



FINAL MESSAGE FROM II SYMPOSIUM OF THE VD MISSIONARY FAMILY

Greetings Family!

“The Lord has done marvellous things with us and we rejoice!” (Cf. Psalms 118). Hence, we wish to share what we have seen, heard and experienced in the II Symposium of the VD Missionary Family, whose theme has been: “A Missionary Family for all peoples.”

It seems a long time since we arrived to Medellin! On that day, we started climbing the mountain, the bus and the driver struggled with all its strength and daring to take us up 2400 meters in altitude. Far below the valley disappeared.



We climbed and climbed, it seems Jesus was taking us up to the mountain of the Transfiguration as they say: ‘climb higher and enter on the Father’s mountain.’ We arrived to the house of Saint Joseph of the Mountain and the Dominican Sisters of Presentation, where we were very cared for. With this pilgrimage, we desired to encounter with the One who calls us and with those whom we share a common charism and mission. On arrival, we were welcomed by the Colombian Verbum Dei Family in a festival full of music, laughter, new friendships, faith and reunions with old friends.



The 72 symposium participants travelled from 21 countries representing the 5 continents, forming a kaleidoscope of cultures, languages, ages and different states of life. We are a universal family that highlights an immense missionary horizon.



The first guidelines given by Lucia Herrerías, President of the VDMFa, emphasised that our missionary identity comes from an encounter with the Friend, and with a daily humble conversion: 'You are my friends if you do what I tell you to do' (Jn 15:14). She also reminds us that Mary makes us friends of God by constantly and simply asking us 'do whatever He tells you!' (Jn 2:5). She also proposed that during this symposium, we have a fundamental attitude which is simple yet challenging: to listen to God through one another because each one of us is a child of God.



After a morning of retreat and being guided by the Spirit of God, our days were filled with Eucharistic celebrations, meetings, noisy meals and prayerful silences, guidelines with an international flavour, times of prayer, moments of rest and sharing, space for laughter and conversation. All of this was surrounded by a unique setting: there below, the city of Medellin, continued to live between sun and clouds, night and lights! With this panorama, we kept listening and feeling the clamour of God for our people, so that God can call us and send us to be the Verbum Dei Missionary Family.



Each commission had a day and half of meetings followed by plenary days. These intense days which we entered in, from the point of view of how we've lived our mission in the last few years, tried to identify the essential aspects of the VDMFa Statutes: identity, mission, spirituality, commitments and vows, coordination, administration and formative process.

We were amazed by our capacity to be brief as well as our fraternal attitude to listen and welcome contributions from one another, challenges and difficult questions that do not have ready answers. From our exchanges, there were a plurality of opinions lived in a profoundly respectful attitude and environment. We experienced a sincere call to conversion and we were able to face thorny problems with maturity and encouraging growth, allowing ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit



Bathing in the communion of the Trinity, we experienced the joy of living in simplicity like the first Christian communities. In this "ecclesial family", we savoured unity despite great diversity.

The joy was constant and our hearts swelled with satisfaction with the testimony of each participant; each one is a witness of God working in so many people in our cities. Little by little and day by day, we were transformed, our horizons broaden and become more achievable.

We recognise and are grateful for the progress which has been made since the first Symposium in 2009, which the Statues were written. During this intervening period, the identity, sense of belonging and mission of the VDMFa have been consolidating in the different places where we are present. Nevertheless, we are aware that we still need to grow in awareness that the VDMF is not separated from the VDMFa but instead is its vital

core. This enhanced understanding, sometimes referred to as the "new us", highlights that all the lay missionary disciples, members of the Fraternity and the consecrated lay missionaries together form the VDMFa. We are all brothers and sisters because we are all heirs of the same gift: to be the Word of God so that many others may similarly become the living Word of God.

The celebration of the Epiphany of the Lord in the middle of our Symposium was an opportunity for gift giving. Our luggage will return home full as a result of the immense generosity of each country: pens, key rings, traditional Colombian tote bags, sweets, fans.... These will help remind us to pray for one another. The star of Bethlehem shone brightly during the entire time clarifying the road ahead and inviting us to offer ourselves as a gift to God who "was made flesh" in order to reach out to all humanity.



At the end of each day we not only experienced a fatigue filled with satisfaction but we also savoured a creative faithfulness marked with humble missionary submission. Although we know we still have far to go, we are witnesses - like Pope Francis has asked us to be- that we bring disquiet and self-interrogation to the people of our cities. We recognise that we still have much to do and many more improvements to implement.





In one evening we visited Medellin. We went to the "Los Alumbrados" the Christmas lights festival. There at North Park, we were amongst a throng of people including children and the elderly. We appreciated the beauty and ingenuity of this Colombian city that is building a future of peace and hope. We then climbed 1200 steps, taxing our physical limitations, to enjoy the Pueblito Paisa, a miniature replica of a traditional town of the local region of Antioquia, Colombia.

On return to the mountain location of the Symposium, we continued to hear the call to be the Verbum Dei Missionary Family for all peoples. Once again we discovered that our communion despite our differences is essential so that we may faithfully live our mission with a clear missionary intentionality, so as to build prayerful evangelising communities where we teach others to pray, form apostles and enable others in their turn to learn how to form apostles.

The atmosphere of simplicity, fraternity, and complementary co-responsibility, gives proof that God's dream, transmitted to us by Jaime Bonet, is becoming a reality. The Father, with His potters hand, is forming a fraternal people that live and propagate His kingdom.



We are aware of the many obstacles that our mission entails. Amongst these we wish to draw attention to: the initial announcement of the gospel to people who have no knowledge of God; the secularisation of many of our towns with their socio-political challenges; the necessity to integrate our spirituality in daily life, the lack of time resulting from overly busy lives, the significant distances involved traveling in the large metropolitan areas and the lack of customising the idea of for forming apostles in our mission. These obstacles do not demoralise us because we lean on the strength of Jesus who calls us, draws us together and sends us out to open new paths of evangelisation.

We are grateful for the life of Jaime Bonet and for those who in the long course of history, have been predecessors that enable us today to be the Verbum Dei Missionary Family for God. We are also grateful for those who organised this symposium. We are grateful to you for your prayers and your interest these days of the symposium. The more than 25,000 internet hits on social media, radio and web page, the virtual accompaniments for this symposium, have made us know and feel that we are united in a single missionary family, spread across all the corners of the Earth. We are also grateful to Monseigneur Edgar Artizábal, auxiliary bishop, who during our closing Eucharistic celebration, encouraged us by reminding us that our mission is in fact God's mission.



Now, as we prepare to leave and return to our communities, we wish to imitate Mother Mary and ponder in our hearts all we have lived here in Medellin. She accompanies us on our intense missionary undertakings and she invites us to pray together to the Father: we pray for fidelity to our charism as we live deeply our missionary spirituality; we ask that all those who are called by the Lord to be Verbum Dei find their peace of belonging in the VDMFa; and we ask that we would welcome with generosity the call to be God's instruments so that He may continue to work out His story of salvation.



We bid you farewell and hope we meet again soon. Courage Family, let us bring the fire of the Holy Spirit to all humanity!



Members of the II Symposium of the VDMFa, Medellin 2017