, although the population of the archdiocese dropped considerably a year ago after the creation of three suffragan dioceses of Azcapotzalco, Ztapalapa and Xochimilco. There are reportedly more than 4 million baptized people in the territory of the archdiocese today. Mexico City is also home to the largest shrine in the world, dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Yet there are also great contrasts, disparities, mounting secularization and, at times, sentiments of anticlericalism.

Creating a solidarity-based community at a changing epoch. In such a complex scenario, while Covid-19 continues spreading illness and death, giving new life to a diocesan mission is hard to conceive. Yet this was precisely the vision of Archbishop, Card. **Carlos Aguiar Retes**, who convened a "Megamisión", which began on October 18, World Mission Day, with a rich program that will culminate with 72 consecutive hours of activities in a few days time, November 13 to 15. *A Church event organized in compliance with the precautionary measures connected to the pandemic and, at the same time, prompted by present-day circumstances.* "Before the new reality we are confronted with today, where many of our brothers and sisters are experiencing situations of suffering, anguish and death, all of us, baptized faithful, are called to give a sensitive and supportive response, showing the face of God to those most in need," the Archbishop wrote in the letter of convocation. He added: "This season should animate us to step forth for love of God and neighbour, viewing this change of epoch as an opportunity to foster the development of a solidarity-based community that will reach out to all, making the Gospel present amidst the cultural diversity of Mexico City." **Breaking away from fear to reach out to everyone.** How will this mission be carried out and with which expectations?, SIR asked Msgr. **Luis Manuel Pérez** Raygoza, Auxiliary Bishop of Mexico City, coordinator of the mission's activity in his capacities as vicar for Pastoral Care in the Archdiocese: "The mission," he said, "was planned during the past five months, and was therefore conceived and developed in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused a health, economic and employment crisis and exacerbated pre-existing social, political and ideological conflicts. *“As Church we consider ourselves to be in a permanent state of mission. This marks the second time we experience this special event, after the one held last year, on the occasion of the extraordinary mission month.* In fact it took shape under the present circumstances. The invitation is to relinquish attitudes of closure, barriers, fear, so as to reach out to everyone, to experience ourselves as envoys like the prophet Isaiah, to share the love of Jesus in concrete gestures and words." This is naturally a very special mission: "Inevitably, many activities happen online, seeking new ways for our proclamation and our missionary service - said Msgr. Pérez Raygoza -. The approach is one of great caution and attentiveness, everything is conveyed through the web, so we are faced with a unique challenge of creativity." **Showing closeness to existential peripheries. The mission we are living is open to all, albeit with specific regard for certain categories of people and for what Pope Francis refers to as "existential peripheries".** Special efforts have been made with the youth - the Auxiliary Bishop explained - especially in view of the 72 consecutive hours we will live in a few days, in mid-November, marking the culmination of our initiative. Moreover, poverty is the permanent context of the mission. There is not only economic poverty, but also existential and social poverty, violence and abandonment. Other specific areas of care include the care of Creation and naturally, given the present circumstances, the healthcare sector, which is now in the front line. The family, currently experiencing numerous problems connected with isolation precautions, including rising unemployment, is also an area of primary concern. We should not overlook the fact that domestic violence is on the rise. Other areas of attention include disabilities and prisons, which are often neglected." An "ambassador" has been sent to each of these areas on Sunday, October 18, during

the Eucharistic celebration in the Basilica of Guadalupe. In the homily of the Mass Card. Aguiar Retes remarked that

the mission must be pursued through our witness:

"By caring for and offering a helping hand to the poor, affected by diseases, disabilities, exclusion, isolation, discrimination, we will be offering not only support, we will also be witnesses of God's love. In Mexico City, as in all large cities, there is are also vast pockets of religious indifference and secularization: "In fact", pointed out Msgr. Raygoza, "distant, hostile, and occasionally aggressive ideologies are widespread, such as gender ideology, pro-abortion and anti-clerical campaigns. But above all I see a great thirst for God. And I have great faith in the lay faithful, in many properly trained pastoral workers. I hope that in this mission we will be joyful and merciful witnesses of the love of God."

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