



The Holy See

**LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER
JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRESIDENT OF
THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS
IN THE UNITED STATES**

*To the Most Reverend Joseph Fiorenza
Bishop of Galveston-Houston
President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops*

I am pleased to learn that on July 6-9 next the National Conference of Catholic Bishops will sponsor *Encuentro 2000*, the fourth nation-wide gathering of the Hispanic Catholic Community in the United States. It was in reference to the specific gifts and needs of the Hispanic community that these *Encuentros* began. The decision to celebrate *Encuentro 2000* as a gathering of the whole Church in the United States draws attention to the deepest meaning of this ecclesial event. Sharing the one Baptism and proclaiming the one Lord, representatives of all sectors of the Catholic community will come together in a spirit of intimate love of the Church which, according to the Lord's will, is "a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all mankind" (*Lumen Gentium*, 1). I ask you kindly to greet in my name the clergy, religious and laity assembled in Washington for the occasion, and to convey my prayerful good wishes for the spiritual and pastoral fruitfulness of this important meeting.

In this Jubilee Year, the *Encuentro* has taken as its theme "Many Faces in God's House", and seeks to be a celebration of the rich cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity which marks the Catholic Church in the United States. The Great Jubilee is a summons to the whole household of God to rejoice in the salvation which is the gift of the Word Incarnate, and to become ever more fully the sacrament of unity in a world tragically beset by division, violence and oppression. It is significant that *Encuentro 2000* is meant to celebrate not only the faith and the religious traditions by which Hispanic Catholics enrich the ecclesial life of your country, but also to point to the important contribution which all Catholics together are urged to make to the mission of the Church

in the United States. At the dawn of the new Millennium, as the Catholic community in America takes up the challenge of the new evangelization, all are called to embody that fruitful unity within diversity which has its origin in the communion of the Blessed Trinity and is the dynamic source of the Church's mission in the world (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 2). It is my hope that the present *Encuentro*, by bringing together representatives of the many cultural and linguistic groups which make up the Church in the United States, will lead to a more effective witness to the Gospel at every level of American society. In this way parishes and local communities will be helped more and more to become places where all feel welcome and where, through evangelization and catechesis, they encounter the Risen Lord and share fully in the new life which he unceasingly bestows upon those reborn through faith and Baptism.

In the spirit of the Great Jubilee, and echoing the appeal of the Bishops assembled in Rome for the Synod for America, I ask all present at the *Encuentro* to renew their gratitude for the great gift of faith (cf. *Ecclesia in America*, 75) and to recommit themselves to ensuring that this priceless treasure is passed on in all its vitality and integrity to the new generation. Directing the efforts of the whole Church to providing a sound and comprehensive religious education will enable the faithful to appreciate ever more fully their Baptismal dignity and their lofty vocation as a leaven of holiness, justice and peace in contemporary American society. Nor must this great task of ecclesial renewal neglect a conscious and persevering promotion of vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life. As the Synod Fathers wished to make clear, "the entire People of God is responsible for promoting vocations, and does so chiefly by persistent and humble prayer" (ibid., 40).

Commending *Encuentro 2000* to the loving protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother and Patroness of America, I pray that through her powerful intercession the Gospel will take ever deeper root in the hearts of the faithful and contribute to the spiritual renewal of American society. To the organizers and to all taking part I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

From the Vatican, June 16, 2000

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