

AUSTRALIS

OBSERVATORIO DEL SUR



**RESULTS OF SURVEY OF 70 LEADERS IN 18
LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES TO FOCUS
RESEARCH AREAS**



WHO WE ARE

ΔUSTRΔLIS

We are a social observatory focused on serving communities of faith, organizations, churches and Christian ministries located preferably in the southern hemisphere. Australis evokes the terra incognita of the south, from where we must analyze our own contexts in our own languages and from where we wish to celebrate what has been done for the extension of the Kingdom of God. We also wish to bring issues to discussion that will allow us to better serve in our own spheres of influence, always seeking to honor those who make things happen. In our case we are going to focus on the Evangelical Christian Churches located in the countries of the South, that is, countries that are mainly located in Latin America, Africa and Oceania. These countries are characterized by emerging or developing economies, and often face challenges in terms of human development, poverty, inequality, limited access to resources and limited political power at the international level.

Our Vision

A relevant church serving effectively according to the values of the of God ´s Kingdom

Our Mission

To provide information and analysis from different perspectives on challenges that the Lord's Church is currently facing. We reflect with the leadership on relevant, practical and evidence-based alternatives that bless society.





Our Core Values



We serve the Church. We serve every faith-based organization that is Christian without any distinction. From our possibilities we will seek unity within diversity.



We honor experience and best practices. We will focus on serving the leadership that is doing Church in our contexts, we will seek to make best practices common practice in the service of the Church. We want to provide relevant input of high quality and usefulness.



We seek integrity in the management of resources. This implies careful and solid management of information, as well as a clear sense of stewardship focused on impact.



We build evidence to improve society. We seek to be a reference point for the contribution of the churches of the South to improve society and a space for respectful and constructive exchange within the different Christian organizations and for dialogue between society and the Christian Church.



Our focus areas are threefold:

- Reflection and knowledge generation
- Awareness and advocacy
- Dissemination of information

The best theory is a good practice



Synthesis of the survey results

Introduction

When we decided to start this journey for serving churches and Christian ministries located in the countries that are mainly in Latin America, Africa and Oceania, we wanted to do it in a gradual, organic and grounded way, hand in hand with the people and ministries we wish to serve.

Gradual because we would start the consultations from Latin America and then move on to the other continents. Organic because as the findings of our research come out, we will share them not only for socializing the information but seeking to connect the ministries that can add value in the topics we find.

Grounded because beyond the knowledge and experience we have; we will consider the opinions of those who make things happen (1) which will allow us to honor our mission and vision as Australis.

Our main desire is to walk alongside those who have developed a mastery in their work by dint of passionate practice aligned to a transcendent calling. We value academic approaches, but we have a commitment to those who, by dint of daily work, are impacting the world from this part of the planet. That's why we say that, for us, the best theory is a good practice. We nourish ourselves from what is happening, learn from it and share it with the aspiration that the best practices will become common practices. That will be the spirit behind any research we share.



Fuentes: BID, Banco Mundial, CEPAL, ONU GMSA 2015, BID 2023, Elaboracion Australis

We are very grateful to all those who participated, name by name, renowned leaders of the evangelical world, but, above all, dear friends who responded with transparency, honesty, and a sincere desire to add value to the Lord's Church in this part of the planet.



For this document, our goal was to begin delimiting the area of research of Australis, for this we selected 70 leaders in 18 Latin American countries[1], who were chosen from a universe of 30,000 churches with which our partners interact with in this part of the planet. We approached these leaders in the spirit of focusing, learning and taking their advice to make our research as useful and relevant as possible, we posed three big questions that would frame our future research which we summarize here succinctly:

In this sense, this document is the meeting of the results of the survey and the areas in which Australis wants to serve the Church, this will help us to frame the work aligned to the questions that will emerge from this research. To all of them, we pose three main questions that will contribute to focus our future research, which we summarize here:

The questions:

1 What areas should we focus our research on to better serve them?

2 What are the imaginaries or beliefs that we should dismantle as a church in order to give a more relevant message in these new times?

3 What leadership model do we believe is necessary for these new times?

All were open-ended questions, so we concentrated on a small number of leaders. In the next survey we plan to expand these inquiries and then analyze them with the help of artificial intelligence tools. The result of this initial survey was enriching, not only did it help us focus future research, but from the perspective of a group that loves the Church, it raised issues that we believe need to be changed in order to fulfill and experience the power of the Great Commission in our communities. We trust that this group will expand, then the opinions of the other continents will come and from their own contexts and languages we will ask the same questions to refine the research area of Australis

The present document is the result of the decantation of the answers of these leaders and our own analysis that is transversalized with this question: **How can we best serve those who are passionate about the Kingdom of God in their lives, relationships, communities, and designs?** That is why after sharing the findings in a synthetic way, we end with questions that will help the evolution of Australis to serve in an increasingly relevant and pertinent way.

"Today's church should not be separated by denominations but united as one body in Christ."

Satirio Dos Santos
Colombia



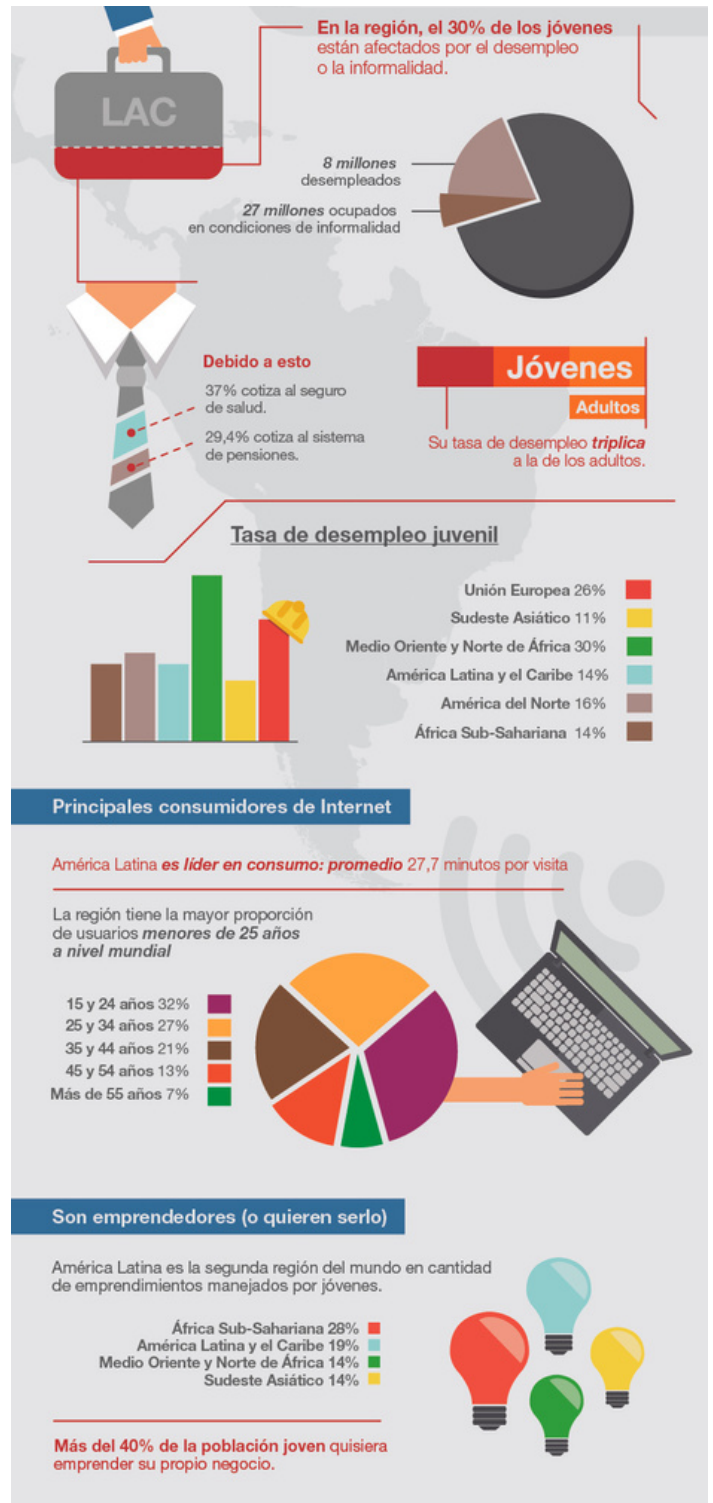
First theme: Family

The family is at the center of concern of the Church, it always has been, but thanks to the quality of the responses, we were able to discover that there were two central concerns within this theme: **1) The new models of family and 2) the family as a sower of identity for their new generations.**

About the new models. - Our classic imaginaries of a father, a mother and children as a nuclear family no longer monopolize the entire population that the Church must disciple or accompany. New models are emerging and we must inquire more about them. Grandparents raising parents, female heads of household, divorced parents forming a new home, couples who do not wish to have children, etc. We must know how the family has been reconfigured to find pertinent strategies of accompaniment along with the whole effort of restoration and reconciliation to which the Lord's Church is called.

Questions to be explored in the future

- How can we respond and support new models without feeling guilty for not forcing idealized models that could be one of the greatest obstacles for the growth and relationship of their members?
- What discipleship material can we provide that responds to their real needs in the contexts of our countries of the South?
- How to help meet the new needs arising from these new models?





The family as a sower of identity:

Latin America is a young continent, more than 50% of the population is under 21 years old. (CEPAL, 2021) Our children, adolescents and young people are being bombarded on social networks ruled by algorithms that take advantage of their emotional wounds, generate anxiety and capitalize on the identity crises that every human being has, especially at their particular stage of life. This is not going to improve with the heyday of Artificial Intelligence at the service of social networks to build their own "sheepfold" in order to offer them to the highest bidder.

"We don't know how to go to the LGBT community, we need material or strategies to evangelize to them."

Karina Donaire
Honduras

Questions to be explored in the future

- Are we getting stuck in discussing the symptoms of this lack of identity, such as sexual orientations, influence of the environment or virtualization of relationships?
- Are we aware of the effects of this new epidemic?
- How can the Church bring parents closer to children in these new contexts?
- How to help you sow identity and purpose while respecting the uniqueness and personal stories coming from these new family contexts?

Second Theme: The Church as an agent of change in the community



The church must be salt and light of the earth, the pagan conception of personal salvation should not be conceived without a communal manifestation of this faith. However, Latin America, despite being one of the most Christianized regions, is the most unequal continent (Tiempo, 2023), with 42 of the 50 most violent cities (BBC, 2018), and with the highest rates of corruption perception (CNN, 2023). We cannot yet say why this contradiction occurs, but from the opinions received we do know that there are things we want to change in the issue related to justice and social work of the Evangelical Church, which are summarized in the following two paragraphs:

"We need to provide answers to social needs".

Ricardo Castillo
Costa Rica

"We need to be aware of the drama of human mobility for those who stay and those who leave."

Carlos Rodriguez
Venezuela

We need to develop new relationships with political power to overcome clientelism, patronage and rescue the role of the church for social transformation, generating new models of advocacy

We do not want to be used by political parties nor should we look for godfathers in power, this takes away the power and authority of the church to be the ethical reference for society. There has been much pain generated when, in the name of the church and the principles it defends, division within the church has been promoted, acts of abuse or corruption have been endorsed and political clientelism has been justified

"The church must respond to the accelerating deterioration of values.

"Alberto Prokopchuk
Argentina



Fuente InsightCrime.org 2021, Adaptacion Australis

Questions to be explored in the future

- How can we earn the right to be heard as a Church?
- How can we awaken the conscience of our countries on issues that make God's heart pain?
- How do we stand up as an ethical authority ready to serve, slow to judge, but firm in defending the causes which break God's heart?

We need to respond in relevant ways to corruption, inequality, poverty, forced migration, and violence in an effective way to demonstrate that the gospel has transformative power

For centuries the church has developed a social work in favor of the most vulnerable, today we can be engaged in debates with groups that accuse it of encouraging what the church by nature must combat.

We need to make visible the fruit of integral discipleship that generates changes in the communities and recognize with humility when we have not shown the transforming power of the Great Commission in our countries.

"We need to develop transformational and transcendent leaders."

Cruz Mario Paniagua
Ecuador



Questions to be explored in the future

- How can we show the processes of social transformation gestated by our faith communities?
- How instead of the false perception of look like opponents of justice-aligned causes, can we demonstrate that we are peacebuilders and advocates for the most vulnerable as evidence of our Christian identity?
- How can we show in our environment the effect of salvation through justice and peace in the communities we wish to influence?
- How to develop academically plausible evidence, beyond anecdotes, of the beneficial effect of the church to combat corruption, violence and inequality of opportunity?



Third Theme New models of being Church for others

The pandemic has taught us many things, including the value of discipleship to sustain the church and the power of prayer to generate intimacy in the community even at a distance. We have also reconfigured ourselves so that the communities around a common interest are more valuable than physical spaces. The responses to this topic raised **three relevant issues:**

First Issue; We need to give more and better space for the participation of youth leadership to respond to the demands of a young continent

The average age of the continent is less than 30 years (UNFPA, 2023), do we know its priorities and its contexts? Do we know about their challenges? Is senior leadership willing to generate disruptive spaces for the flourishing of this new leadership? How do we promote an intergenerational dialogue that generates synergies for the work of the church?

"We need leaders who are mentors, not egocentric, who do not take over the congregation."

Laura Castro USA

Second Issue: We need to rethink the way of doing church outside of physical spaces and taking advantage of the new tools at our disposal

Social networks have taken the lead in organizing and even modifying the behavior of "sheepfolds" or "tribes" that offer themselves to the highest bidder to be consumers on duty or to support causes that distance us from our image and likeness of God fed by fear, greed or fear of rejection.

"The church can be the epicenter of creativity and missiological execution."

Andrés González
Ecuador



The church needs to build a relevant response, not to take advantage of the groups or tribes formed by the networks or the new social ones, but to respond to their greater interests. If we want to take advantage of social networks, we must be clear that images cannot replace reality.

Third issue: We need to train Christians properly to present and defend the gospel in different contexts

Many of our speeches do not connect with the people we wish to reach in these post-pandemic times. We cannot--by merely seeking shelter in the reliability and solidity of the Word—excuse ourselves for not being culturally relevant and compassionately empathetic. Sometimes we give our culture the weight of the Word of God and we have not been willing to incarnate in the groups where Jesus is present, therefore losing relevance and closeness with those we are called to serve.

"Normally the church with its liturgy, language, form and welcome is designed to retain believers, but not to reach out to others." We are a hotel for believers or a hospital for the sick."

David Ortega
Ecuador

Questions to be explored in the future

- What are the new models of Christian community that are working in this part of the world?
- What will be the church's response to work on the formation and discipleship of these new groups and how will we redefine social spaces to be more relevant in our mission?
- How will we nurture critical thinking, creativity, and innovation resting on a God who doesn't need to be defended and can't be manipulated?
- How can we create a culture that allows us to listen and ask questions instead of judging?
- What do we need to understand the context and wounds of the groups we wish to reach?
- What do we need to renounce to discover new paths and spaces of connection creating meaningful relationships with the new generations?

"It would be helpful to dialogue with grassroots people and their families to gather insight from the stakeholders themselves to understand their most relevant needs."

Freddy Guerrero
Ecuador

No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved."

Matthew 9:16-17 ESV



PART TWO:

imaginaries to be dismantled

“No man knows how bad he is, ‘till he has tried very hard to be good”.

C.S. Lewis

Whether it's cognitive biases in leadership, giving more weight to the culture we inherit, or simply because comfort, indifference, and ignorance, we've parked ourselves in places that can make it difficult for God's Word and Spirit to flow in the best way in new contexts. All this, whether by action or omission, leads us to maintain paradigms, beliefs, ways of reading or projecting our ministries that do not help to experience the transformative power of the great commission and make relevance only a change of fashion. When we asked leaders what imaginaries we should dismantle in our churches, the answers were grouped into **three broad themes**:

First theme: Let us dismantle the idea of building the church around the local building.

That is, focusing on the internal numerical growth of the church without seeing the correlation in the change of the community or communities to which the members belong or where the church is located. This reproduces traditional growth dynamics that do not show the transformative power of the Great Commission and focus on numerical growth rather than gospel transformation. It seeks to keep members rather than to challenge them to other levels of commitment to be agents of change in their environment. The false belief that a small church is a failed large church, as mentioned by one of our leaders, generates anxiety about not wanting to show a numerically small church in bi-vocational ministries,



figure 2: Most recurrent words in the answers to question 2 generated in Wordclouds.com

“We need to dismantle the idea of being just 'maintenance churches' that are more focused on membership not leaving.”

Erwin Garcia Orantes
Guatemala

“Let us dismantle the belief that “templecentric” living is evidence of being right with God.”

Carlos Rodrigez
Venezuela

This prevents us from enjoying the value of community focusing on making our church a healing community with deeper impact than superficial growth could have. We confuse massive preaching strategies with pastoral impartings that bless generations. This gives rise to false problems of church growing. With this the local church becomes larger but does not develop in the community.



With this the local church becomes bigger but does not develop in the community. A big church is good. A big church with character is better. There is not necessarily a relationship between less size and better formation, but we do know that when pressure for numbers takes precedence, regardless of size, profundity is lost.

Questions to be explored in the future

- *We want to see our churches growing numerically, but how can we be church to others in our social spaces?*
- *What does it take for us to stop taking a physical place as a reference and start focusing on a community?*
- *What would make our community miss us if we closed the church venue?*
- *How do we construct the same reality in the space of Sunday worship and the social space where we must also worship?*

Second theme: Let us dismantle the imaginary bifurcation between Church and society.

The dichotomy of thought that we can act differently as a church and as ordinary citizens brings several dangers, one of them being the contradiction of putting the mission of the Church above the mission of God for humanity. The wife of the lamb cannot be an end in itself. The natural consequence of this is a church that ignores social problems or a church that acts like a train that spends more than 90% of its energy to drive the locomotive instead of the wagons, this relativizes our commitment to transformation. We can end up looking for a numerical and not organic growth, which can lead us to be focused adults to generate more resources

We need to work intensively not to distance the profane from the sacred, rather to know that we are called to the reconciliation of the sacred that was profaned, seeking to reconcile the whole Universe in God.



"We need to shed a religiosity that does not engage the church with the community."

Diego Trujillo
Ecuador

Questions to be explored in the future

- How can we make the church a relevant space to solve the personal challenges of our members?
- What can we do to avoid relativizing the things that hurt humanity because of our own theological biases?
- How do we highlight and celebrate the church best practices that are transforming communities?
- How do we define social transformation from the perspective of the Churches in the South?

Third theme: Let's dismantle the idea of giving more weight to culture than to mission.

We deviate in two ways, in one way we do it by replicating harmful patterns that take us away from a pertinent and relevant response to society, for example: in the name of culture or tradition, we can discriminate against women, stop serving people who are not members of the church and revolve around leadership instead of the God's Word.

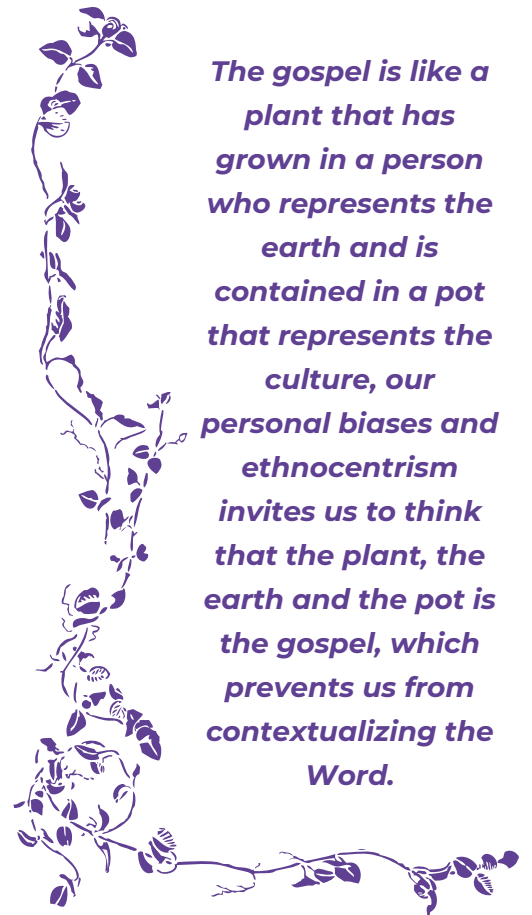
This can lead us to promote a pseudo-gospel of prosperity, an emotional worship without daily practice, an over spiritualization or a territorial management that can make us see the other Christian community as a rival, we give more weight to competition than connection.

But on the other hand, we deviate when we want to preach an anthropocentric gospel, the grace that justifies sin and not the sinner. We encourage the audience to a culture of temporary comfort and superficiality to which we will eventually have to account when wounded people complain to us for having entertained and diverted them instead of helping them find in Jesus and his principles long-term solutions. In fact,

I personally think we should explore whether this disenchantment is one of the reasons for the turnover in our temples,

Questions to be explored in the future

- How can we incarnate the mission in such a way that the ship is in the water and not the water in the ship?
- What is the weight of the anxiety to grow and remain afloat that keeps us from diving deeper into the mission?
- How do we find new strategies that allow us new points of balance to sustain the work of the church with workers who can be a good testimony of life balance for their families?
- How are we to care for, evidence, and celebrate ministries that are changing the world not by their size or fame but by their passion for obedience to go in the right direction?
- How do we connect the large churches with the large churches that are on the front lines of the mission field?
- What organic growth strategies can the most relevant churches on the continent share?



The gospel is like a plant that has grown in a person who represents the earth and is contained in a pot that represents the culture, our personal biases and ethnocentrism invites us to think that the plant, the earth and the pot is the gospel, which prevents us from contextualizing the Word.

"We need to change the religiosity that instead of involving us in society distances us from it".

Roberto Quinatoa
Perú



Let us dismantle the imaginary that leads us to relativize the universal priesthood of the believer.

A church centered on its facilities and own activities can make us believe that we only have to fulfill liturgical responsibilities instead of transformational commitments, in this context it is easy for the believer to abdicate his responsibility in the processes of transformation and construction of the Church on a broader scale, therefore, it will be easier for the believer to settle for attending or being part of the liturgy on Sundays.

"We need to dismantle the "pastorcentrism" that prevents the priesthood of every believer from being put into practice"o de todo creyente".

Jorge Fagundez
Uruguay

"We must dismantle the idea of worship as the totalizing center of the Church's ministry."

Jose Galvis
USA

We abdicate our universal priesthood for comfort and give the pastor the authority to change our lives through his preaching, we impose a heavy burden on him to be the center of everything and in the process, we also carry his family, we seek that they are the ideal reference of what we are not, but we think we should be. We idealize and condemn it at the same time.

But on the other hand, a controlling or authoritarian leadership underestimates the priestly role of the believer and can end up designing a moral scale in the image and likeness of what the leadership wants to show externally, guilt, helplessness and shame are used to learn to imitate and hide us, this can overwhelm both the leader and the believer and gestate a relationship where spiritual abuse is allowed.



Questions to be explored in the future

- How can we support the church to be a community where everyone expresses and connects with God according to their own design enriching the work of the body of Christ?
- What can we do to dismantle authoritarian cultures to be cultures of honor?
- How do we invite the believer to assume his responsibility beyond the ecclesiastical function or the fulfillment of the work plan of the church to be an agent of transformation in his family and community?
- How do we demonstrate the empowerment of those who take responsibility for changing their environment?
- How do we raise up servant leaders who are not defined by being in the first places?



Second characteristic: Vulnerable leaders.

Leaders who can look at each other with the eyes of Jesus and from there can embrace contradictions and accompany people, leaders who do not have to teach to hide, but who can understand the struggles of others from their own personal wounds, wounded healers. Leaders who go against the morality that distances us from intimacy with God to accompany us on the countercurrent journey of freedom against social pressure. Dethrone the public scale of sins, look with compassion at the misjudged and feel pain for being far from God's heart rather than being discovered



Questions to be explored in the future

- How do we create a mentoring culture to restore people?
- How do we reclaim the power of vulnerability, compassion for restoration?



Third characteristic: A leader who seeks the development of people using discipleship to train, empower and drive.

Leaders who learn to catalyze the strengths of their teams. How can we equip leaders to express their spirituality in a practical way that develops their teams and creates environments conducive to creativity and innovation?

"We must have leadership that is contextual, dynamic, thinks outside the box and is aware of the times we live in.

***"Harold Caicedo
USA***



Fourth characteristic: Prepared leadership

This answer stood out above the others and in my opinion, rightly so. Without this primary requirement we can be good therapists, coaches, management, preachers with good stories, but we will not be able to accompany others from the heart of God



Fifth characteristic Líderes preparados.

Where the knowledge of the God's Word is the basis and must be aware of working with humility and openness to be a strategic, creative, innovative, visionary leadership that goes beyond the parish vision, with a clear vision for these new times. But also with a participatory vision that does not seek to impose it on others by playing the role of God, but rather that creates a thirst for transcendent purposes aligned with the call that each believer has.

Questions to be explored in the future

- How do we build participatory visions to connect the personal call and the call of different ministries for the same city or country?
- What will be the soft or genuine skills that we must develop in that leadership?
- How to equip them to lead in ambiguous, fragile, volatile, complex times?
- How do we help them unmask false offers of identity in a metaverse that wants to change people's behavior so that they go after the offers of the consumer society away from God?
- How to accompany leadership formation ministries in the South that seek to prepare leaders relevant to our culture and that at this moment in history are the greatest source of evangelization for the world?

Acknowledgments

Certainly, the challenges are great, but those of us who are convinced of the value of the Lord's Church and its witnesses, whatever organization they are in, know that it is possible to make a difference in the world. From our part as an Australis Observatory, we only want to help highlight the issues in which we need to advance and socialize the contributions of the churches and ministries that from practice are answering or working on these questions.

We long to be a home for all, to provide reliable information and connect ministries and churches that share a desire to add value in the global South. We aspire to be an instrument of learning and celebration, to show that the Church and its various ministries offer a path of redemption, reconciliation, and restoration, marked by the footsteps of Jesus



Additionally, we want to expand our circle of influence by serving and working together to answer the questions God has placed on our hearts in our common quest to find relevant ways to share the Lord's love. We desire to highlight the transformative power of the Great Commission and express His glory in the global South.

Our heartfelt gratitude to all the leaders who participated in the survey. This document is our expression of thanks to them. We leave the doors open to any partner, Christian organization, or church that wishes to inquire further about these questions. Our hope is that, as Australis, we can dive in knowing that with God's grace, we will not only identify the challenges, but also make the answers visible or build them together.

September 27, 2023

José Luis Ochoa
CEO Australis

"Questions don't change the truth. But they give it movement."

Giannina Braschi

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Next steps

**October
2023**

First survey of 1,000 churches in Latin America on the questions triggered by this document.

**November
2023**

Latin American leadership consultation on integral discipleship.

**January
2024**

Appreciative inquiry on best practices for church planting in coordination with partners.

**March
2024**

Third survey with 2,000 churches in Latin America on the questions raised in the consultations with the leadership of the faith communities.

2024

Consultation with Brazilian leaders, surveys, meeting between churches and pro-church organizations around common interests and initiation of consultations in Africa.

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