



## **ANTILLES EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE**

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### **MEDIA RELEASE FROM THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS of the ANTILLES EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE following the 67<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL PLENARY MEETING**

Becoming a Synodal Church is the mandate of the Church in the AEC region. At the 67th Annual Plenary Meeting, held April 23-28, 2023 in Aruba, the AEC Bishops committed to transform the church at every level to reflect the call to synodality by Pope Francis. This commitment to walk together shaped both the agenda and the approach of the entire meeting where Sexual Abuse, Crime and Violence, and Solidarity with Haiti were discussed.

#### **Sexual Abuse**

Father Gerard McGlone of the Society of Jesus (Jesuit) led the bishops through a day of retreat and a study day on the topic of sexual abuse within the church. He questioned: "How can this crushing scandal transform the church so that it can once again be meaningful to the world?" He used Ronald Rolheiser's article "On Carrying the Scandal Biblically (2002)" as a reference document.

The image presented was that of Mary and the Beloved Disciple standing under the cross of Jesus (Jn 19: 25-27). This is a biblical way of expressing Mary standing in the suffering of Jesus. The prophecy of Simeon was that a sword would pierce her soul (Lk 2:25). She did not protest, she did not say anything, she just stood there. Standing still is a sign of strength.

What does it mean that she pondered all this in her heart? It means that she endured and transformed everything so that she did not repay in kind. The church must not now run away from the suffering that has been caused. It is good that the church feels helpless under the cross, without power or prestige. By feeling the pain of the victims, we will find ways to meaningfully address this greater evil of pedophilia and other forms of sexual violence around the world. Our first responsibility remains the victims, and the first act of love is to listen. Listen to what they have to say to us. Like Mary, we must stand in love, pierced by the horror we witness.

### **Crime and Violence**

The AEC Bishops congratulated our Government leaders for their declaration on Crime and Violence. By raising this issue to the level of a Public Health Crisis, they have shone a bright light on this matter that essentially needs the whole of society to bring about the required solutions. Every one of us needs to work together, listen to each other, especially to the most vulnerable communities, to find the solutions that are necessary. This is the time to put our differences aside and unite against the common enemy—crime and violence.

### **Solidarity with Haiti**

We met virtually with the Episcopal Conference of Haiti, represented by President Most Reverend) Launay Saturné and four other bishops who spoke about the dire situation in Haiti where crime was rampant and spiraling out of control. They lamented that although international leaders had convened many meetings focusing on Haiti, there was still no plan that resulted in a reduction in crime and the senseless violence. The major immediate challenge was national security, which affected everything and everyone. According to the President, “We need help in appealing to the countries whose guns and ammunition enter Haiti. There are over 600,000 illegal weapons in Haiti. We need these reduced to secure our nation.” There is no easy solution.

Regarding education, pastoral care and integral development they said: “We need your support. We need synodal support and care”. There was great gratitude for the meeting and for the contact between the two Conferences of Bishops. The AEC Bishops committed to work together to unite the voices of all the Conferences of Bishops in the Caribbean—Haiti, Puerto Rico, Cuba and the AEC, and Latin America to advocate for support for Haiti.

### **Changing of the Guard**

The Bishops of the AEC Conference thanked the outgoing Executive—Archbishop Gabriel Malzaire (President), Archbishop Jason Gordon (Vice President) and Bishop Gerard County (Treasurer).

After the scheduled election process, welcome was extended to the incoming Executive: President Archbishop Jason Gordon, Vice President Bishop John Persaud and Treasurer Bishop Robert Llanos. They were given the mandate to lead the Bishops into a synodal way, inviting the whole people of God to deep listening while walking together.

**END**