



TRAINING REFLECTION
April - May 2026

“Dilexi te”

An invitation to continue living our AIC mission to the fullest

Introduction

In his first apostolic exhortation “Dilexi te”¹, published last October, Pope Leo XIV invites us to “look at poverty in a different way; not only as a reality to be fought, but also as a place where God speaks and where believers must allow themselves to be challenged”².

The exhortation, initiated by Pope Francis, focuses on love for the poor and on the key role that service to the most disadvantaged people plays in the Church, which is why it speaks to us in a special way as members of AIC.

After a brief introduction explaining the context in which the exhortation was written, the Holy Father outlines this wonderful and interesting reflection in five chapters. His text is an invitation to the entire Church to discover Christ’s love in the poor and the call to serve them—something that we, as members of AIC, have been living out and putting into practice for centuries through our Vincentian charism and spirituality.

The purpose of this training reflection is to share, in a simple way, a summary of this apostolic exhortation, to introduce us to it and allow us to reflect on the importance of love for people living in poverty and the mission of service within the Church. To this end, we offer you the material prepared by Fr. Andrés Felipe Rojo, CM³, which highlights the main ideas of the exhortation. We hope it will encourage you to live, with even greater passion and depth, your commitment to our most vulnerable brothers and sisters.

Summary of Dilexi Te by Pope Leo XIV

The title *Dilexi te* (“I have loved you”) (Rev 3:9) evokes God’s love for a Christian community that lacked resources and was treated with contempt, reflecting the words of Mary’s canticle. Contemplating the love of Christ, who identifies with “the lowest ranks of society,” highlights the dignity of the human person, especially when they are “weak, scorned, or suffering.” Leo XIV explains that Pope Francis was preparing this exhortation before his death, imagining Christ addressing each person living in poverty and saying: “I have loved you” (Rev 3:9).

¹ [Apostolic Exhortation “Dilexi te” by Pope Leo XIV on love for the poor](#) (4th October 2025)

² [Friendship with the poor: The bishops of Belgium invite us to live “Dilexi te”](#). Article in French, published on 16th April 2026 on the cathobel.be website.

³ Material in Spanish published on the Corazón de Paúl website:

<https://www.corazondepaul.org/2025/10/09/resumen-de-dilexi-te-del-papa-leon-xiv/>



1. Chapter one: A few essential words

a) Affection and revelation

Affection for the Lord is inextricably linked to affection for the poor. Jesus' words: "You always have the poor with you" (Mt 26:11) are related to His promise to be with His disciples always (Mt 28:20) and His identification with the least of these: "Just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). Meeting those who have no power is a fundamental way of encountering the Lord of history, not a mere act of charity, but an act of revelation.

b) The cry and multiple forms of poverty

The memory of St Francis of Assisi and his lifestyle inspire evangelical renewal. God shows his concern for the cry of the oppressed (Ex 3:7–10). The condition of people living in poverty is a cry that challenges all people, societies, political and economic systems, and, not least, the Church. Poverty is not a homogeneous phenomenon but rather, there are multiple forms, such as the lack of material means of subsistence, social marginalisation, moral, spiritual, and cultural poverty, personal fragility, and/or the lack of rights and freedom.

c) Inequalities and prejudices

Despite countless efforts, the commitment to tackle the social and structural causes of poverty remains insufficient because society often prioritises the accumulation of wealth at all costs (an effort which favours the strongest). This creates a conflicting growth of wealthy elites living in a "bubble" while more and more people are living in poverty. Poverty worsens and inequalities grow. The apostolic exhortation highlights the particular vulnerability of **women**, who are "doubly poor" as they suffer exclusion, mistreatment, and violence.

The document also speaks out against **ideological prejudices** that downplay the severity of poverty or attribute it to people not "deserving" otherwise. Most people living in poverty are not poor by choice. Christians must not succumb to secular ideologies that dismiss or ridicule charitable works, which are the "burning heart of the Church's mission."

2. Chapter two: God chooses the poor

a) The preferential option

God's poverty is manifested in his descent as he shares the limitations of our human nature, becoming poor, being born in a manger, and sharing in the radical poverty of death on the cross. **God's preferential option for the poor** shows his compassion for weakness and care especially for the oppressed, calling on the Church to also make a decisive and radical choice in favour of the weakest.

b) Jesus, the poor Messiah

The Old Testament finds its fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth, who, though he was rich, became poor to enrich us with his poverty (2 Cor 8:9). The Gospel shows this radical poverty in every aspect of His life: exclusion since birth (there was no room at the inn), persecution (flight to



Egypt), and exclusion in death (he was crucified outside the city walls). Jesus was a craftsman (carpenter) and an itinerant teacher who had nowhere to lay His head, a sign of His vulnerability and His full trust in God. Jesus presented himself as the Messiah of the poor, sent to bring the Good News to them and to set the captives free (Lk 4:18). He proclaimed that the poor were blessed: “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God” (Lk 6:20).

c) Mercy in the Bible

Love for one’s neighbour is tangible proof of one’s authentic love for God (1 Jn 4:20; Mk 12:29–31). Jesus taught that every act of love toward one’s neighbour, no matter how small, is a reflection of divine charity (Mt 25:40). We are encouraged to practice works of mercy, such as inviting people who are poor and/or living with disabilities to banquets, since they have no way to repay us (Lk 14:12–14). The parable of the final judgment (Mt 25:31–46) shows the “protocol” by which we will be judged.

The Letter of James strongly links faith with works, warning that faith without works is “dead” (Jas 2:14–17). The Scriptures contain strong exhortations to practice justice, warning the rich that withheld wages cry out against them. The early Christian community offered a clear example of charity, which included resolving conflicts in the community by distributing subsidies to widows and ensuring service to the poorest (Acts 6:1–6).

3. Chapter three: A Church for the poor

Historical richness and testimonies

The desire for a “**Church which is poor and for the poor**” reflects the understanding that the Church must identify with those who are least. The exhortation presents examples from the tradition of the Church:

- **The deacons and martyrs:** St Stephen and St Lawrence united their service to the poor with martyrdom. St Lawrence affirmed that **the poor are the treasures of the Church**.
- **The Fathers of the Church:** They saw in the poor a privileged way to reach God. **St John Chrysostom** spoke out against luxury and declared that not giving to the poor was to rob them of life. **St Augustine** taught that the poor are the sacramental presence of the Lord.
- **Care of the sick:** Christian compassion manifested itself in caring for sick people, in whom the crucified Lord is recognised. Saints such as St John of God and St Camillus de Lellis, along with many women’s Congregations, embodied this service with “motherly affection.”
- **Monastic life:** Monastic life (St Basil the Great, St Benedict of Norcia) integrated hospitality and charity into its spirituality. Monasteries were places of refuge, education, and human development, showing that voluntary poverty is a path of freedom and communion.
- **Freeing prisoners:** Orders such as the Trinitarians and the Mercedarians emerged with the specific charism of freeing enslaved Christians, extending the redemptive mystery of Christ. Their mission today extends to modern forms of slavery, such as human trafficking.



- **Mendicant orders:** St Francis of Assisi and St Dominic de Guzmán initiated an evangelical revolution by adopting an itinerant life without possessions, living among the poor and seeing them as “brothers and sisters, living images of the Lord.” St Clare of Assisi defended the *Privilegium Paupertatis* (privilege of poverty).
- **Education of the poor:** The Church has long regarded education as an act of justice and faith. Figures such as St Joseph Calasanz (Pious Schools) and St John Baptist de La Salle (Brothers of the Christian Schools) founded institutions offering free education to young people living in poverty.
- **Migrants:** The Church has always recognised in people who are migrants the living presence of the Lord. Saints such as St John Baptist Scalabrini and St Frances Xavier Cabrini dedicated their mission to supporting them. The response to the challenges of migration is summed up in four key verbs: **welcome, protect, promote and integrate.**
- **At the side of the least among us:** Saints such as St Teresa of Calcutta and St Dulce of the Poor are icons of charity, who saw people living in poverty not only as objects of compassion but as “teachers of the Gospel” and the suffering flesh of Christ.
- **Popular movements:** The exhortation recognises and encourages popular movements made up of lay people that fight against the structural causes of poverty, inequality, and the denial of rights.

4. Chapter four: A history that continues

a) Social doctrine and the Second Vatican Council

Recent Magisterium has been a source of teachings concerning people living in poverty. The Second Vatican Council was a pivotal moment, where St John XXIII declared that the Church is “**the Church of the poor.**” Cardinal Lercaro even affirmed that the mystery of Christ in the poor is, in some sense, the “only theme of the Council as a whole.” The Council affirmed the universal destination of earthly goods and the social function of property (*Gaudium et Spes*).

b) Structures of sin and inequality

Charity is a historical force that drives efforts to address the structural causes of poverty. It can speak out against the “dictatorship of an economy that kills” and ideologies that defend the complete autonomy of the market. These injustices have been described as “**social sin**” by Conferences of the Latin American episcopate. Social sin takes the form of a “structure of sin” or “**social alienation,**” where it becomes “normal or reasonable” to ignore people living in poverty. It is urgent to cure society of this sickness, as inequality is “the root of social ills.”

c) The poor as subjects of evangelisation

The Aparecida Conference emphasised that the preferential option for the poor is implicit in Christological faith. It is crucial to view marginalised communities not as objects of charity, but **as subjects capable of creating their own culture** and as bearers of a “mysterious wisdom.” People living in poverty are teachers of the Gospel who show us how to simplify our lives and trust in God.



5. Chapter five: A constant challenge

a) The flesh of Christ

Caring for people living in poverty is an essential part of the Church's unbroken tradition. Poor people are part of Christians' "**family**". Indifference towards them is the symptom of an unhealthy society that seeks prosperity but turns its back on suffering. For Christians, people living in poverty are not a sociological category, but the **very flesh of Christ**. The Church must reach out to the flesh of Christ, which is "flesh that hungers and thirsts, and experiences infirmity and imprisonment."

b) Almsgiving today

The exhortation confirms that the most important way to help is to promote access to **decent work**. However, if that is not possible, **almsgiving** remains necessary as a means of contact and empathy with those less fortunate. Almsgiving does not exempt institutions of their responsibilities, nor does it replace the fight for justice. But however modest it may be, almsgiving does invite us to pause, look the person living in poverty in the eyes, and share with them. The practice of almsgiving is a gesture that allows us **to touch the suffering flesh of the poor**.

In its conclusion, the exhortation emphasises that a Church that sets no limits to love and knows no enemies to fight but only people to love is the Church that the world needs today.

Questions for personal and group reflection

1. Which parts of the apostolic exhortation stand out most to you as an AIC volunteer?
2. What have the disadvantaged people you support in your AIC service taught you? Share an experience.
3. As AIC volunteers, how could we best share our experience with the most disadvantaged people **within our communities/around us** and encourage others to commit to our most vulnerable brothers and sisters?

Reflection compiled by the Training team, April 2026