



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO BISHOPS OF NICARAGUA  
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo  
Saturday, 6 September 2008*

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

To receive you all together as Pastors of the Church in Nicaragua during your visit *ad limina Apostolorum* gives me great pleasure and affords me the opportunity to express my interest in your apostolic concerns and the aspirations and anxieties of the Nicaraguan people, which in these days you have vividly set before me. I am grateful for the kind words on behalf of all of Archbishop Leopoldo José Brenes Solórzano of Managua, President of the Bishops' Conference, expressing your intention to develop an increasingly close bond of unity, charity and peace with the Successor of Peter (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 22), as well as communion among yourselves in your "apostolic office as witnesses of Christ to all men" (*Christus Dominus*, n. 11).

I know of your efforts to spread the message of the Gospel in every context of Nicaragua, with the self-sacrificing collaboration of your priests and the religious institutes that are present in Nicaragua. You also receive frequent and precious help from catechists and delegates of the Word, who are a channel through which the gift of faith develops in children and illumines the various stages of life in faraway places where it is virtually impossible to guarantee the permanent presence of a priest to guide the community. The Church is deeply indebted to these people who present the Good News and Christian teaching in a fraternal spirit, personally, delivering it day after day, as is right for a message that once it is deeply absorbed is destined to become new life in those who receive it. It is therefore indispensable that these generous servants and collaborators in the mission as evangelizers of the Church receive their Pastor's encouragement, possess a profound and continuous religious formation and maintain irreproachable fidelity to the doctrine of the Church. They must be in a very special way outstanding "disciples" who are authentic teachers, who teach with the authority of Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 25), and imbue in

those who hear them a longing for the Teacher and his ministers, who make him truly present through the sacraments, most especially the Eucharist, to build, thereby, a true and full Christian community united around the Lord and presided over by one of his priests (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 75). The need for clergy with a good spiritual, intellectual and human formation recently prompted you to review the network of seminaries in the country, in the hope of thus being able to offer the seminarians of your dioceses a better formation which is always so necessary and requires closeness and painstaking attention on the part of each Bishop, never slackening in the careful discernment of candidates or the rigorous requirements that are essential in order to become exemplary priests overflowing with love for Christ and his Church. In this way it will be possible to nourish new hopes of being able to offer adequate pastoral care in important sectors such as the systematic, incisive and well-organized catechesis for children and young people, for whom you have drafted a specific catechism for Confirmation and promoted the "missionary childhood". It is to be hoped that the proper religious assistance in hospitals, prisons and other institutions may also improve.

In this regard, it should never be forgotten that the seed of the Gospel must be sown anew every time, in every epoch, in every generation, if it is to sprout and grow vigorously and if its flower is not to wither. Popular piety, so deeply rooted in your people and a great treasure for them, must also be something more than a simple tradition passively received. It should be continuously revitalized with pastoral action that makes the depth of the gestures and signs shine, pointing to the unfathomable mystery of salvation and hope to which they refer and in which God has made us sharers, enlightening our minds, filling our hearts and involving our lives. One of the great challenges that you face is precisely the sound religious formation of your faithful, ensuring that the Gospel is deeply engraved on their minds, their lives and their work, in such a way that they are leaven of the Kingdom of God, witnessing to him in the various social milieus and helping to ensure that temporal issues are ordered in accordance with justice and adapted to man's integral vocation here on earth (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 7).

This is particularly important in a situation in which, especially in recent years, social inequalities and political radicalization have been added to poverty and migration. I note with satisfaction that as Pastors you share in the vicissitudes of your people and, scrupulously respecting the autonomy of civil management, strive to create a relaxed atmosphere of dialogue, without giving up defending fundamental human rights, reporting situations of injustice and fostering a conception of politics which, rather than ambition for power and control, is a generous and humble service to the common good. I encourage you in this process, while at the same time I urge you to promote and accompany numerous initiatives of charity and solidarity with the neediest people who exist in your Churches, so that there is no lack of help for families in difficulty or of that generous spirit in so many lay people who, on certain occasions strive anonymously to obtain daily bread for their poorer brothers and sisters.

In this as in many other areas, the dynamism, devotion and creativity of men and women religious

is a treasure for the life of the Church in Nicaragua. They witness to the fact that "the more one lives in Christ, the better one can serve him in others, going even to the furthest missionary outposts and facing the greatest dangers" (*Vita Consecrata*, n. 76). May they not lack the gratitude of their Bishops or their encouragement to remain faithful to their own charism and specific mission in the Church.

The educational institutions deserve special mention, in particular the Catholic schools that are attended by the majority of Nicaraguan students. These schools carry out an essential mission of the Church and an invaluable service to society amid great difficulties and in the absence of proper assistance. The service of educators who, at times with great sacrifice, are dedicated to an integral formation that opens doors to a promising future for youth is praiseworthy. A country that seeks development and a Church that desires to be more dynamic must focus its efforts on these educators, without hiding from them the importance of the transcendent and religious dimension for the human being. Thus, I urge you to encourage teachers and strive to uphold the right of parents to educate their children in accordance with their own convictions and beliefs.

At the end of this meeting, I would like to reiterate my gratitude and appreciation for your demanding work as Pastors, encouraging the missionary spirit in your particular Churches. Please convey my greeting to Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo, to the Bishops emeritus, to the priests and seminarians, to the numerous religious communities and, in a special way, to the contemplative Sisters in your country, to the catechists and to all who constantly help you to spread the Gospel in Nicaragua. As I entrust your task to the Virgin Mary, *Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción* [Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception], I impart a heartfelt Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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