

The Church of Amazonia creates an ecclesial conference

On the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, the presidents of the Latin American Episcopal Council and the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network announced the creation of the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon Region

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Cardinal Claudio Hummes, General Rapporteur for the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon region, left, shares a word with Pope Francis on the occasion of the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology, in the Vatican gardens, Oct. 4, 2019. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

The 182 synod fathers had suggested it in the [Final Document](#) they gave to Pope Francis last October at the end of the Synod of Bishops' [special assembly](#) for the Pan-Amazon Region.

They asked for the creation of a new body that would link the dioceses of Amazonia, the bishops' conferences of the nine Amazonian countries and the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM).

The pope "officially presented" the Final Document in his post-synodal exhortation [Querida Amazonia](#) and expressed his hope that "the pastors, consecrated men and women and lay faithful of the Amazon region (would) strive to apply it" (QA, 3-4).

Now, eight months after the Synod assembly ended, CELAM and REPAM (the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network) [announced](#) on June 29, Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, the institution of the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon Region (ECA).

This new ecclesial conference brings together ten bishops from the episcopal conferences of the nine countries concerned (with two representatives for Brazil, given its great size).

Brazilian Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, Archbishop Emeritus of São Paulo, has been elected the new ECA president.

The 85-year-old Franciscan, who is also a former prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy in Rome (2006-2010) and currently chairs [REPAM](#), was a key figure in preparing last October's synod gathering.

Bishop David Martínez de Aguirre, apostolic administrator of the huge vicariate of Puerto Maldonado (Peru), has been named vice-president. The 50-year-old Dominican welcomed Pope Francis to Peru in 2018.

Meanwhile, Bishop Eugenio Coter has been named representative of the episcopal conferences of the Amazonian countries. The 63-year-old Italian-born prelate is apostolic vicar of Pando (Bolivia).

"Hopefully this will give us more weight"

These three members of the ECA executive committee were elected to the post-synodal council last October, which is tasked with implementing the assembly's suggestions and proposals.

The objective of this new ecclesial conference is to help "define the Amazonian face of the Church and to continue the task of finding new paths for the evangelizing mission," explains the CELAM-REPAM statement.

It was signed by Cardinal Hummes and the CELAM president, Peruvian Archbishop Miguel Cabrejos Vidarte OFM.

"It is hoped that this will give us more weight, when facing local political leaders, to implement the decisions of the Synod," said Bishop Emmanuel Lafont of Cayenne (Guyana), an ECA member.

The 74-year-old French missionary bishop welcomed the fact that this new body is an "ecclesial conference" and not an "episcopal conference".

This means ECA also includes lay people and members of religious orders, namely the presidents of the four regional ecclesial bodies - CELAM, REPAM, the Confederation of Latin American Religious (CLAR) and Caritas Latin America and Caribbean. There will also be three representatives of the indigenous peoples.

Proximity to Pope Francis

The decision to create the conference was made in a virtual assembly held on June 26 and June 29 by the Assembly for the Project of Constitution of the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon.

The composition of this assembly, the communiqué states, "reflects the unity in diversity of our Church and its call to ever greater synodality".

Several Vatican officials participated in the virtual assembly.

They included Cardinals Lorenzo Baldisseri (general secretary of the Synod of Bishops), Michael Czerny (undersecretary of the Refugees and Migrants Section of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development), Luis Antonio Tagle (prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples) and Marc Ouellet (prefect of the Congregation for Bishops).

"The fact that we are in direct contact with these roman leaders, which is not the case with REPAM, is a good thing," continued Bishop Lafont.

"It was urgent to have a link between us, to remind each other that we must promote the resolutions of the Synod," he said, again speaking of this new ecclesial conference as a "stimulus".

During the virtual assembly, the new Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon Region approved its statutes with the help of experts in canon law.

It now wants to be "a response to the multiple threats facing the Amazon," in particular the COVID-19 pandemic which has already caused the deaths of more than 4,000 people in the Amazon, as well as the destruction of the environment and the resurgence of violence against indigenous peoples.