

Montfortians Without Borders ON THE WAY TOWARD **Mexico**

FINAL REPORT



*"Go from your country and your
kindred and your father's house
to the land that I will show you."*

Gen. 12,1b.4a

México





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On the way to toward Mexico
Final report

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Introduction

It is with joy that we can present this final report from the mission that was given to us by the Superior General, Father Luiz Augusto Stefani: to visit Mexico and to gather the necessary elements for a community discernment about a possible new mission. The mission's goals were achieved. The Missionaries of the Company of Mary, the Montfort Missionaries, can found a mission in Mexico. Three dioceses have opened their doors to us and are awaiting the results of our discernment. Each diocese has its own characteristics and is different from the others in all the possible ways imaginable. Fundamentally, this document has three parts;

- The first part describes some history of Mexico and also a look at Mexico today. It was a lot of work and observation, questioning and reading. The undertones of everything need to be understood in the context of Mexico's own idiosyncrasies, the phenomena of Guadalupe, and the impact of migration. This comes directly from what was taught to us by the Comboni Missionaries.
- The second part is a chronology of each day that the team was in Mexico, from the first day we gathered until the day we all returned home. Here are the moments when we were searching and learning, of action and reflection, discernment and prayer, rest and work.
- Finally, the last part is an explanation of our discernment process and the results that have come from it.

We are thankful for the confidence placed in us. It was a beautiful experience. But we don't want to move on with this report without first expressing our sincere gratitude to the Sons of Saint Daniel Comboni (the Comboni Missionaries), and in a very particular way to Father Enrique Sanchez, provincial, and to his bursar, Fr. Guillermo and to Fr. Erasmus. We cannot forget the words of Bishop Jaime and his moral support. May God bless each of them. The warm welcome, fraternal atmosphere, openness and commitment allowed us, with God's help, to reach the mission's objectives.

Let us not forget to keep this mission, and that of Vietnam, among our prayer intentions. May Our Lady of Guadalupe cover us in her protective cloak.

Presented, on the feast of St. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort 28 April 2018.

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1 Overall Context of Mexico

1.1 Generalities



1.1.1 Names, Territory and Population

The official name of Mexico is the United States of Mexico. It is the southern most country of North America and its capital city is the Capital District of Mexico City. It is the third most populated city of the world, with over 21.5 million inhabitants. Mexico City is superseded only by Tokyo and New York City, with 31.2 and 30.1, respectively. Politically, the country is a Democratic Republic with representative and federal divisions in 32 states plus the Capital District.

The territory of Mexico covers more than 1,964,374 km² and it is the 14th largest country in

the world (by landmass) and the third largest in North America. It's northern border is 3,155 km with the United States of America; its southern border with Guatemala consists of 958 km and 276 km with Belize. The coasts of this country are bounded by the Pacific Ocean on the west and both the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea to the east and these range more than 9,000 km and this makes it the third largest coastline in North America.

Mexico is the 11th largest country in the world by its population. The total population is estimated to be around 127 million persons in 2017. The majority of these people speak Spanish as their mother tongue even though the State recognizes more than 67 indigenous languages across the

nation. Throughout the country the people speak more than 287 languages or dialects that come from the diversity of its population. Mexico is the largest Spanish speaking country in the world and the 7th among the nations of the world with such a large diversity of languages.



1.1.2 Climate

Mexico has a very large diversity in its climate. Geographically it is divided into two separate regions across the Tropic of Cancer. This parallel allows for two diverse climates: one more tropical than the other which is moderate. And we cannot overlook the influence of the oceans on the way each of these climate zones has been shaped and configured.



1.1.3 Education

The tradition for education in Mexico is among one of the oldest in the world, having its roots in the Aztec Empire. The Aztecs were the first civi-

lization that obliged its citizens to participate in universal education, although the students were divided by sex.

The constitution of Mexico, Article 3, establishes that the State will impart education for free to preschool age children, and then in primary, secondary and upper levels of instruction. This is obligatory and is the reason that the Secretariat for Public Education was established on October 3, 1921.



1.1.4 Transportation

By 2008 more than 366,100 kms. of roads were being used in Mexico. Of these, more than a third are just simple roads that have a covering of asphalt. But more than 10,000 kms of four-lane highway exist in all of Mexico. All of the roadways in Mexico are federal roads. Yet, these are managed by different consortiums. These are operated by SCT and have no cost to use. On the other hand, more than 40,000 kms are maintained and controlled as toll roads by CAPUFE; what is collected is later reinvested into the roadways and their regular maintenance. Some of these high-speed roads are very expensive, especially the road from Mexico City to Toluca, or the Autopista del Sol which connects Mexico City with Acapulco's ports. The problem and the huge disparity of movement and transportation in Mexico is clearly seen in Mexico City. It's possible that a resident of Mexico City spends six hours of the day traveling to and from his workplace.

1.1.5 Food



The famous flavors of the Mexican kitchen have their origins in the period of Spanish colonization when there was a mixing of ingredients from Spanish style cooking and that of the indigenous people. Indigenous food sources have given us corn, chili -or better known in the Spanish speaking world as ají-, beans, pumpkin, avocado, sweet potato, tomatoes, cocoa, turkey, and a wide variety of fruits and condiments. Even today, prehistoric cooking utensils and techniques are used in kitchens around the world. For example, the making of tamales from corn, cooking in earthenware pots, and the grinding by hand of spices and other condiments. The Spanish brought to these combinations the choice of meats like pork, beef and chicken; hot peppers and sugar; milk and all of its derivatives; wheat and rice; citrus fruits; and a constellation of other ingredients that form part of the daily diet for the Mexican people.

Over the millennia the mixing of foods and cultures has given birth to a host of “new” things for us to enjoy. El pozole, mole, barbecued foods, tamales (today we follow the ancient recipes!), a wide variety of breads and grains, tacos, and a wide assortment of appetizing foods. Many distinct beverages came from this region of the world too, like atole, chapurrado, and fruit sweetened wa-

ter; a sampling of desserts like acitron, and other hard candies that have been created and cultivated by scores of nuns during the course of the last few centuries. Without a doubt, one of the most widely recognized sweets from Mexico is chocolate, which was an Aztec drink. Partly for this reason that, on November 16, 2010, Mexican gastronomy was recognized as part of the Cultural Patrimony of the World.

1.1.6 Idiosyncrasies

Warmly and with hospitality, Mexicans welcome strangers who arrive in these lands, without worrying too much how to communicate — quite often, hand signals and gestures are enough! — and they are able to figure out what their guest needs and wants.

Another very typical trait is the gentleness of the Mexican people, sometimes to a fault. At times they don’t seem able to say “no.” Instead, they resort to using indigenas phrases and expressions, or making nonsensical talk that, in the end, leaves one wondering what he really said or wanted to say.

Shrewdness and sharp wit are almost a national patrimony. From childhood, Mexicans learn that, in part, life’s survival consists in being more cunning than others, even taking advantage of them and trying to “get over” on someone. By simply talking in confusing ways, all the way up to the most blatant corruption, they are able to protect themselves well.

Their great sense of humor is another trait of the Mexican people. Many people are crude, and they laugh easily. They make fun of everything and are able to laugh easily at

themselves; sometimes they laugh so hard that they cry. Ironically, this kind of sarcastic reaction is often a counter-response to the daily reality they face.

Family is the base of Mexican society. In general, men are more concerned about the outside world, the larger culture; women are the cement that holds the family unit together; she is the sap that gives life to the tree. Even despite the huge exodus toward the United States, millions of homes are sustained by the women. And the prototypical

Mexican woman is the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mother of the Mexican People.

Parties and family gatherings could never be so popular for the Mexican people without good food and drink. That's part of the reason why the gastronomic tradition is so widely famous. It possesses a vast gambit of colors, seasonings, ingredients and unique dishes that conquer so many people, and are obligatory rites of passage for anyone trying to inculturate himself into the Mexican way of life.

1.2 Politics

The governmental system of the United States of Mexico is democratic, federal and lay. Its executive system that is based on a president who is the head of state, and their system consists of many political parties.

Three political parties have been dominant for many years: The National Action Party (PAN, for

its abbreviation in Spanish); the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD); and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). This last is the oldest of the dominant political parties and it was established in 1929 under the name National Revolutionary Party (PNR) but changed its name in 1936 to the Mexican Revolutionary Party (PRM) and later to the PRI in 1946.



1.3 Mexico's Economy

The distribution of wealth in Mexico is far from equal, and the disparity between rich-and-poor is enormous. Mexico is the tenth largest exporter in the world and recently it is being considered as an emerging economy. This title is given to those countries whose economy has seen continued growth for a period of years. The largest part of its economy is based on trade and commerce with the United States of America, which consumes more than 85% of Mexican exports and gives work to more than 10% of the total population. The money transfers (remesas, in Spanish) from the US and other international migrants form the second most important element of the Mexican economy's income stream, after petroleum.

In macroeconomic terms, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the 14th largest in the world and the 11th for the capacity of each person to produce. On a regional scale, it is the second largest economy in Latin America and the fourth largest on the continent. According to the United Nations' 2015 report on human growth, Mexico occupies 77th place among all the countries of the earth, equal to growth in countries such as Indonesia, Turkey, Thailand and South Africa.

1.3.1 Petroleum

The petroleum industry in Mexico is completely controlled by the state-owned company, Pemex (Petróleos Mexicanos), the world third largest producer of petroleum. Worldwide, the Mexican distributor, Hispanoamérica, is considered to be the sixth largest in sales.

In February of 2009 DeGoyler and McNaughton, Netherland & Sewell and Ryder Scott each certified that Mexican consortium of Chicontepec has reserves comparable to half of that in Saudi Arabia, and this put Mexico as the third largest country with domestic oil reserves (behind Saudi Arabia and Canada). Mexico lacks the infrastructure and equipment needed to exploit fully these reserves.

1.3.2. Tourism

Tourism forms an essentially important part of Mexico's economy and it is one of the most no-



table countries to visit. Mexico is the 13th largest country for international arrivals and tourists, having welcomed 23.4 million tourists in 2011 and 2012. It is the leading country for tourism in Latin America and the eighth most visited in the world. This is owed, in large part, because of the 32 different cultural and natural sites which UNESCO considers part of the Patrimony of Humanity. In this sense, Mexico is first on the continent and sixth worldwide.

1.4 Religion



1.4.1 Roman Catholicism

Mexico is the second largest country in the world with a Catholic population, following Brazil. Following Mexico are the Philippines and the United States of America. Despite this large percentage of Catholics, the state is considered civil after the separation of Church and State under the 1857 Constitution and ratified later in its 1917 Constitution. Until the middle of the 1990's there was no officially recognized religious institutions.

But in 1993 the State recognized the existence of religious associations and this allowed for the opening of diplomatic relations with the Holy See (before that, the Vatican was not recognized officially in Mexico as a political entity).

The largest part of the Mexican people consider themselves Christians and among them the largest grouping are Catholics, 110.9 million according to the 2017 Anuario Católico. Only in the second half of the 20th century was there an increase of non-Catholic Christian communities.

1.4.2 Different Christian Groups

The second largest group of Christians in Mexico are the Jehovah's Witnesses. With about 1 million members in Mexico this is the second largest branch in the world of the Witnesses.

The third largest grouping of non-Catholic people is within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons). Following the Mormons, we see the Church of the Light of the World, based in Guadalajara. We cannot overlook the significant presence of evangelical, or Pentecostal, churches throughout Mexico, especially among the indigenous peoples and along the border regions. Some counts place the number of evangelical Christians around 1.3 million members which, in raw numbers, makes them the second largest Christian community (the others being larger by grouping and organization).

1.4.3 Other Religions

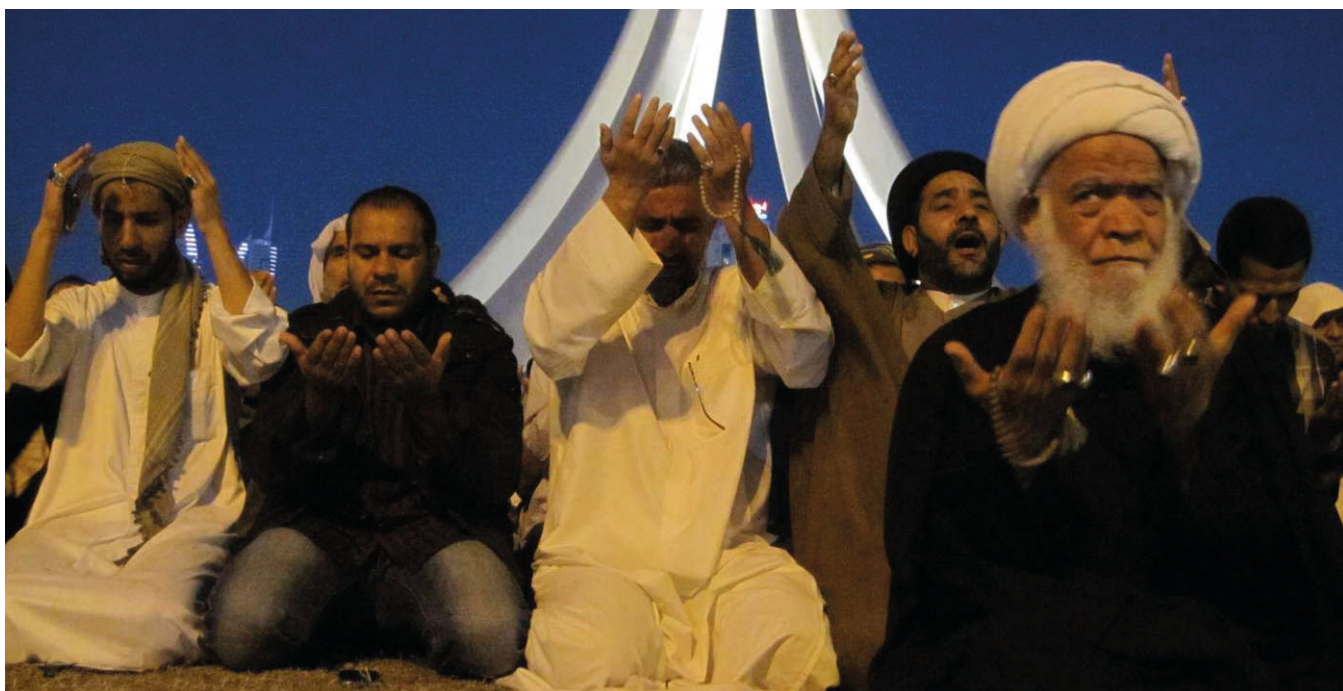
Santeria has grown in popularity in recent years although it is an ancient, syncretism found in Mexican culture.

Still there are many millions of people in Mexico that consider themselves as non-religious. Some estimates place this number around 2 million people of the 84 million over the age of 5 years.

In the minority we can find some religious practices most significantly among them are those who follow Islam which rapidly is increasing. Those who practice Islam number around 18,000 and come from countries like Iran, Iraq, Indonesia, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Morocco, Chile and Spain.

Though the number is not exact, there is a large presence of people who align themselves as Jewish. Some estimates place this number around 67,400, mostly found around Mexico City. Other pockets of Jewish communities are found in the cities of Veracruz, Cancún, Monterrey and Guadalajara.

We find in the cities, mainly, growing numbers of people who practice Buddhism, Hinduism, Islamic Sufism, Sikhism, Hare Krishna, Universalist Unitarianism, and Rastafari's. Popular religions are still widely practiced, and this is part of the self-identification of the Mexican people. One of the key aspects of the regular practice of Catholicism in Mexico is this element of prehistoric and





Day of the Dead, whose reenactments each year pose a real challenge to the pastoral plan of the Catholic Church.

1.4.5 The Phenomena of Our Lady of Guadalupe

The phenomena of Guadalupe began in 1531 and is a transcendental event for the history of the Church in Mexico. Thanks to the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to the indigenous St. Juan Diego, the population of the Valley of Mexico at first, then gradually throughout the rest

of the country, was converted by the preaching of the Franciscan Friars, leading to what we know today as Mexican Catholicism. After the Franciscans arrival came the Mercedarians, then the Jesuits who helped the whole process of evangelization grow through the use of their colleges. Today, on the 12th of December each year, the celebration is not only one of the Church but of the whole of Mexican society as an expression of their particular identity.

African and Asian influences. We see this most clearly in the practice of the Cult of the Santa Muerte (the Holy Death).

1.4.4 The Cult of the Santa Muerte

There is a long history and evolution of the history of this cult, but it can be basically divided into two stages. The earliest and largest stage of evolution was pre-Hispanic, and then passing into the colonial period until the middle of the 20th century.

Since 2005, though, there has been an ever-decreasing amount of legal permissions granted to the practice of this cult by the Secretariat for the Governing of Mexico (SEGOB), because of 'grave detours from the ends to which it is established in the statutes of the law under the Religious Associations and Public Cults in Mexico. The movements within this cult consist of rituals, the imposition of curses and spells that have nothing to do with religion but are more esoteric, tending more toward black magic than anything else. Even so, there are a large number of practicing Catholics who follow the Santa Muerte and who don't see any contradiction in their worship of the Blanca Niña (Little White Girl) and the worship of God.

Finally, we can see strong representations of faith in the celebration of the Passion of Christ and the

1.4.6 Synthesis of the Apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe to Juan Diego December 1531

The apparitions of Our lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego, the miraculous imprinting of her image on his cloak, and her message of love for us had as its principal goal the proclamation of her most adorable Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, to the people who inhabit "in the New World."

First Apparition: early morning hours of Saturday, 9 December

Juan Diego heard the singing of the birds. They were calling his name; and he climbed to the top of the hillside named Tepeyac where he sees the Little Girl. She ordered him to go to the Bishop and ask him to build a Church there, on the plain. "My Little Boy, whom I love so much: I am



the perfect and ever Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God...., how I desire that you help build for me this temple...And in that place I will always be ready to hear the cries of the people, of their sadness, in order to help cleanse and to cure all of the different afflictions, pain and sufferings."

Second Apparition: about 5:00 PM on Saturday, 9 December

Juan Diego returned to the hilltop and gave an account of the Bishop's incredulity, and he asked for her to choose another messenger. But the Virgin Mary only confirmed his mission and sent him back to the Bishop on the following day. "My child, you are the least significant: it is indispensable that this be revealed through your intervention. I strongly pray that it is you, and I order that tomorrow you go and try again to see the Bishop. And make sure that he receives you an understands my wish that he build a church here."

Third Apparition: Sunday, 10 December nearly 3:00 PM:

Once again at the hilltop, Juan Diego recounted his conversation with the Bishop. And, once again, the bishop did not pay attention to him. This time he said that heeded another sign to help him believe that this was true. "That's alright, my

child, my most beloved. Tomorrow you will come here and then bring to the High Priest the proof, a sign he asked from you. Through this sign he will believe you, and no one will doubt what you are saying." But the next day he could not go because his uncle, Juan Bernadino, was very sick.

Fourth Apparition: Tuesday, 12 December, very early in the morning.

Given how sick was his uncle, Juan Diego set out early in the morning of 12 December to look for a priest. He went around the hillside so that the Virgin Mary would not see him. But she met him anyhow; her words comforted him about his uncle's illness. "I give you all assurance that he has been cured." She sent him to the hilltop to gather roses, a sure sign that she would give. When he returned, she said to him, "My dearest child, these different flowers are the proof, the sign that you will bring to the bishop. For my part, I wish that you tell him what I desire, and that he comply with what I wish."

Fifth Apparition: Tuesday, 12 December, that same morning:

At the same moment as she was appearing to Juan Diego, Mary also appears to Juan Bernadi-

no, his uncle, in his home and cures his illnesses. She also revealed her name to him and appeals that, from this moment and forever, “at her precious image everyone refer to her always as, ‘the Ever-Virgin Mary of Guadalupe.’”

The Image Imprinted on his Tilma: Tuesday 12 December, around noontime:

In the house of the bishop, Fray Juan de Zumárraga, Juan Diego shows him the roses that he brought in his cloak as a sign from the Virgin. “He opened his tilma, in which he carried the roses, and at the same time there appeared the image of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. This is the same as we venerate today in her chosen place, the temple at Tepeyac.”



1.5 Present Day Problems

1.5.1 Poverty

The experience of poverty in Mexico is very pervasive. It involves nutrition, clean drinking water supplies, housing, education, healthcare, social and mental security, the quality and basic services for peoples' homes, income levels and social cohesion according to the definition of “social growth” among the laws of the country. It is divided into four categories: moderate, relative, absolute and extreme poverty.

According to the World Bank's international standard for poverty, just less than 50% of Mexico's population lives below this level. The same calculation sees that 38% live at moderate poverty and 0.1% lives in extreme poverty. This leaves 42% of Mexico's population living below the national poverty level.

1.5.2 Migration

For quite a few years the high level of poverty among the rural poor has provoked a crisis of migration into the cities which have been seen as paradises for growth and opportunity. The result is a series of unequal scenarios: insultingly high levels of opulence and ostentatious lifestyles; the other, scandalous levels of poverty and misery.

The massive migration toward the United States is one of the factors that has led to a shredding of the fabric of society throughout the country. There are estimates of 22 million Mexican persons living across the northern border.

1.5.3 Kidnapping

The phenomena of kidnapping has increased in Mexico on an almost daily pace. It effects nearly family in Mexico, from all levels of society. Everyone lives with this threat in their daily life because the young people, who mainly commit this crime, live with a high degree of impunity.

Kidnapping has become its own industry in Mexico, and the victims can be from any economic strata. The era when only the wealthy, or owners of large industrial businesses, were the ones being kidnapped has long passed. Today the reality is such that every family has to be wary of kidnappers. Ransoms are no longer simply a few million pesos but are exorbitantly high amounts from 20 million to over 500 million pesos. From the perspective of a kidnapper, it is highly more lucrative to detain 15-20 persons a month instead of the old method of one or two persons a year. Kidnapping is experienced in the whole of Mexico. A victim can be chosen simply because he owns a vehicle; the ransom him the family is often obliged to sell everything as quickly as possible to pay what is demanded.

1.5.4 The Drug Trade

The war against drug trafficking is an armed conflict within Mexico between the State, some local defense associations, and the cartels which control the different illegal activities, principally the traffic of illegal drugs. This situation became official on the 11 of December 2016 when the federal Government accounted operations against organized crime in Michoacán State, where, since 2006, there had been more that 500 persons assassinated at the hands of the drug cartels. To combat this, the Mexican government has chosen to use its military which include the Federal Police, governmental security services, local police units, and parts of their armed and naval forces.

The largest cartels are the Sinaloa, el Golfo, Los Zeta, Los Caballeros Templarios (The Knights Templar), Jalisco Nueva Generacion, Cartel de

Juarez, the Organizacion Beltran Leyva which controls the City of Mexico, and the Familia Michoacán.

Statistics from the Federal Secretary of Public Safety reveal that over 121,199 persons have been detained since 2006 who have all come from different parts of these organized crime families. Large numbers have come from the Golfo and Zetas groups. Few of those who have been detained have received any sentence.

Between December 2006 and January 2015, it is estimated that these gangs have killed more than 80,000 people either in conflicts between the gangs or with the security forces, or via execution. The number includes gang members, security forces and civilians. Among the civilians who have been killed there is a high number of journalists, human rights workers, and many others who remain unidentified. To show the disparity and uncertainty in defining this problem, other sources say that at least 150,000 have been killed.

1.5.5 Corruption

Traditionally, outside analysts have considered corruption to be the number one problem facing Mexican society. Surveys taken since the beginning of this century reveal that corruption has negatively affected political legitimacy, administrative transparency and economic efficiency, notably in the area of giving account for accounts and funds that come from within the country and from outside sources.

The roots of corruption in Mexico are deep and extensive, grown over centuries. What began as a practice among the political elite to consolidate their oligarchy via the means of an authoritative and repressive governmental system.

In 2017, during the polling for the Index of the Perception of Corruption, Mexico was ranked as 35th most corrupt in the world (the ranking of this is based from 0-Most Corrupt, to 100-Least Corrupt).



2 Our Visit in Mexico

2.1 From Wednesday 3 April until Friday the 6th of April

The team mandated to begin the exploration in Mexico (Father Harry Flores Morales from Nicaragua; Brother Jean Desire Rakotonandrasana from Madagascar and presently working at the General House; and Father Gonzalo Tabares Builes from Colombia, serving as coordinator) met in Bogotá and began to familiarize themselves with each other. We discussed our lives, dreams and hopes in preparation for the upcoming visits. The team made a short video clip about the upcoming visit, "Montfortians Without Borders; On the Way to Mexico." This was posted to YouTube and various websites of the congregation. And in those first days, Brother Desire had to work on his visa and other legal considerations for him to be able to travel.



2.2 SATURDAY, 7 APRIL

We arrived at Mexico City's international airport, Benito Juárez. Upon arrival we were greeted by Fr. Enrique Sanchez, the Provincial Superior of the Comboni Fathers in Mexico; he was accompanied by Fr. Erasmo from the same community. Both warmly welcomed us and helped us in our arrival.



2.3 SUNDAY, 8 APRIL

The team was invited by the provincial to celebrate the eucharist at a nearby parish, the parish of Padre Nuestro (parish of Our Father). Father Enrique presided and Frs. Gonzalo and Harry concelebrated. The first reading of that Sunday told the story of the first communities in Jerusa-

lem and how they prepared their hearts for mission, entrusting everything to the Lord.

Later in the day we met with Fr. Enrique. Father Gonzalo expressed the desire to found a community in Mexico for the mission, for the diffusion of Montfortian Spirituality and for vocational recruitment. We discussed some of the dioceses where we intended to visit, and Fr. Enrique made other suggestions, too. He directed us to make contact with the Diocese of Valle del Chaclo, Cuautitlan, Nezahuacoyoti, Ecatepec, and Cuernavaca. HE offered to help make contact with some of the bishops and with Cardinal Carlos Aguiar. He felt it wise to take advantage of the meeting of the Episcopal Conference whose dates overlapped ours. The team undertook a first discernment and the Dioceses of Puebla, Cuernavaca and Ecatepec were chosen.

2.4 MONDAY, 9 APRIL

Father Enrique invited the team to accompany him and visit the historic center of the City of Mexico while Fr. Erasmo spent some time making the necessary contact and visits with the bishops. For our midday meal we were invited to have lunch with another Comboni community in the city center, the CAM.

2.5 TUESDAY, 10 APRIL

The team visited the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe to pray for the mission. We were accompanied by Father Oscar, another Comboni Father, and were able to concelebrate the Eucharist at the Basilica.

2.6 WEDNESDAY 11 APRIL

It was an important day. At the meeting of the CEM (Episcopal Conference of Mexico, by its initials in Spanish), which was quite a distance from the provincial house, our Team managed an interview with the Bishops of Cuernavaca, Bishop Ramón Castro; Puebla, Bishop Victor Sanchez; and from Ecatepec, Bishop Oscar Roberto Dominguez. With each one Father Gonzalo gave

an explanation of our reason for visiting Mexico and for meeting with them. The bishops gave us



explanations of their diocesan realities and opened their doors to us. We were invited to make a visit to the dioceses in the next week, once the meeting of the Conference was over. Following this set of interviews, we tried to get a meeting with the Cardinal, but it was impossible given his many commitments.

2.7 THURSDAY 12 APRIL

Today was a day of recollection, gathering up all that we had learned and spending it in quiet discernment. The Team had a chance to meet with Bishop Jaime, a Comboni Missionary who worked in Peru and who was visiting the Provincial house for a meeting. He was a big help to us with some helpful tips and also in our prayer



time. He recommends that we start our work in the Diocese of Mexico City, and this lifted our spirits quite a bit.

2.8 FRIDAY 13 APRIL

We spent the day at the provincial house in prayer and resting.

2.9 SATURDAY 14 APRIL

We took advantage of the invitation from the Bishop of Ecatepec and made our visit to that diocese today. We were greeted by the Pastoral Vicar, Father Leonardo, who had been given the task of showing us five parishes in their First Vicariate. Following the visit, we were invited to have lunch with the bishop at his residence.

2.10 SUNDAY 15 APRIL

We visited the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe once again and Fr. Gonzalo concelebrated mass with a large number of priests at 9:00 AM.

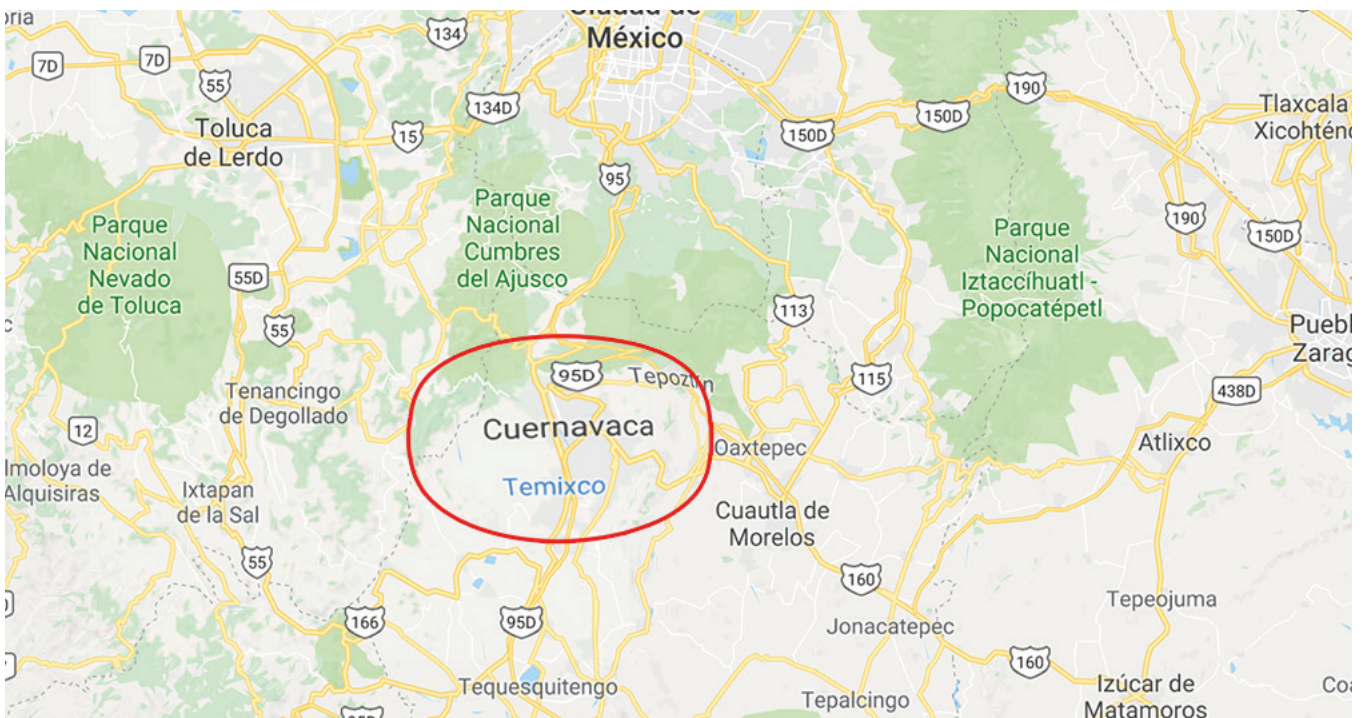
2.11 MONDAY 16 APRIL AND TUESDAY 17 APRIL

Father Gonzalo spent the time trying to make an appointment with the Cardinal, Bishop Oscar Aguiar, and also with bishop of the First Vicariate for the Archdiocese of Mexico, Bishop Armando Colín, together with Brother Jose Sanchez Bravo who is the president of the Intercongregational Conference of Religious in Mexico (CIRM). Each of these efforts was unfruitful.

We also set the dates for visiting the other dioceses already mentioned: Thursday the 19th, Cuernavaca; Friday the 20th, Puebla; Saturday the 21st, Ecatepec.

2.12 WEDNESDAY 18 APRIL

The team came together for prayer, sharing and discernment. We later had a meeting with the provincial bursar of the Combonians who ex-



plained the system used in Mexico for payments, taxes, legal presence, and how this impacts the Church and Religious Institutes in that country.

2.13 THURSDAY 19 APRIL

Today we visited the Diocese of Cuernavaca according to our planned itinerary. We were joined today by Comboni Father, Fr. David.

The Bishop showed us the cathedral and all the damage it had experienced in the earthquake of September 2017. Later, our team was joined by a group of two Indian fathers who also want to establish in that diocese, and we were taken to visit three parishes located very closely to each other. It was very easy to see the damage each church had received from the earthquake, each one in need of a lot of restoration. Even at this point, the Eucharist is celebrated outside of the church buildings for reasons of safety.

Following the visit, we were invited to have lunch with Bishop Ramón Castro. He himself initiated a conversation with us about establishing a montfortian presence and offered us a parish. He asked that we make an official communication with our decision.

Toward the end of the day we also visited the Comboni Missionaries' parish of the Assumption, in Temixco.

2.14. FRIDAY 20 APRIL

Today we traveled to visit the Diocese of Puebla. Our Team was welcomed by Bishop Hugo, the Pastoral Vicar. Father Gonzalo again discussed the reasons and objectives for our visits. We were joined by Father Miguel a priest of the archdiocese, and together we visited the Shrine of the Niño Doctor. The doors of the diocese were opened to us and they offered us the possibility to establish our presence in their Zona Centro,



or in one of the zones with many campesinos and indigenous persons. It was in this zone where we had the chance to meet some of the indigenous people who again asked the bishop for a priest to attend their community.



2.15. SATURDAY 21 APRIL

Today was a day for discernment and to seek confirmation of our plans. We made a third visit to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe to pray and make our discernment about the Will of God.

The bishop from Ecatepec invited us to concelebrate the liturgy with him and to later have lunch. Again, during lunch, he initiated a conversation about our coming to his diocese and he ratified his desire that we accept his invitation. Bishop Oscar Roberto offered us a parish and asked that we communicate officially with him of our decision.

Later in the evening we had supper with the Comboni community, and we expressed our gratitude for their hospitality and assistance. We are especially grateful for the help given by Fathers Enrique, the provincial, and Guillermo, the bursar, and Erasmo.

2.16. SUNDAY 22 APRIL

The team journeyed back to Colombia without any difficulties.

2.17. MONDAY 23 APRIL AND TUESDAY 24 APRIL

Durant ces deux jours, l'équipe s'est consacrée à l'établissement du rapport de la visite exploratoire.

3 Process and the Results of Our Discernment

3.1 PROCESS

3.1.1 Remembering the Objective, Criteria and the Places of our Visit

Our objective for visiting Mexico was to set forth as: "To gather the fundamental elements needed to make a community discernment that would help us discover the Will of God in the desire to establish a presence of the Congregation in Mexico." (Cf., Montfortians without Borders, On the Way to Mexico, p. 3)

The four criteria that clarified our objective and the developments from each:

1. "the diffusion of Montfortian Spirituality: the locale should facilitate the diffusion of our spirituality in all the ways it is written, practiced and experienced;"
2. "Mission: naturally this is a basic element. The locale should be considered a place of mission among the poor;"
3. "Fraternal Life: taking into account that this is the base and a fundamental element of the religious life, the place will have to help the team live a fraternal life that is serene, joyful and gives witness to others;"
4. "Formation: vocations are a gift from God and a goal we desire. From this we can derive the place which offers the facility for vocation animation and to begin a pre-noviciate process. Closeness to centers of religious studies is important." (Cf. idem, pp. 3,4)

Taking into account the objective and criteria that were established, our team entered a discernment and the coordinator of the team, Fr Gonzalo, presented a fifth criteria for us to entertain: "the visit and the choice of a place." (p.8) Here we are to consider the work we did beginning with our arrival in Mexico City and going out from there; also, the visits we made in the dioceses of Oaxaca, Puebla and Guadalajara. We need to remember the conversations with the Apostolic Nuncio, Bishop Francesco Coppola; Cardinal Carlos Aguiar Arretes and Brother José Sánchez Bravo who is the president of the Conference of Religious in Mexico.

3.1.2 Discernment and Option

3.1.2.1 First Exercise of the Discernment, The Diocese.

When we arrived, the team met with father Enrique Sanchez, provincial of the Comboni Fathers, who was open to helping with the process of founding in Mexico. As a conclusion, the

team discarded the possibility of working in the Diocese of Guadalajara because of the highly clerical atmosphere and a diocese that really is not in need of assistance from religious. We were not offered any placement that is directly in service to the poor. Equally, we dismissed the diocese of Oaxaca, even though it has such a need for clergy and is extremely poor; but it only met one of the criteria for our mission. There was no offer or place from which we can extend our work of diffusing Montfortian Spirituality.

With all of that said, we centered our efforts on the dioceses where we were made to feel welcome and where we see the greatest ability to comply with the criteria for our mission and the work we were sent to accomplish. Therefore, we chose to center our discernment on the Dioceses of Cuernavaca, Puebla and Ecatepec.

3.1.2.2 Interviews with the Bishops

We took into account that the bishops of these dioceses welcomed us and Father Erasmo of the Comboni Fathers while they were also occupied with the meeting of the Bishops' Conference and they each later invited us to visit them in their dioceses.

Father Gonzalo made a presentation of the Team, our Community and Spirituality, our Charism and the reason for these visits. Thankfully, each of the bishops gave us an explanation of their dioceses and their own personal questionings but still opened the doors of the dioceses to us with an invitation to share our charism in that local church.

3.1.2.3 Second Exercise of the Discernment: the first vote

Again, we gathered to discuss and discern the possibilities of where we might work and to name a diocese. We were asked to consider each of the diocese, to give reasons for and against, the impressions we had of each after meeting

the bishops and to go over our notes from each place. This exercise was done in an atmosphere of prayer and discernment. From it we came to the following conclusions:

1. The three dioceses are really good places to establish the Congregation;
2. The Diocese of Ecatepec is the one that stands out because it meets all of the basic criteria of our plan;
3. The next two follow in order of preference: Cuernavaca and Puebla

With these criteria, the team went back to its work of visiting each of these dioceses.

3.1.2.4 Visit to each diocese

3.1.2.4.1 Visit to the Diocese of Ecatepec

The first diocese we visited was Ecatepec. The Pastoral Vicar, Bishop Leonardo, presented the pastoral plan of the diocese to us and he accompanied us on a visit to each of the four vicariates. We ended our visit with a conversation with the bishop and then lunch at the Episcopal House. At that time, he was very clear and said to us that the doors of his diocese are open to us. He offered us a parish, assistance with the process of founding, help in the diffusion of our spirituality (he has a shrine to the 5th Apparition of our Lady) and the recruitment of montfortian vocations. With these offers; our own felt experience in the diocese, and to have visited the Shrine; the excellent pastoral plan and organization in the diocese; and the lack of many religious working in the diocese; plus the nearness to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe...the team felt all of this confirmed the desire to establish a presence of the congregation in this local church.

3.1.2.4.2 Diocese of Cuernavaca

The Bishop welcomed us in his diocese when we visited. We were shown the cathedral and then were taken to visit four other parishes that were

damaged by the earthquake of 2017. With Comboni Father, Fr. David, we visited the parish administered by them in Temixco. At our midday meal with the bishop we came to the following conclusions:

1. He reiterated his openness to the Congregation in his diocese;
2. He offered us a parish, one to be determined at a later date;
3. The Congregation should write officially to him within six months of its decision on his proposal;
4. If our decision is positive and it is received well locally, then he would help us set out a juridical path to follow.



3.1.2.4.3 Archdiocese of Puebla

We were received by one of the Vicars for the archdiocese, Bishop Hugo. Later, we made a visit to one of the parishes in the Central Zone accompanied by Father Miguel. The archbishop was away from the City. These are our conclusions:

1. The Congregation is welcome to establish a presence in the Archdiocese;
2. The archbishop will offer us a parish in the Zona Central or in a zone with many indigenous and campesino people. He will not offer us anything in the historic zone of the archdiocese where there already are many religious congregations.

3. When the congregation makes its decision, we should write to him officially;
4. If our decision is favorable, then a formal process of transition will be initiated.

3.1.2.5 Exercise of a Final Discernment

With all of the elements from our visits to the various places the Team entered into a final discernment that gave us the following results:

3.1.2.5.1 First Option: The Diocese of Ecatepec

Favorable Reasons: The bishop is the most interested. He invited the team to concelebrate with him at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, he gave us food and discussed with us the possibility of our coming to his diocese.

3.1.2.5.1.2 Second Option: The Archdiocese of Puebla

Aside from all that was mentioned above, we especially think that the location of the Zona Centro, located adjacent to the historic zone, is a good place. We also felt very welcome in the reception we received from Bishop Hugo and the other priests whom we met. And, relatively speaking, the lack of clergy in the Archdiocese is their real experience and they are in the midst of a decline in vocations.

3.1.2.5.3 Third Option: The Diocese of Cuernavaca

Our reasons stayed the same. We also noted that, in our time visiting the diocese, not one diocesan priest met with us even though we visited three parishes and the Cathedral.

3.1.2.6 Confirmation of the Decision

After this exercise and having finished our prayer through the morning hours, the Team went to the Basilica with the task of personally praying and confirming the choices we made and the

order we present them. Only after this did the Team come together one last time and each one had the opportunity to present his results. This is what came from our discernment:

3.2. FINAL RESULT

3.2.1 The Diocese of Ecatepec

3.2.1.1 Reason Number 1:

The bishop shows openness and a willingness to permit the spreading of montfortian spirituality. There is the Shrine of the Fifth Apparition and it is only a half-hour away from the Basilica of Our Lady. The dioceses is geographically small but densely populated.

3.2.1.2 Reason Number 2:

It is a diocese in formation, where most of the Catholic population comes from the working class of Mexico City. It is a humble environment and is popular among workers and simple people from the City. There is a lot of life in the streets. The diocese is constantly on a Permanent Mission and has a solid Pastoral Plan whose end is to gather people into Small Communities.

3.2.1.3 Reason Number 3:

There is a high degree of fraternal life among the clergy whose median age is around 40. They are very welcoming and simple men, priests of the barrio. The founding community would fit in well among this community of priests.

3.2.1.4. Reason Number 4:

Because of there is an atmosphere of formation and it is young population, there is potential for a lot of vocations. It has a pretty seminary. And the bishop clearly expressed his help to find vocation for the Company of Mary.

3.2.1.5 Conclusion:

It is the option that we highly recommend beginning a Montfortian presence in Mexico. It is the better place to begin a foundation. (See, Annex 2, Some Details of the Diocese of Ecatepec).

3.2.2 Second Place to Found: The Diocese of Puebla

3.2.2.1. Reason Number 1:

The bishop shows openness and a willingness to permit the spreading of montfortian spirituality. The places they initially have offered to us are very far outside of the Capital and don't seem favorable to the dissemination of our spirituality nor to the process of formation.

3.2.2.2 Reason Number 2:

It is a very traditional and historic diocese. Despite being very vocational, there is a lack of clergy. It has an urban and rural zone; follows a good pastoral plan. The placements offer even more than missionary. This is the kind of place we can consider after the presence of the Congregation is solidly established. Any mission here will absorb the founding team.

3.2.2.3. Reason Number 3:

The priests are welcoming. The places they have offered us are favorable to a small, fraternal life with the local clergy.

3.2.2.4 Reason Number 4:

In order to have a vocational plan or a postulancy we would need to consider that this diocese is far removed from any urban center and may not be helpful to this process.

3.2.2.5 Conclusion:

It is a good choice for a later missionary experience. (See Annex 3, Some Points for the Diocese of Puebla).

3.2.3 Third Choice for Founding a Mission: Th Diocese of Cuernavaca

3.2.3.1. Reason Number 1:

The bishop shows openness and a willingness to permit the spreading of montfortian spirituality. The city is easily navigated and would facilitate the work of spreading Montfortian Spirituality. It is only an hour outside of the City.

3.2.3.2 Reason Number 2:

The diocese is historic and traditional. It is characterized by a prophetic mindset from the time when Bishop Mendoza Arceo led the diocese. We need to remember that more than 60% of the churches need repair the founding team will be caught up in the work of building and rebuilding instead of the mission for which we are sent. Most likely we will need to rent a house in which to live.

3.2.3.3 Reason Number 3:

The local clergy is not welcoming and there is an expressed lack of desire for religious to be there. The Team would live quite apart from the other clergy and would not be made to feel welcome.

3.2.3.4 Reason Number 4:

Seeing that it is a small city, we think that Vocation Animation would be rather easy to accomplish.

3.2.3.5 Conclusion:

It is a good idea to set up a community there, but later. The fact that we have to go and rebuild things is not too favorable to any of the criteria we were given. (See also, Appendix 4, Some Notes on the Diocese of Cuernavaca).

3.3 WHAT COMES NEXT

Chosen by the General Government with the help of COORLAC and all of the Congregation, it is necessary to:

3.3.1. - Write to the three Bishops and share our decision;

3.3.2. - Visit the selected diocese to begin to really examine what needs to be done;

3.3.2.1. - Choose the site;

3.3.2.2. - Prepare for the Team to go and to be received;

3.3.2.3. - Begin to gather all the required papers for the visa application process and the work that this entails.



ANNEX 1

Initial Discernment

Introduction:

In the first place, each bishop we visited was given an overview of what were our objectives and the reasons for visiting. Father Gonzalo, the Coordinator of the Team, shared with them our spirituality (wisdom, marian, and missionary) and the desire to begin a mission in this land that has as its patroness Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of the Americas. He expressed to each bishop the dream that the congregation has had for many years of working in Mexico and to offer to the Church the richness of the montfortian charism via a clear diffusion of our spirituality.

First interview:

Most Reverend Ramón Castro Castro, Bishop of Cuernavaca

Bishop Ramon Castro is originally from Teocuitatlán de Corona, Jalisco. Born: 27 January 1956 and he is the tenth bishop of the Diocese of Cuernavaca. This diocese is most noted for the role many of its bishops have had in the growth of the Church in Mexico.

Reality of the diocese:

Heavily influenced by Liberation theology

Experienced liturgical reform at least 5 years before Vatican Council II

Called the City of eternal springtime, it is of a varied climate

It consists of 33 municipalities, 113 parishes, 204 priests with a median age of 45 years.

The cathedral was built in 1525 and is the fifth cathedral built in the Americas.

Suffered a lot of damage in recent earthquakes and it seems to be a diocese in constant renovation. There are 320 damaged buildings and 50 priests living without any personal or parish house.

There is no governmental assistance for the work of rebuilding. There is a notable lack of collaboration between the state and the church.

There is a lot of friction within the Church given that a few bishops have had to resign over problems of corruption, which is wide spread in the area.

The clergy is very closed minded and jealous. The previous bishop ended many of the contracts with religious congregations in his diocese.

Bishop Ramon's Perspective:

We can help move the Church forward from its position of being hurt and in pain

The heart of the bishop is to be universal and so the doors of the diocese are open to us.

Second interview:

Most Reverend Oscar Roberto Dominguez Couttonlenc, Bishop of Ecatepec.

Bishop Oscar Roberto Dominguez is originally from the Puebla de Zaragoza. Born, 13 May 1956. Was ordained a priest for the Missionaries of Guadalupe in 1983.

Reality of the diocese:

It is a diocese of 3 Million inhabitants, situated about 30 minutes from the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe

It has 140 priests

The people are working class or poorer

It is a good place for the dissemination of montfortian spirituality and is home to the Shrine of the Fifth Apparition

It is suggested that we concentrate on being immersed in the local reality and not go in looking for vocations but, rather, to wait and see how this develops

Many other groups have gone into the diocese with high hopes and were only disappointed, and they left with very little result

Our Team was invited to get to know the diocese and to see the different places and experience the local poverty

Third interview:

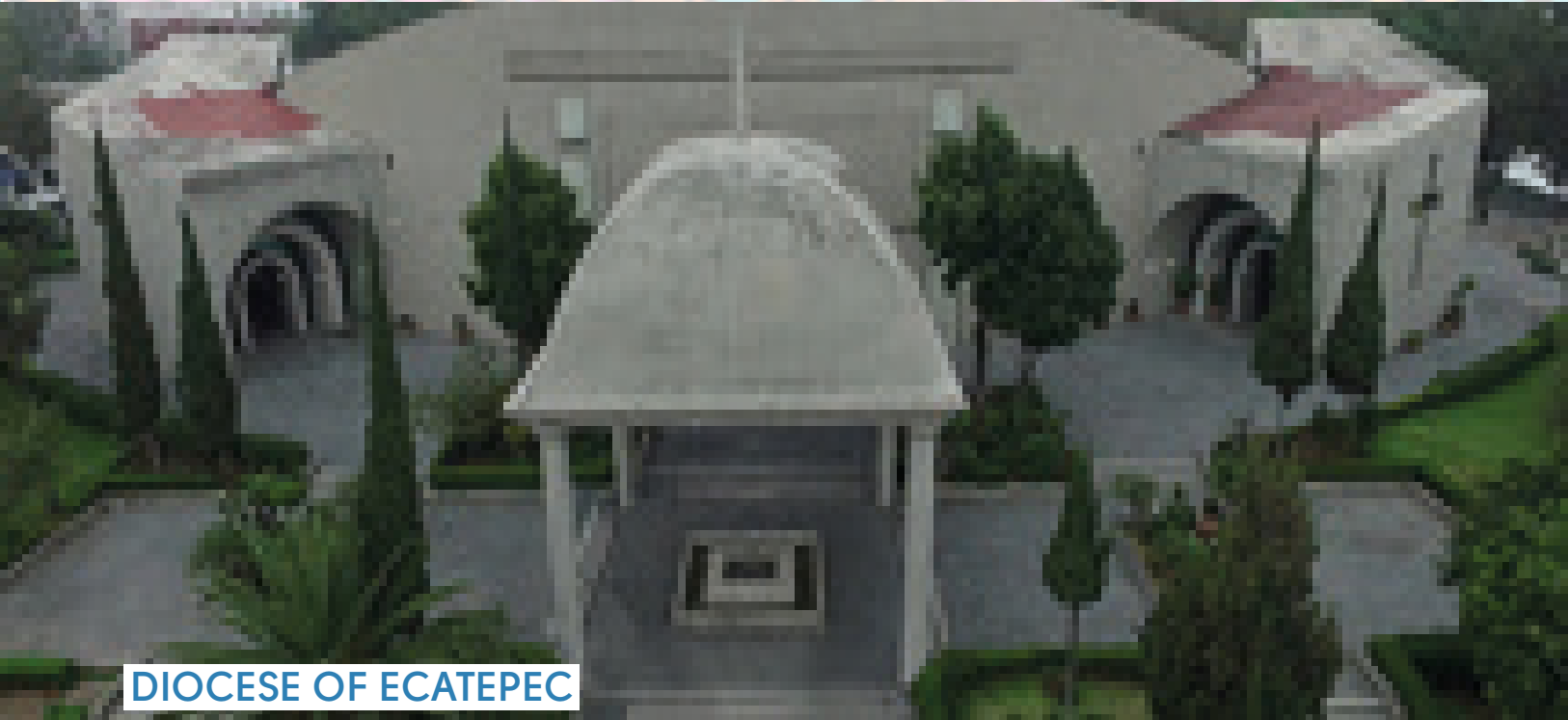
Most Reverend Jose Victor Manuel Valentin Sanchez Espinoza, Archbishop of Puebla

Bishop Sanchez is originally from Santa Cruz, Mexico. Born on 21 May 1950.

In a very brief conversation, the bishop manifested his openness to a Montfortian presence, and he explained to us that in the diocese there are 6 pastoral zones with another 320 parishes located in the surrounding mountainsides.

The diocese has many religious congregations located in the City of Puebla, and he asked that we open a mission outside of the City.





DIOCESE OF ECATEPEC

Annex 2:

Some Information about the diocese of Ecatepec.

The Ordinary of the Diocese is the Most Reverend Oscar Roberto Dominguez.

History:

The diocese was erected officially on June 28, 1995 by Pope John Paul II. The new diocese was established after its two previous apostolic administrators expressed a need to create a new local Church to give greater pastoral attention to the growing population of faithful in the area.

The Diocese of Ecatepec began with 58 parishes, initially. Ten came from the archdiocese of Tlalnepantla and 48 from the Diocese of Texcoco. Regarding the presbyterate, the initial clergy came from both dioceses: 66 from Texcoco and 11 from Tlalnepantla.

The parish church of St Christopher of Ecatepec was chosen as the first cathedral. It dates from the 16th century and was under the care of the Franciscans for many years. On the same date, 28 June 1995, Pope John Paul also chose the first bishop of the diocese Bishop Onesimo Cepeda Silva who later was consecrated by the Apostolic Nuncio.

The Episcopal Vicariates were then established in the 5th of July 2009: Episcopal Vicariate I will be sated at the church of Our lady of the Miraculous Medal; Vicariate II will be located at the church of St Clare of Assisi; Vicariate III, at the Parish of the 12 Apostles; Vicariate IV, the church of St Christopher Ecatepec. This last Seat was transferred after a few months to the church of St Joseph Jajalapa.

On the 17th of July 2012, Pope Benedict XVI chose as bishop Oscar Roberto Dominguez Couttolenc, M.G., as the second bishop of the Diocese; he was installed on the 17th of September 2012.

Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

The 28th of June 1995, when the diocese was erected, this parish church was selected as the Cathedral Seat and it was rededicated in honor of St Christopher of Ecatepec.

Ecclesiastical Province:

The objective of the diocese is to promote a common pastoral plan in the nearby dioceses. Accord-

ing to the ability of the people and the competence of those involved, those local churches would be grouped into the Ecclesiastical province of Tlalnepantla. It is composed of:

1. The Archdiocese of Tlalnepantla
2. Diocese of Cuautitlan
3. Diocese of Ecatepec
4. Diocese of Teotihuacan
5. Diocese of Texcoco



Annex 3: The Archdiocese of Puebla



The Ordinary of the archdiocese is Archbishop Victor Sanchez

Located in the State of Puebla, the Archdiocese of Puebla de los Angeles is seated in the city of the same name. The Cathedral Seat is in the parish church of the Cathedral of Puebla (locally called the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception).

The Archdiocese of Puebla is the oldest in Mexico, originally erected as the Diocese of Tlaxcala on the 13th of October 1525, suffragen of the Archdiocese of Seville (Spain). With territory from the diocese of Tlaxcala the Diocese of Mexico was erected in 1530 and this replaced Seville as the metropolitan in 1546. From its origin, this diocese has served as the mother church of



Mexico, giving birth to many other local churches since 1535. It was elevated in 1903 to the rank of Metropolitan Archdiocese when the name was changed from Tlaxcala to Puebla.

It comprises more than 20,000km² and has a population of greater than 3.5 million people. More than 81,000 baptisms occur each year; 11,500 marriages occurred in the same year it was last counted (2007). There are 443 priests of the Archdiocese and 154 religious priests serving in Puebla. There are about 1,026 religious in the archdiocese and, of these, 970 are feminine vocations.

Pastoral Plan:

"A Church in Formation, Joyful Missionary Disciples of Jesus Christ" (2014-2018)

Th structure: reality and utopia; pastoral itinerary and projects that are decidedly missionary. There are Seven Steps to Follow: Where are we? Where do we want to be? Priorities? Objectives? Lines of Action? Detailed Program? Accompaniment and Evaluation.

The Pastoral Center

This includes 34 municipalities and is located in the central State of Puebla.



Annex 4: Diocese of Cuernavaca



The Ordinary of the Diocese of Cuernavaca is Bishop Ramon Castro.

The Ordinary of the Diocese of Cuernavaca is Bishop Ramon Castro.

The Diocese of Cuernavaca is the Episcopal Seat for the Catholic Church in Mexico and is a suffragan of the Archdiocese of Mexico City. The Seat of the diocese is located at the Cathedral of Cuernavaca.

The territory of the diocese consists on the Mexican State of Morelos, covering more than 4,900 km² and consisting of over 2.1 million people.

The Episcopal Seat for Cuernavaca is the Cathedral of the Assumption of Mary.

The diocese is divided into 108 parishes and 4 pastoral zones, each with the name of one of the Evangelists.



Notes:

Notes:

"You have heard, my youngest son,
my breath my word; go,
do whatever is on your side. "



COMPANY OF MARY
MONTFORT MISSIONARIES

Paul Berzons
'16