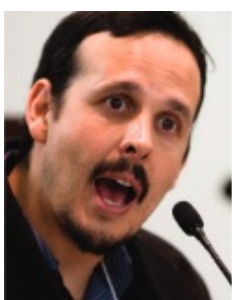


Key figure unpacks Amazonian synod

Mauricio Lopez, the executive director of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM), estimates his organization conducted well over 300 listening sessions in nine countries that comprise the Amazon territory. More than 87,000 people participated in those discussions.



Lopez

“It’s been such a privilege, but I have to say, this is completely new. ... There was never something like this in the past for a synod in the Catholic Church,” said Lopez, who was born in Mexico and lives in Ecuador.

In an interview – condensed and edited for clarity – with Our Sunday Visitor, Lopez discussed the extensive process of listening and dialogue that informed the writing of the *instrumentum laboris*, the working document, for the upcoming Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region. Lopez emphasized that Pope Francis told him and Brazil’s Cardinal Claudio Hummes, the synod’s relator general, that the Amazon territory and its people, especially the indigenous communities, were to be the synod’s main subjects.

“He has asked us to be courageous, to bring courageous proposals and to be truthful to what we heard from the people,” Lopez said.

Our Sunday Visitor: What are your hopes for the synod?

Mauricio Lopez: My hope is that we can truthfully listen to the Holy Spirit present in the voices of the People of God, and at the same time, giving up our own intentions and interests, no matter how valuable they might be, so that we can truly listen to God talking to us in a discerning space.

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After the synod, I hope to come back to the Amazon territory and look into the eyes of the people whom we worked with in the territory and tell them, “We honored your voice, your hopes, your expectations, the gift of your life as Catholics who work day in and day out there, that what you offered to us was embraced.”

OSV: What do you see as the message of this synod?

Lopez: I think the message is clear. The synod is a son and a daughter of *Laudato Si*. It's the first experience of actualizing *Laudato Si*, and we're hoping that this will be a new stage, because the synod is not the end of the road. It's actually the beginning of a new stage for the Church there, and perhaps the seeds of *metanoia*, of radical conversion, conversion from within. From the roots of this *kairos* [a God-given moment], we can perceive strongly and clearly the presence of God, telling us that we need to move forward, in unity but also in diversity and in a very strong respect for our beautiful Church while paying attention to those who have been pushed away and thrown off the side of the road. They are the crucified presence of Jesus, and we cannot avoid this call from Jesus himself to respond to their cries and the signs of the times.

OSV: Why was it appropriate for the pope to call a synod on the Amazon territory?

Lopez: I remember very clearly a couple of meetings with the pope, and one of the things he said really touched my heart, and remains as clear guidelines in this preparation toward the synod. He said, "Please do not miss what's most important. ... The periphery becomes the center." It is the periphery, here in the Amazon territory, that has been considered part of the throwaway culture and discard-able.

There is no intention to try to change things in a global perspective. The intention of the synod is for us as a Church to be able to respond to a reality, which is crying out very loud, as we experience these days with the fires in the Amazon. But also, we need to listen to the sufferings of the people, which include the criminalizing of their leaders, the assassinations of so many indigenous people, some of them who are part of the Catholic Church.

OSV: How important a theme will inculturation be during the synod?

Lopez: Going into the roots of our own spiritual tradition as Catholics, we can see how Jesus himself has been very clear about bringing the good news of God to everyone. But he's also touched by other cultures. He's inculturated in concrete cultures.

If you read the document of the synod, you can see how about 60 times, Jesus the Lord is mentioned as the reference point, as the beginning and the end. What we are trying to achieve is a connection with the Second Vatican Council in which we are invited to recognize him in different cultures.

We need to broaden the perspective that Western culture is not the only one in which Jesus can be present. This would be caging in Jesus and making him something of our own dimension, and he's way beyond that.

OSV: What do you say to those who have criticized this synod and its documents?

Lopez: If people could only come [to the Amazon] and be there for one year, to serve and be responsible for a community in a very isolated place, facing what the people there face, I'm pretty sure some ideas would change. So I invite anyone who feels that the *instrumentum laboris* is somehow off reality to come here, to spend a few months or a year working there, receiving the gift of encounter with [the] cultures there, and also bringing the Gospel of God to them while respecting that dialogue.

OSV: What have people in the Amazon territory recently been telling you about the synod?

Lopez: What has touched my heart profoundly is when the People of God, who on the ground, the Catholics living there in the most isolated places, when they read the *instrumentum laboris*, they say, "This is me. This represents me. I am responsible for this." How can we not have hope when we hear that?

I've been meeting people in the countries of the Amazon territory, discussing the *instrumentum laboris*, and you can see how much hope there is with the bishops, with members of the clergy, with missionaries, with religious men and women and the People of God. There is so much hope. There is peace. There is unity. There is joy. That doesn't mean that we agree on everything, it's just that we feel represented by this process.

Brian Fraga is a contributing editor for Our Sunday Visitor.