News



Gustavo Mejia, youth director at St. Joseph Parish in Miami Beach, helps carry the South Florida World Youth Day Cross during Mass Aug. 6, 2023, concluding a weeklong series of parallel World Youth Day events Aug. 1-6 mirroring those that took place in Lisbon, Portugal, for those unable to travel there. Miami Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski celebrated the Mass at the Land of the Pierced Hearts retreat center in Homestead, Fla. (OSV News/Tom Tracy)

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At a recent virtual gathering, ministry leaders in the United States and Latin American countries talked about ways to forge paths for "pastoral juvenil," or ministry with Hispanic youth and young adults.

"Jesus Christ, look upon with favor all the youth, the carriers of hope for the church and the world," Elisabeth Román, president of the National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry, prayed at the start of the webinar. "Bless the paths of discovery and discernment, amid times of joy and experiences of difficulty. ... As a church, we embark on our holy mission."

NCCHM, the Chicago-based organization Román leads, was the main sponsor of the Spanish-language webinar, which took place on the evening of April 24 and drew more than 120 viewers from 19 countries.

Hispanic ministry leaders in the U.S. and Latin America shared what their respective ministries are doing or have done to minister to young Latinos, especially efforts to help them develop leadership skills designed for them to engage in outreach and evangelization among their peers in their parishes and beyond. A key consensus in all aspects of ministry is to remind the jóvenes (youth and young adults) of the importance of faith, family, education, work and community.

The community part includes social justice endeavors, without losing sight of the spiritual foundations of church's outreach. Additionally, panelists said that spiritual retreats, service, accompaniment, and faith-based use of social media result in positive outcomes. One difference, it was noted, is that Hispanic Youth Ministry in the U.S. is often conducted in a bilingual fashion, and at times "in Spanglish," such as during social and athletic gatherings.

The virtual meeting featured several panelists and two moderators. The panelists, all leaders in family and youth ministries, included Father Fabio Antunes do

Nascimento, from Brazil; James Holzhauer-Chuckas, Benedictine Oblate from Illinois; Lorena Chuscoff and Pablo Gomez, both from Argentina; and Ligia Matamoros, from Costa Rica.

The main moderator was Felix Palazzi, an NCCHM board member, who noted the significance of outreach and evangelization to assist the young and the vulnerable. Juan Escarfuller, director of the Instituto Fe y Vida (Institute for Faith and Life) based in Illinois, served as moderator/panelist.

"I depend on teamwork — a teamwork of many talents, many identities," Escarfuller said, citing the importance of collaboration in ministering to youths and their families. "Pastoral juvenil is a vision of the kingdom of God. …There are many colors, many voices, many accents. And why do we do this? Precisely because, in part, there is much injustice against those who are different, who possibly do not talk like others. The voices of young Latinos in the United States cry out for the justice of God."

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Holzhauer-Chuckas, in speaking of his ministry work, said, "We have a wonderful team — many people who are dedicated to their work with young people, inspiring them to become leaders."

Father do Nascimento spoke of "the beauty" of all the coordinated efforts in recent years among Pastoral Juvenil leaders throughout the U.S., Latin America and the Caribbean, "by putting our hearts in the service that we do. … We have beautiful experiences in the Latin American Church, where a young person can make his path. This makes me very joyful — young people evangelizing young people."

Chuscoff, who, along with Gomez, has worked in producing Catholic-based films and videos, noted the importance of keeping up with social media and ever-evolving means of communication when it comes to increasing creativity in youth ministry. She cited the significance of ministering to youth "with love, listening and trying to understand their realities, their fears."

Matamoros, in talking of the importance of pastoral juvenil/youth and young adult ministry in her life, said, "It is in my heart; it helped me very much to grow as a

person and also spiritually." She noted that now, as an adult, she has been in a joyful position to help youths in their life journeys, their spiritual path, "walking and building together" with fellow pastoral juvenil leaders.

After the virtual gathering, Román told OSV News that April was the second month for a webinar series with the conference from Latin America and their institute (the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council, and CELAM's Centro de Formación Cebitepal, both based in Colombia). "By connecting ourselves with Latin America, we connect ourselves with the root causes of immigration; this helps us in certain ways to better pastorally serve the immigrants," she said.

Román said the dialogue with the Latin American groups was formed in 2022, in part in response to the growing Hispanic immigrant influx into the United States, and also to answer the call for synodality from Pope Francis.

The ongoing webinar series is based on four fundamental pillars: the family (March); youth ministry (April), social justice (May) and pastoral formation (June).

"These (international) formation sessions have created bridges, a means of sharing," Román added. "We hope to continue walking together in synodality, here in the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean."