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Catholic Action: Synodality and Mission
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SYNODAL EXPERIENCES

ARGENTINA

Catholic Action Walks in History with the Whole Church, Following in the Wake of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, in Dialogue with the World

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Good morning to everyone. We give thanks to God for the opportunity of this gathering to continue journeying together, welcoming all those who wish to walk alongside us in this particular lay vocation of Catholic Action, which the Holy Spirit has gifted to the People of God—the Church—for the good of all. It is a vocation with a 160-year history.

From those early days, through the definition given by Pius XI in 1922 (*Ubi arcano Dei*), describing it as the "participation of the laity in the hierarchical apostolate of the Church," to the present day, much history has unfolded. Yet rather than aging us, this history rejuvenates us, revealing that "divine inspiration" of which Pius XI spoke as an answer to the signs of the times in each stage of the pilgrim People in history.

Today, I would like to explore with you five features of our identity: co-responsibility, diocesaneity, mission, formation, and holiness. And finally, to look together at our hour.

First: Co-responsible

Last Christmas, Pope Leo XIV told Italian Catholic Action something that defines all of us: *"The name of the association reflects its identity well: you are disciples of Jesus, witnesses of His Gospel, and fellow travelers with the whole Church."*

This is our DNA: missionary disciples walking together in the Church in communion with our pastors. Pope Francis expressed this in 2014 by stating that we are the diocesan laity living in close co-responsibility with our pastors, combining commitments within the Church with the commitment to transform society and direct it toward the good.

Thus, that definition by Pius XI is reinterpreted today through the lens of co-responsibility grounded in baptism, following the footsteps of the Second Vatican Council, which Pope Leo calls "the North Star of the Church's journey."

A co-responsibility about which Benedict XVI spoke clearly to IFCA in 2012: where the laity must not be considered mere “collaborators” of the clergy, but persons who are genuinely “co-responsible” for the Church’s being and acting.

This takes on special strength today, in the implementation phase of the Synod on Synodality, where Christians—personally or in associations—are called to make the gifts granted by the Spirit bear fruit for witnessing and proclaiming the Gospel across diverse places and cultures (cf. *LG* 12), contributing both to the life of the Christian community and to the development of society in all its dimensions. Catholic Action thus offers itself as a *palæstra*—a training ground—where we learn to journey together, build alliances within the ecclesial community, engage in fruitful dialogue with other religious confessions, and foster social friendship with society.

Second: Rooted in the Diocesan Church

To achieve this, we need concrete incarnation. Pope Francis highlighted our defining characteristic, diocesaneity: a presence rooted in each particular Church, taking concrete shape in parishes. The Church needs us because we have chosen service to the particular Church and its mission as the focus of our apostolic commitment, as Saint John Paul II pointed out to us.

We heard it in the Synod Hall at the 2017 IFCA Congress: the mission of the universal Church comes alive in each particular Church with its own unique flavor, and Catholic Action comes genuinely alive when it embraces the pastoral care of each diocese as its own, starting from the parishes.

To quote: *“Catholic Action must embrace the totality of the Church's mission in generous belonging to the diocesan Church from the parish. The mission of the universal Church is actualized in each particular Church with its own distinctive character; likewise, Catholic Action comes authentically alive by responding to and adopting as its own the pastoral care of each diocesan Church in its concrete insertion from the parishes,”* as we heard stated in the Synod Hall during the 2017 IFCA Congress.

Third: Mission

Pope Leo invites us to return to the Council documents to rediscover their prophetic nature and relevance. Let us return to them and recall that in *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 20, we find the first mark of our associative life: our end is the apostolic end of the Church itself. To evangelize, sanctify, and form the Christian conscience of people so that the spirit of the Gospel permeates every community and every environment: the economy, culture, politics, school, work—always paying heed to the littlest, the fragile, and the poor. The same document adds three other marks: that we are an apostolate of the laity, organized, and in filial relationship with pastors. When these four marks coincide, whether or not they bear this specific name, we speak of Catholic Action.

The Second Vatican Council mentions us explicitly two more times:

Christus Dominus 17—the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops—reminds Bishops to encourage various forms of the apostolate throughout the diocese…

To quote: *"They should carefully urge on the faithful the duty of exercising the apostolate, each according to his condition and ability, and recommend that they take part in and support the various enterprises of the lay apostolate, especially Catholic Action. •They should also promote and foster associations that directly or indirectly pursue a supernatural end."*

Ad Gentes 15, in discussing the formation of the Christian community, numbers among the ministries necessary for the planting of the Church the offices of priests, deacons, catechists, and Catholic Action.

Saint Paul VI spoke of our singular ministeriality: we are not an ordained ministry, but we are indeed part of the Church's ministeriality, which has been entirely service since the earliest communities. In our case, it is a ministeriality expressed through service to diocesan pastoral care and social prophecy in the midst of daily life.

For, as Pope Leo reminds us, *"the vast field of the lay apostolate is not confined to the space of the Church, but expands into the world."* The Church is present wherever her children witness to the Gospel: in the workplace, in civil society, in all human relationships. *"And this is only possible through the contribution, service, and witness of the laity!"*

That is why Pope Francis was so unequivocal: *"Mission is not merely one task among many in Catholic Action; it is the task. If mission is not its distinctive force, the essence of Catholic Action is distorted and loses its reason for being."*

Yesterday we heard testimonies regarding the contribution to peacemaking efforts, and in a few moments, we will hear about Catholic Action's contribution across diverse realms of social diaconia to help transform society toward building the Kingdom of God, as carried out in many nations.

Fourth: Formation

For this reason, Catholic Action must form a mature, committed laity, ever in heartfelt communion with the bishops. Saint Paul VI taught that formation is consubstantial with Catholic Action, and Pope Francis echoed this, telling us: *"Form by offering a journey of growth in faith, an ongoing catechetical itinerary oriented toward mission. Form for mission."*

An integral and ongoing formation that, as the Final Document of the Synod teaches us, is not merely the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, but the promotion of an openness to encounter, sharing, and collaboration; of common reflection and discernment; and of a theological reading of concrete experiences rich in lay spirituality. This spirituality is expressed in sacramental life and in prayer that places the heart within the needs, anguish, and joys of the people. *"A prayer that walks, that takes you far,"* as Pope Francis said.

In this regard, Catholic Action offers itself as a school of life in which to deploy its capacity to educate in discipleship and accompany in witnessing, in an encounter that brings together people of diverse generations—from the youngest to the elderly—as the Synod Final Document notes. In our communities, each group, according to age, offers spaces to regenerate faith in the crucified and risen Jesus, share the deepest questions and daily concerns, and discern personal and social choices with evangelical criteria, as *Evangelii Gaudium* (73) reminds us.

Fifth: Holiness

The goal of our journey is holiness, sowing in everyone's heart the truth that genuine Christian spirituality is that which sinks deep into the desire for sanctity. This journey begins in the Beatitudes and is realized through Matthew 25, by loving and working for our most suffering brothers and sisters, as Francis reminded IFCA.

A spirituality marked by contemplation that commits us to walking the path of holiness with eyes fixed on Jesus—as Saint John Paul II proposed to us as the first watchword in Loreto in 2004, when he raised our elder brothers and sister to the altars: Pedro Tarrés i Claret, Alberto Marvelli, and Pina Suriano.

How much Catholic Action knows of this! We are a school of holiness. Hundreds upon hundreds of men and women of different ages, lands, and backgrounds are inscribed or on the way to being enrolled in the Church's book of saints, alongside countless "saints next door" who encourage us in our lay vocation.

Our Hour

Finally, because we could speak for hours, let us turn our gaze to "our hour," as our beloved Blessed Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, spiritual father of this Forum, would tell us.

An hour marked by the epochal change brought by artificial intelligence. An hour of scientific and technological progress with unequal access to its benefits; of growing wealth alongside persistent hunger and poverty; of migrants; of greater awareness of caring for the planet alongside consumption habits that hinder it; of searching for meaning, of war, and of the urgent necessity for peace.

Before these signs, we are called, as Catholic Action, to be a missionary discipleship association that, in the footsteps of the Council, is passionate about the Gospel and about life, concerned for the well-being of all, and committed to building paths of fraternity to give a soul to a more just, inclusive, and supportive society.

May this Assembly grant us the strength to live out and propose "in season and out of season" this associative experience in an outgoing Church that lives the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing. "And may it show!"

Thank you very much.