

PASTORAL GUIDELINES

OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN RESPONSE TO MINING



| EDITORIAL



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Contents

	PAG.
Introduction	1
1. The cry of impoverished people and of Mother Earth	3
2. Extractivism	5
3. The Church's option for communities and their territories	9
4. Strengthening local Churches for ecological conversion	11
5. The relationship of the Church with States and companies	13
Conclusion	15

Introduction

This document is the fruit of reflection, discernment, prayer, and commitment of members of the Catholic Church in the defense of the Common Home in Latin America, who maintain a constant dialogue with other Churches. Coordinated by the Churches and Mining Network¹, with the support of CELAM and inspired especially by a recent meeting² of some Latin American bishops living in regions threatened or affected by mining.

The text seeks to offer the Churches of Latin America pastoral proposals orientations in response to the impacts of mining on territories, and the violations of socio-environmental rights it causes, and the threats and violence to which the people of God, including ecclesial leaders, continue to be exposed. It expresses the ethical and prophetic role of the Church, in light of the Word of God and the magisterium, in a context of particular urgency for the socio-ecological commitment of our faith.

Ten years have passed since the publication of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which renewed the Church's path in prioritizing Integral Ecology and issued an urgent call to the world to care for the Common Home, opening new political, economic, cultural, educational, and spiritual perspectives for our societies. The questions raised by this encyclical are even more necessary today, in these times of environmental and climatic collapse.

At the same time, the Church is celebrating a Jubilee, marking 2025 years since the incarnation of God in our history, thus reaffirming the biblical commitment to renew humanity's relationships and "to be reconciled with the world"³

¹ The ecumenical network Churches and Mining is a coalition of faith communities and Christian organizations in Latin America working to defend the rights of communities affected by mining. It promotes socio-environmental justice, denounces the violations caused by extractivism, and supports sustainable alternatives that respect life and nature. www.iglesiasymineria.org

² <https://www.vaticannews.va/es/iglesia/news/2024-10/obispos-latinoamericanos-las-consecuencias-de-la-mineria.html>

³ *Laudate Deum*, No. 69. This exhortation repropose the radicality of *Laudato Si'* in the context of the extreme phenomena of climate change, calling the world to action and responsibility.

The objective of the Jubilee was to re-establish the right relationship with God, with people, and with creation; it entailed the forgiveness of debts, the restitution of alienated lands, and the resting of the earth.

The Jubilee Year has as its motto "Pilgrims of Hope" and Pope Francis' Bull of Convocation was entitled "Hope does not disappoint." Among the most important themes, we highlight the proposal to governments to abolish the death penalty, cancel foreign debts, and create a fund to end poverty.

In this same year, 2025, the Conference of the Parties on Climate (COP30) will be held for the first time in the Amazon. The Church is participating significantly in this process, just as it did with commitment in the COP16 on Biodiversity in Cali, Colombia, in 2024. On these occasions, the Church has strongly supported the cause of the peoples and communities who, through the care of their territories, are the true protagonists in the fight against severe climate change.

1. The cry of impoverished people and of Mother Earth

We are at an extremely dangerous moment, and the socio-environmental risks are reaching alarming levels of climate collapse.

We are pained by the cry of communities and other creatures wounded by the advance of predatory extractivism, especially mining, which devastates, pollutes, seizes water and restricts access to common goods, appropriates territories, sacrifices communities' ways of life, and imposes itself as the only possible development alternative.

Today we endure the torture and martyrdom of 58 active wars in the world. There is no war without weapons, and there are no weapons without metals: missiles, drones, spy satellites, bombs, tanks, bombers, aircraft carriers, and more. We all oppose the horror of fratricidal wars. But where are the minerals extracted for the immoral arms industry? How do our countries cooperate in the arms race? Who – transnational companies, states, laws, technicians, scientists- promote this thriving business of death? These are questions we should ask before this technology of death destroys humanity and sister Mother Earth.

We grieve for the many socio-environmental leaders⁴ who have been assassinated, criminalized, slandered, or forced to flee because of the threats they face in defending their communities. As the Aparecida document notes, there is unbridled exploitation "leaving a trail of dilapidation, and even death, throughout our region⁵." The "Life Hangs by a Thread" campaign, an initiative of CELAM's Center for Pastoral Action Programs and Networks, aims to coordinate actions that promote solidarity, protection, and recognition of the work of human rights defenders, social leaders, and civic actors in Latin America and the Caribbean.

⁴ In 2022, 177 land and environmental defenders were killed worldwide, of which nearly 90% occurred in Latin America. Global Witness, *Defending Tomorrow: The Climate Crisis and Threats Against Land and Environmental Defenders*, report, 2023, available at <https://globalwitness.org/es/campaigns/land-and-environmental-defenders/voces-silenciadas/>

⁵ CELAM, *Aparecida Document*, No. 473.

Pope Francis heard this cry of pain and hope when he wrote a letter to the communities affected by mining, who met in Rome with the Dicastery for Integral Human Development:

You wanted to gather (...) so that the cry of so many people, families, and communities who suffer directly or indirectly from the often too negative consequences of mining could be heard. A cry for the lost land; a cry for the extraction of wealth from the ground which, paradoxically, has not produced wealth for the local populations who remain poor; a cry of pain in response to violence, threats, and corruption; a cry of indignation and support for the violations of human rights, discreetly or blatantly trampled upon in terms of the health of populations, working conditions, sometimes slavery and human trafficking that fuels the tragic phenomenon of prostitution; a cry of sadness and helplessness for the pollution of water, air and soil; a cry of incomprehension for the lack of inclusive processes and support from civil, local, and national authorities, who have the fundamental duty to promote the common good⁶.

For this reason, the Latin American peoples cry out: "Water is worth more than gold," and the Church supports their demonstrations and demands⁷.

4 | Placing at the center the clamor of the peoples and Mother Earth, the Church recognizes that many of the promises and guarantees of sustainability and development – through which States and mining companies obtained environmental and social licenses for extractive projects and operations- are, in reality, unsustainable and mere deceptions and disguises of corporate interests⁸. These serve to conceal the impacts on communities and territories, as well as violations of Human Rights and Nature. One of the major impacts of mining on communities is the "rupture of the social fabric," which manifests in divided families and communities and the buying of consciences.

⁶ Pope Francis' message to the meeting "United with God we hear a cry," organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (PCJP) in collaboration with the Latin American Churches and Mining Network, July 17-19, 2015

⁷ The Catholic Church in Panama, for example, recently joined the popular mobilizations throughout the country against mining, under the slogan "Panama is worth more without mining."

⁸ There are many publications on this subject, such as, for example, the book by eight Argentinean authors "15 mitos y realidades de la minería transnacional en Argentina;" <https://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/Argentina/iig-uba/20161025033400/15mitos.pdf>

2. Extractivism

By “extractivism,” we mean an unbridled tendency of the economic system to convert the goods of nature into capital. The action of “extracting” the greatest amount of materials in the shortest possible time, to convert them into raw materials and inputs that industry will use and transform into products and services that others will market, society will consume, and nature itself will then receive as polluting waste, constitutes the consumerist cycle being generated with increasing speed and risk⁹.

This type of relationship with Mother Earth, very different from that of peasant communities, Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant peoples, and many cultures of our continent, is characteristic of “an economic model based on profit, which does not hesitate to exploit, discard and even kill”¹⁰ the human being.” It is an economy that knows no limits because, by definition, it is only worth as much as it grows; it destroys and disposes to establish its cycle of death: extract, consume, and discard, both materials and people.

This model has intensified and become even more unrestrained as it now depends on a finance-dominated economy that drives it: the pace of extraction and export of minerals and other raw materials is no longer determined solely by productive and commercial needs but is guided by stock markets, investments, growth promises of large corporations and projections about the future use or scarcity of common goods. This economic model further contributes to inequality and the profit of large financial groups over the lives of people and territories.

For this reason, we adopt an alternative perspective framed in the concept ‘Transitions to Post-Extractivism’¹¹, which seeks to chart concrete paths toward development models that are less dependent on the intensive extraction of natural resources. This proposal establishes a gradual process comprising three main stages:

⁹ CELAM, Pastoral Letter MISSIONARY DISCIPLES, CUSTODIANS OF THE COMMON HOUSE, No. 11.

¹⁰ Fratelli Tutti, No. 22

¹¹ <http://gudynas.com/wp-content/uploads/GudynasAlayzaPostextractivismoAlternativas12.pdf>

Predatory mining, which represents the current model, based on intensive exploitation with serious socio-environmental impacts.

Necessary mining, oriented to satisfy only priority demands, reducing its scale and implementing strict environmental and social sustainability criteria.

Essential mining, which profoundly redefines the use of mineral resources, limiting it to what is strictly indispensable and with a focus on ecological and social justice.

These transitions imply structural changes in economic policies, the relationship with the territories, and the participation of the affected communities.

It is evident that a certain level of extractivism is necessary for technology, production, and daily life. However, current mining does not respond to this reality, as it follows unsustainable extraction rates and rhythms, driven by profit-seeking in financial markets and lacks investment policies in recycling materials or promoting simpler and less aggressive lifestyles and consumption.

6

The proposals of the CELAM document "Integral Ecology on the Route of the Laudate Deum¹²," with contributions to the Churches of the continent, also align with these ideas. The Commission for Integral Ecology of Latin America and the Caribbean (CEILAC), attached to CELAM, chose several thematic areas to deepen the Church's pastoral commitment in this field: social and environmental crisis; water, land and territory; culture of care, common good and alternatives for the various forms of good living; among others. The main proposed actions are citizen participation, pedagogical initiatives, dialogue and alliances, advocacy, and defense.

While many communities, popular movements, and parts of the academic world are seeking alternatives that value the lives of people and all of creation, the economic system is also reinventing itself, offering new narratives to justify the continuity of the extractivist model.

The most recent proposals to reconfigure this predatory economy are the mining-energy transitions, which aim to maintain the same lifestyle of the wealthiest societies, their consumption, and concentration of capital, merely by changing the matrix of energy sources. The problem is that the so-called "clean energies," in reality, require - for their capture, storage, and distribution - infrastructure and gigantic machinery, such

¹² CELAM and Jubilee Foundation, Integral Ecology on the route of the Laudate Deum. <https://adn.celam.org/iglesia-catolica-se-suma-a-los-compromisos-de-la-cop16-y-presenta-como-aportes-la-ruta-laudate-deum/>

as hydroelectric dams, wind turbines, solar panels, and batteries, which are manufactured with huge quantity and variety of so-called "critical" minerals, due to the market value they acquire in the corporate bid to lead their commodification.

According to projections made by governments and hegemonic corporations (China, USA, Canada, EU), this energy transition will require the extraction of around 50 critical minerals, some, such as lithium, copper, cobalt, rare earths, and nickel, in quantities much higher than today. Following these projections, the demand for these minerals could increase almost fourfold by 2030¹³. This implies a dramatic multiplication of conflicts and violence in the "sacrifice zones" destined to sustain the dominant economies.

In short, extractivism increases; it is a false solution, and it denies the thirst for dignity and respect for people and the guarantee of life for the planet.

¹³

<https://unctad.org/es/news/auge-de-minerales-criticos-el-cambio-energetico-global-trae-oportunidades-y-riesgos-para-los>

3. The Church's option for communities and their territories

The incarnation of God and the life of Jesus with the people of his time, as well as the tradition of faith and commitment of the Latin American Church after the Second Vatican Council, inspire our dioceses and local Churches to renew the option for the poorest, among whom today is also "our oppressed and devastated earth, which 'groans and travails in birth' (Romans 8:22)¹⁴."

Incarnation leads to an incarnational spirituality that recognizes the interconnectedness between the lives of individuals and all creatures.

Our local Churches are happy to celebrate together with the people, to listen to their hopes and desires, to join in their clamors and resistance, and to appreciate their popular devotion, which deeply links symbols and beings of our Mother Earth, such as water, air, earth, and fire.

Thus, we advance in dialogue with other spiritualities that have sustained resistance, such as Indigenous and Afro-descendant spiritualities, from which we can learn to dismantle the disordered and despotic anthropocentrism that characterizes our culture and religion, to purify our faith and recover the reverence and contemplation of God's presence in all creatures. Together with the communities, our faith is transformed and completed.

These communities invite us to walk alongside them in an attitude of authentic fraternity, which the Church wishes to embrace by placing itself at the service of the causes of justice and dignity for the most impoverished. This commitment is expressed in concrete forms of accompaniment, in the denunciation of injustices, in political advocacy, and in a transformative social prophecy. Moreover, it can be enriched with the support of the institutional recognition of the Church, which makes it possible to articulate this service from local territories to national and international political spheres.

¹⁴

Francis, *Laudato Si'*, No. 2.

One of the most frequent requests from communities is the guarantee of their "right to say no," that is, the right to self-determination in their territories, which are often recognized and defended as "mining free zones"¹⁵. The Church has participated in several of these mobilizations and has become an influential actor and a fundamental ally for the communities that dream of other opportunities in their territories.

This makes it possible to promote the ways and plans of life of the communities who, as in the case of Indigenous peoples, "when they remain in their territories, it is precisely they who take the best care of them" (LS 146). Numerous projects of local, circular, and participatory economies, also promoted by the Church, demonstrate that, with fair investment also from public authorities, a new economy could indeed be established, "that gives life and does not kill, that includes and does not exclude, that humanizes and does not dehumanize"¹⁶.

The Church's defense of the communities' ways of life and rights to territory aligns with the vision of the "Economy of Francis"¹⁷, which in turn requires a conversion from the consumerist and throwaway system to which our societies are subjected. Along with the proposal for transitions towards essential mining, it is necessary to adopt the perspective of "happy sobriety," understood as "a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, capable of deep enjoyment without being obsessed by consumption" (LS 222-227).

¹⁵ This is the case of the Church in El Salvador, which participated in the popular mobilizations for a country free of metallic mining <https://prensacomunitaria.org/2025/01/la-prohibicion-de-la-mineria-metalica-en-el-salvador-antecedentes-argumentos-y-desafios/> or the presence of the Church in the demonstrations against mining in Panama <https://www.vidanuevadigital.com/2023/10/21/la-iglesia-se-suma-a-las-manifestaciones-contra-la-explotacion-minera-en-panama/> o del referendo por el Chochó Andino, libre de la minería <https://es.mongabay.com/2023/08/ecuador-decidió-detener-explotacion-petrolera-en-yasuni-y-mineria-en-reserva-del-choco-andino/> Also the Episcopal Conference of the Dominican Republic pronounced itself on the impacts of mining <https://amerindiaenlared.org/contenido/25782/comunicado-de-la-conferencia-episcopal-dominicana-frente-a-las-agresiones-de-barrick-gold/>

¹⁶ Pope Francis' address to the youth from Assisi (Italy), 21.11.20.

¹⁷ <https://es.zenit.org/2019/05/13/francisco-convoca-a-los-jovenes-para-cambiar-la-economia-actual-en-asis/>

4. Strengthening local Churches for ecological conversion

Because of its moral authority and public recognition, the Church is frequently requested by the State¹⁸ or companies to legitimize established socioeconomic conditions. In some cases, it is also asked to mediate in conflicts caused by extractivism, with the aim of appeasing communities defending their territories and guaranteeing the continuity of mining activities.

However, many church leaders, informed of the truths hidden by the companies, understand that the role of the Church is to warn the People of God from deception and false promises.

When the position of faith-based organizations is coherent with the preferential option for the poor and the victims, and defends, together with them, the vindication of their rights and environmental justice, the forces of organized crime and even those who presume to hold power, exercising it outside of the common good, tend to move from seduction to threats, finger-pointing, criminalization, slander or attacks against their right to life.

Many bishops, priests, religious, catechists, ministers of the Word, and pastoral agents live under these threats and risks. The Church needs to support these individuals and communities by offering them guidance and protection.

It is the mission of the Church to listen to the cry of the poor, excluded, and discarded and to accompany the victims of social and ecclesial injustices with processes of recognition and reparation. It is urgent to reform the formative itineraries of the seminaries, including themes such as integral ecology, native peoples, inculturation and interculturality, and the Church's social thought. It is necessary to reaffirm and prioritize integral ecology in our communities, based on the four dreams of Querida Amazonia.

To accompany Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants in the defense of life, land, and cultures. To encourage the bishops to take this into account in their Pastoral Plans with a prophetic attitude.}

¹⁸ A good reference on the responsibility of the State and companies can be found in a CELAM publication: Alcántara, F., *Economía y doctrina social de la Iglesia*. https://www.celam.org/Images/img_noticias/doc24f15d6ce2b03e_17012012_315pm.pdf

An urgent challenge is to strengthen the formation of ecclesial leaders - both ordained ministers and laypeople - in the perspective of Integral Ecology and the Social Doctrine of the Church (SDC), with significant contributions from the social sciences. "We must continue to form courageous and firm leaders, who will not allow their consciences to be stolen¹⁹."

The present times call for deeper and renewed interpretations of our narratives, from biblical readings in the light of eco-theology to the practice of eco-spiritualities open to encounters with the wisdom and sensibilities of other peoples and cultures.

It is very important to strengthen Church organizations in territorial networks that are attentive to socio-environmental challenges and open to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and collaboration with popular movements and academia, as is done by the Churches and Mining Network, REPAM, REMAM, REDCHAC, the Platina Ecclesial Network, and the Integral Ecology Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean (CEILAC).

Our local Churches can invest more in communication that effectively conveys to the people the message of justice, peace, and care for the Common Home inspired by the Gospel. Communication that supports communities resisting and seeking to build the Economy of Francis, that favors the exchange of good practices, and that makes visible the face of a poor Church for the poor (EG 198).

¹⁹ Bishop Giovanni Paz of Latacunga, Ecuador, in his sharing on the occasion of the meeting of Latin American bishops affected by mining. EDITORIAL – Encuentro de obispos latinoamericanos que enfrentan la minería: comprometidos con la liberación de los pueblos en un solo canto con toda la creación – Iglesias y Minería

5. The relationship of the Church with States and companies

We have previously reflected on the risks for the Church of assuming the role of “mediator” in conflicts provoked by the alliance between corporations and States, at the service of the extractivist model that benefits a few capital holders, attacks the Common Home, and imposes economic enclaves that endanger the lives of peoples and deepen structural poverty.

By her vocation and mission, the Church discovers that she is called to take the side of human and non-human victims, remaining open to the institutional dialogue with them, in the search for justice, inclusion, and the protagonism of the impoverished. “I dare to tell you that the future of humanity lies, to a great extent, in your hands, in your ability to organize yourselves and promote creative alternatives,” said the Holy Father to the popular movements gathered in Bolivia²⁰

It is the responsibility of the State to enact laws that effectively guarantee human rights and the rights of nature, within the framework of productive systems that offer work and dignity for all. Likewise, it is the obligation of companies to respect environmental laws and international legal frameworks, which civil society is trying to elevate to binding levels, protected by independent institutions²¹.

The Church's dialogue with the State and corporations starts from these premises and remains open, recognizing the potential of “better politics” (FT 155-197) and of a sincere commitment of Christians in the business world, but always assuming the point of view and the voice of those sacrificed by this economic system, which continues to kill (EG 53).

It is fundamental, in this sense, “to pay special attention to the origin of donations or other types of benefits, as well as to the investments made by

²⁰ Address of Pope Francis to the popular movements. Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Bolivia), 09.07.15, No. 1.

²¹ See the initiative for a binding treaty on business and human rights at the UN, for example. <https://bindingtreaty.org/gin-global-interparliamentary-network-es/>

ecclesiastical institutions or Christians," as the synodal exhortation *Querida Amazonia* (No. 25) reminds us. The local Churches cannot allow themselves to be "bought" in exchange for their own benefits; they must avoid corporate capture that nullifies their autonomous and independent voice, and they must also verify whether the money they deposit in banks or invest in shares or pension funds is not financing the violent aggression of mining against communities or territories.

In this regard, the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences recently published the document "Mensuram Bonam: faith-based measures for Catholic investors: a starting point and a call to action"²²; along the same lines, the Churches and Mining Network launched a few years ago a Mining Divestment Campaign²³, already adopted by religious congregations and some local Churches²⁴.

²² <https://social.conferenciaepiscopal.es/documentos/accioncaritativa/mesuram-bonam-principios-y-criterios-para-el-mundo-de-las-finanzas/>

²³ www.divestinmining.org

²⁴ The decision of the Austrian Bishops' Conference to withdraw its investments from gold mining, for example, is notable. <https://iglesiasymineria.org/2024/07/29/inversiones-eticas-que-no-generen-mas-violencia-y-despojo-en-el-sur-global-conferencia-episcopal-de-austria-emite-una-directriz-sobre-sus-finanzas/>

Conclusion

We, the bishops exhort the Catholic communities of the continent to see and touch reality, contemplating in it the Gospel of Creation and perceiving the action of the Holy Spirit in human history, in order to analyze, interpret, and discern what is appropriate or not in the extractive activities in the territories. Thus, we can propose, plan, and act to transform our own way of life, influence the mining-energy policies of States and governments, and the policies and strategies of companies engaged in extractivism, to achieve the common good and authentic, sustainable, and integral human development²⁵.

These words from the CELAM document "Missionary Disciples, Guardians of the Common Home" reflect the commitment of a Church sensitive to the joys, cries and hopes of the people of God. They also highlight the importance of having constantly updated pastoral guidelines in the face of the complex and urgent challenge of setting limits to predatory extractivism and "reviving the economy," as Pope Francis dreams²⁶.

We trust that these pastoral guidelines will strengthen the mission of so many Christians: laypeople, religious, deacons, priests, and bishops attentive to the cry of the poor and the Earth. We place ourselves at your disposal to offer resources, reports, research, as well as proposals for exchanges and meetings that support the Church's mission in caring for the Common Home, guided by the vision of Integral Ecology.

May the silenced cry of the rivers, forests, mountains, and seas inspire our ecological conversion. May the blood shed by men and women in so many Latin American territories – such as La Oroya, Mariana, Brumadinho, El Aguán, and the Amazon - strengthen our faith. May their memories enlighten us and keep us united in the search for justice and in the defense of the Common Home, in this continent of hope.

²⁵ CELAM, Pastoral Letter MISSIONARY DISCIPLES, GUARDIANS OF THE COMMON HOUSE Discernment in the light of Laudato Si'. Bogotá, 2018, No. 12.

²⁶ Message of the Holy Father Francis for the "Economy of Francesco" event (Assisi, Italy, March 26- 28, 2020).

This document was inspired by the meeting "The Church and the Communities Affected by Mining: Fraternal Meeting of Latin American Bishops," held in Panama City, Panama, in October 2024, with the participation of the following bishops:

1. *José Domingo Ulloa Mendieta, Metropolitan Archbishop of Panama, Vice President of CELAM, and President of the Episcopal Conference of Panama.*
2. *Manuel Ochogavía Barahona, Bishop of Colón, Panama.*
3. *Pedro Joaquín Hernández Catarero, Bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate of Darién, Panama.*
4. *Álvaro Leonel Cardenal Ramazzini Imeri, Bishop of Huehuetenango, Guatemala.*
5. *Antonio Calderón Cruz, Bishop of the Diocese of San Francisco de Asís de Jutiapa, Guatemala.*
6. *Bernabé de Jesús Sagastume Lemus, Bishop of San Marcos, Guatemala.*
7. *Jenry Orlando Ruiz Mora, Bishop of the Diocese of Trujillo, Honduras.*
8. *Luis Antonio Scozzina, Bishop of Nueva Orán, Argentina.*
9. *Roberto Pío Álvarez, Bishop of the Diocese of Rawson, Chubut, Argentina.*
10. *Vicente de Paula Ferreira, Bishop of the Diocese of Livrameto de Nossa Senhora, Bahia, Brazil, and President of the Commission of Integral Ecology and Mining Commission of the CNBB.*
11. *Luiz Fernando Lisboa. Archbishop of Cachoeiro de Itapemirim, Brazil.*
12. *Noel Antonio Londoño Buitrago, Bishop of the Diocese of Jericó, Colombia.*
13. *Adalberto Jiménez, Bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate of Aguarico, Ecuador.*
14. *Geovanni Mauricio Paz Hurtado, Bishop of the Diocese of Latacunga, Ecuador.*

15. *Alfredo Vizcarra Mori, Archbishop of Trujillo, Peru.*
16. *Cristobal Bernardo Mejia Corral, Bishop of the Diocese of Chulucanas, Piura, Peru.*



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