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## BLOGS

# Pope Francis approves new bishops' body to remake regional church with 'amazonian face'

*Cardinal Hummes announced a new Pan-Amazonian episcopal body that was based on recommendations in the Amazon Synod's final document.*

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*Pope Francis receives Pachamama statue in Vatican gardens during indigenous ceremony, Rome, Oct. 4, 2019.* Vatican News / video screen grab

*By Maike Hickson*

April 8, 2020 (LifeSiteNews) – Despite the current corona crisis, the Pan-Amazonian ecclesial network REPAM announced on 3 April that Pope Francis has approved of the establishment of a new episcopal body of the bishops of the Amazon region which had been proposed by the Amazon Synod's final document.

This is the first proof that Pope Francis did not abrogate or censor the Synod's final documents with its own proposals when publishing his post-synodal exhortation *Querida Amazonia*. The second proof is today's news that the Pope also followed up on the final document's proposal to set up yet another female deacon commission.

Some key Vatican prelates – such as Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri and Cardinal Luis Tagle – are to be part of this new Amazonian organization.

REPAM had organized much of the preparations for the October 2019 Amazon Synod in Rome, and several of its members are also members of the post-synodal council, such as Cardinal Cláudio Hummes and Bishop Erwin Kräutler. On its website, it announced on April 3, 2020 the establishment of this new episcopal organization in the Amazon region.

“In a letter dated April 1,” REPAM states, “Cardinal Claudio Hummes, president of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM), communicated the steps to be taken in the coming months for the official constitution of the Pan-Amazonian Episcopal Organization (OEP) that was proposed in point 115 of the Final Document of the Synod. This process has the approval of Pope Francis.”

The Final Document of the Amazon Synod contains this point 115, which is titled “A post-synodal regional Church organism for the Amazon region.” It states: “We propose the creation of a Bishops' organism that promotes synodality among the churches of the region, helps to express the Amazonian face of this Church and continues the task of finding new paths for the evangelizing mission, especially incorporating the proposal of integral ecology, thus strengthening the physiognomy of the Church in the Amazon.” This new organism, the text continues, would be “a permanent and representative Bishops' organism that promotes synodality in the Amazon region, connected with CELAM, with its own structure, in a simple organization and also connected with REPAM.”

This new organism is meant to implement the proposals of the Amazon Synod. Point 115 says: “So constituted, it can be the effective instrument in the territory of the Latin American and Caribbean Church for taking up many of the proposals that emerged in this Synod. It would be the nexus for developing Church and socio-environmental networks and initiatives at the continental and international levels.”

After Pope Francis had published, on February 12, his post-synodal exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, there had been some confusion as to whether or not he therewith rescinded some controversial parts of the synod's final document, since he spoke up against female ordination and did not seem to endorse the idea of ordaining married men to the priesthood.

However, the Pope had made it clear in number 3 of his own February 12 exhortation that he intended to “present” the final document, instead of correcting it in any fundamental way. The passage reads: “At the same time, I would like to officially present the Final Document, which sets forth the conclusions of the Synod, which profited from the participation of many

people who know better than myself or the Roman Curia the problems and issues of the Amazon region, since they live there, they experience its suffering and they love it passionately. I have preferred not to cite the Final Document in this Exhortation, because I would encourage everyone to read it in full.”

As LifeSite had reported in February, two key organizers of the Amazon Synod, Cardinal Cláudio Hummes and Mauricio López (the executive secretary of the Amazon network REPAM), insist that the synod's proposals – especially the married priesthood – are not yet off the table. Hummes stated that ordaining married men to the priesthood “must be developed and completed” following the release of Pope Francis’ new document, and López says that, since the Pope “explicitly presented the final document [of the synod] in his introduction,” one can “hold fast to everything.” He has “not the slightest doubt” that married priests “will come.”

Therefore, the establishment of this new episcopal body in the Amazon region could well be a first step in order to implement many other measures that were endorsed in the Synod's final document.

As the April 3 REPAM report states, “We are beginning the most significant phase, because it is the one in which we can put this love for the beloved Amazon into action, inspired by words.” This phase is included in a letter that Cardinal Claudio Hummes, the president of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network, had “sent on April 1, 2020 to all those involved in the creation of the Amazon Episcopal Organization (OEP), with an ecclesial perspective, and in which he indicated the steps to be taken to establish this institution whose need was made visible during the last Synod for the Amazon held last October in Rome,” the report continues.

The report also mentions CELAM, the Episcopal Conference of Latin America, whose experts have already been repeatedly meeting since the October 2019 Amazon Synod in order to implement the agenda of that synod. For example, according to one report, “for the third time the presidency, the team of bishops' advisors and experts of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) met from 24 to 27 February in Bogota to continue building the path of pastoral renewal and restructuring, inspired by the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*.”

To return to the REPAM report, Cardinal Hummes is outlining three initial steps that are to lead to this new episcopal body. Due to the situation with the current coronavirus crisis, first meetings are taking place via the internet and other social networks. In April, the constituent assembly is being prepared by REPAM and CELAM. At the same time, Hummes is quoted as saying that “communication should be maintained with the General Secretariat of the Synod and the members of the Post Synodal Council in order to share the steps we will be taking as Church in the Amazon territory, and to ask for their advice, guidance and suggestions.” Finally, it is hoped that in May or June the Constitutive Assembly of the OEP can be held in order to approve an essential constitution, to elect a collegial body and a secretariat, and to prepare an extended Assembly with a broad ecclesial perspective.

An important aspect is that there will be four non-voting members of the Vatican in this new organization: Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, as well as Cardinal Michael Czerny. Other members of this new constituent assembly – 23 as a whole – will be sent by the respective national bishops' conferences of that region, added are three additional members of the indigenous communities, the presidents of REPAM and CELAM (Cardinals Hummes and Pedro Barreto, as well as Archbishop Héctor Cabrejos).

In an additional interview included in the April 3 REPAM report, Cardinal Hummes explains that this new organism is “urgent” and that he hopes it will be “not only a formality.”

Hummes insists in that interview that “the process of applying the guidelines of the Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia* and the Final Document of the Synod in the territory must not stop, otherwise there is a risk of weakening the process and reducing the hopes of the populations of the territory.” Therefore, the cardinal continues, this new institution is “urgent, because this body will promote and coordinate the implementation of the Synod in the territory.”

Hummes also explains that they have “the support of both the Vatican and the regional ecclesial organisms.” The Brazilian prelate concludes that this new institution “will undoubtedly contribute to the dreams of Pope Francis, the dreams of a more synodal, missionary, merciful and poor Church with the poor, on its way out to the peripheries.”

“The Synod for the Amazon was historic; no previous synod was as synodal and as reform-oriented as this one,” he adds.

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