News

Peruvian Cardinal Pedro Barreto Jimeno is pictured at the Jesuit headquarters in Rome Sept. 2

Peruvian Cardinal Pedro Barreto Jimeno is pictured at the Jesuit headquarters in Rome Sept. 22, 2021. Cardinal Barreto spoke to Catholic News Service about his Sept. 20 meeting with Pope Francis, the significance of the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon and the implementation of the recommendations of the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon. (CNS photo/Junno Arocho Esteves)

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The establishment of an Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon that involves both the laity and the clergy is a sign of a church that listens to God through the voice of his people, Peruvian Cardinal Pedro Barreto Jimeno of Huancayo said.

Participants at the 2019 Synod of Bishops for the Amazon had recommended forming "an episcopal organism that promotes synodality among the church of the Pan-Amazon region." Instead of creating a regional bishops' conference, however, the bishops in 2020 formed the "ecclesial" conference to include representatives of all the church's membership.

The Amazon synod, as well as the upcoming synod on "synodality," are a manifestation of Pope Francis' desire of "going from the periphery to the center as an evangelizing criterion," Cardinal Barreto told Catholic News Service Sept. 22.

"The church is moving from the periphery to the center," the cardinal said. "The message is clear, and this is not something invented by Pope Francis; this is in the documents of the Second Vatican Council."

The Peruvian cardinal, who serves as president of the Pan-Amazonian Church Network, known as REPAM, met with Pope Francis at the Vatican Sept. 20 to update him on the work of the organization, which also was involved in establishing the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon.

Cardinal Barreto told CNS that while the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon already has a juridical structure, he hopes Pope Francis will soon issue a decree recognizing the new conference, which is the first of its kind "in the history of the church."

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"All the other conferences are bishops' conferences. This one would be the first ecclesial conference," he said. "It is an ecclesial conference in which all baptized men and women can participate but, at the same time, is also part of a biome, that is, of the Amazon."

During his meeting, Cardinal Barreto said he showed Pope Francis a short video of an itinerant missionary team from REPAM working in the Amazon comprised of seven religious and lay men and women, including an Indigenous religious woman.

In the video, the team told the pope, "'Thank you for remembering us. We are very happy, very joyful and very much encouraged because now the Amazon is known in the world and we love you,'" the Peruvian cardinal recalled.

"I had the opportunity to see Pope Francis' face from up close as I showed him the video. I was so sad that I didn't have another phone on me to record it because he had a smile that I would describe as 'angelic,'" he said. "This was something that I will keep in my heart as a motivation to keep walking forward together."

Cardinal Barreto explained that the church's current focus on synodality — which literally means "walking together" — is in keeping with the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, "Lumen Gentium," and its call for a "pilgrim church" that walks alongside the faithful "through the difficulties and persecutions of the world."

While walking together "is an easy thing to say, it is very difficult, and from a human perspective, I would say even impossible," he said. "But from the perspective of faith, our lives are enriched through this synodal spirituality and each one of us participates in this walking together, discussing things like Peter and Paul did at the Council of Jerusalem."

The Peruvian cardinal also commented on Pope Francis' discussion with his Jesuit confreres Sept. 12 during a meeting at the apostolic nunciature in Bratislava. A transcript of the pope's remarks was released Sept. 21 by the Jesuit journal La Civilta Cattolica.

In it, the pope spoke about how he deals with criticism against him, including when "some people accuse me of not talking about holiness."

"They say I always talk about social issues and that I'm a communist. Yet I wrote an entire apostolic exhortation on holiness, 'Gaudete et Exsultate,'" the pope said.

Cardinal Barreto said he, too, faces similar accusations because of his defense of Indigenous people.

"In Peru, they also call me a communist," he said. "Why? Because it's about us speaking with freedom and it brings its consequences."

"I think we are returning to a church — not one of the catacombs because the church is not in the catacombs — but with the spirit of the catacombs, the spirit of the early Christians, that we should not be afraid because following Jesus was never easy," he added.

"And when there are no persecutions or criticisms, that's when we should worry," Cardinal Barreto said.