



DICASTERIUM PRO LAICIS, FAMILIA ET VITA

ANNUAL MEETING WITH THE MODERATORS OF ASSOCIATIONS OF THE FAITHFUL,  
ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS AND NEW COMMUNITIES, THURSDAY 22 JUNE 2023

*On mission with Peter –  
apostolicity at the heart of the identity of the ecclesial movements.*

CARDINAL FARRELL'S OPENING ADDRESS

## **Introduction**

I cordially greet and welcome all of you, moderators, international leaders and delegates of ecclesial movements, associations and new communities. A special greeting to the *Lay Salvatorians*, the latest to receive pontifical recognition and today, for the first time, present here with us.

For our annual meeting this year, we would like to draw your attention to the first *World Congress of Ecclesial Movements*. It was organised in 1998 by the then Pontifical Council for the Laity and its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary falls this year. It concluded with a solemn Pentecost Vigil in St Peter's Square on 30 May. It was a memorable meeting in which many founders and thousands of members of the movements gathered around St John Paul II, to pray and thank the Lord, to feel that they were 'at the heart of the Church' together, to draw strength from communion with the Successor of Peter and with all the other associations of the lay faithful, and to continue their mission with renewed impetus.

In the days leading up to the Vigil, a three-day Congress (27-29 May 1998) was held on the theme, '*Movements in the Church*'. Among the various papers delivered there

was one by the then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger entitled “*The Ecclesial Movements and their Theological Positioning*”, which has since been regarded as a ‘milestone’ in the Church’s reflection on this topic.

So today, let us take our cue from the anniversary of the 1998 Congress and look at what Cardinal Ratzinger had to say. Our intention is not academic, nor do we wish to instigate a theological debate. We would like, however, to think about the movements today and their identity and fidelity to the ‘purpose’ for which they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. I hope that this will be useful as you refocus your way forward.

### **Part One: Movements and the Petrine Ministry**

I want to focus on a specific aspect of the presentation given by Cardinal Ratzinger -- the link between the Successor of Peter and the ecclesial movements. The then-Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith emphasised that Jesus did not appoint the apostles to be bishops of local churches, but gave them a mission that covered the whole world. The mandate they received was as follows: “Go out to the whole world and proclaim the gospel to all creation” (*Mark* 16:15). They were apostles ‘for the world’. Therefore, the ‘apostolic ministry’, which soon expanded to include people other than the Twelve, was intended by Jesus to propagate the faith everywhere. After the Twelve, all of those who were invested with the ‘apostolic succession’ have had the task, as St Irenaeus insisted, of preserving the integrity and unity of the faith and they are to implement Jesus’ mandate to make disciples of all the peoples of the earth (*Matthew* 28:19).<sup>1</sup>

Cardinal Ratzinger pointed to a risk facing the apostolic ministry in every age. I quote: “The ministry of apostolic succession can become bogged down in performing services purely at the local Church level and we can lose sight of the universality of Christ's mandate; the eagerness that impels us to bring the gift of Christ to others can

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Movements in the Church*, p. 35.

become extinguished in the immobility of a firmly established Church”. He added: “The universal element, which goes beyond the services to be rendered to the local Churches, continues to be an indispensable necessity.”<sup>2</sup>

Cardinal Ratzinger goes on to present a very striking insight when he says that God, throughout the course of history, has given rise to ‘charisms’ and ‘movements’ to keep alive the missionary nature and universal openness of the Church. These are two indispensable aspects of apostolicity which absolutely must not be lost!

Against this backdrop there is the specific role of the Petrine ministry. Cardinal Ratzinger explained that “The ministry of the successors of Peter overcomes the purely local structure of the Church; the successor of Peter is not only a local bishop of Rome, but a bishop for the whole Church and in the whole Church. He therefore embodies an essential aspect of the apostolic mandate, an aspect that must never be missing in the Church. However, even the Petrine ministry itself would not be properly understood and would be distorted into a kind of bizarre anomaly, if the task of fulfilling the universal dimension of the apostolic succession were to be placed solely on its holder. In the Church there must also be services and missions that are not purely local in nature, but that serve the mandate that involves the whole Church and the propagation of the Gospel. The Pope needs these services, and they need him, and in the interplay between the two kinds of mission the symphony of ecclesial life is fulfilled.”<sup>3</sup>

These are very strong statements. What it means in practice is to say that the Pope needs the movements and the movements need the Pope! According to this view, one of the characteristic features of the ‘charism’ of the Successor of Peter is precisely universal openness, because Peter ‘looks to the world’ and Peter has the evangelisation of all peoples at heart.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 45.

It is here that we find the special link between the movements and the Successor of Peter -- their particular 'service' to the pope. The movements were prompted by the Holy Spirit to keep alive in the Church its inherent missionary spirit, that is, the possibility of reaching every region of the earth in the proclamation of the Gospel.

This is why the popes have understood the movements and have welcomed them as a providential gift. In their eyes, the movements emerged as a concrete response by the Holy Spirit to the desire for apostolicity that has always been at the heart of every pontiff.

To return to the 1998 event, we can observe how St John Paul II himself had a clear perception of the importance of the ecclesial movements in view of the 'new evangelisation', as he liked to call it. At the Pentecost Vigil, he concluded his address to the movements by renewing the missionary mandate of Jesus. These were his words: "Today, from this square, Christ says to each one of you, 'Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature' (*Mark* 16:15). He is relying on each one of you; the Church relies on you."<sup>4</sup>

So, the popes welcomed all the charisms that aimed to live according to the Gospel with freshness and thoroughness and that were keeping the apostolic momentum alive in the Church. To collaborate with the Petrine ministry and its apostolic goal to bring the Gospel to all is precisely the specific role of the movements, their 'theological positioning', as Cardinal Ratzinger defined it. It is no coincidence that all of you are international associations and movements, born in a certain city or region, but then spread to many nations to which you have brought the Gospel and your enthusiasm for faith in Christ.

## **Part Two: The challenge of apostolicity today**

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<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, *Meeting with ecclesial movements and new communities*, 30 May 1998.

The return to integrity of faith and missionary apostolicity are the wonderful contribution you bring to the Church. This is not, however, to be understood as a ‘badge of honour’ to be shown to all, but rather as a ‘perennial call’ to which you must continually respond and not lose sight of what is essential.

Many of your organisations have celebrated their 40<sup>th</sup> or 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of existence. Others were founded even earlier. These are important milestones, but we must not stop to contemplate only what has been achieved. We must live in the present with grateful memory of the past and look to the future and to the challenges being presented to us by the world.

We really have only one great challenge, that of transmitting the faith to the men and women of our time. It is the challenge of evangelisation, the challenge of bringing Jesus to everyone and everywhere. It is “the Church’s greatest challenge”.<sup>5</sup> I would like to draw your attention to what the Holy Father writes on this subject in *Evangelii Gaudium* -- a text that I invite you to reread this year as we celebrate the tenth anniversary of its publication. I quote: “we cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings [within our communities]... we need to move from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry.”<sup>6</sup>

There are still many in the world who do not know Jesus Christ or perhaps have rejected him, just as there is a growing number of those who have lost faith, who do not live according to their baptismal identity and behave as if God were not there. The Holy Father notes this phenomenon with some concern. He writes: “in recent decades there has been a breakdown in the way Catholics pass down the Christian faith to the young. It is undeniable that many people feel disillusioned and no longer identify with the Catholic tradition. Growing numbers of parents do not bring their children for baptism or teach them how to pray. There is also a certain exodus towards other faith communities.”<sup>7</sup> In this context, it is necessary for each of your

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<sup>5</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* 40.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 70.

organisations to renew your apostolic drive and your missionary energy, and without fear to adopt an attitude of ‘going forth’ to seek out those who are at a distance and to reach out to the excluded.

In this regard, I would like to point out some aspects that I invite you to keep in mind in your apostolic work, which is of so much value to the life of the Church.

1. One aspect is **evangelisation in today’s society**. Your founders were men and women very much ‘in tune’ with their times. They knew how to listen with an open heart and lively intelligence to the needs, questions and aspirations of the people around them. They knew how to present the Gospel as a response to those needs. They used language and ways of thinking that were understandable to those to whom they were sent.

Let us think, for example, of the great effort made by some of your founders in the 1950s or 1960s, when they began this work. They were able to ‘understand’ with sharp insight the climate of that time and they knew how to ‘speak’ to the men and women of that generation. They presented the Gospel of Jesus with a ‘new face’ and with new freshness that fascinated thousands of people.

From the 1950s, or 1960s, or even 1970s, many years have passed! A time interval of 60 years in our days is no longer the same as the same interval in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The material duration is the same, but the social, cultural and psychological changes are infinitely accelerated!

I do not want to enter into sociological analyses here, but I just want to tell you that we must promptly accept the pope’s invitation when he says, “I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are.” This means that there is an urgent need to rediscover the creativity and courage required to present the Gospel of Jesus with renewed freshness in its timeless actuality. It must speak to the men and women of today, who have different sensitivities, different

lifestyles and different individual and family problems, compared to the time when your movements were founded.

Above all, those responsible for the movements, at the various levels, local and international, must ask themselves: Does all that we are offering through our forms of apostolate still serve a useful purpose? Does our style of proclamation, our schedules, language and customs continue to be suitable for conveying the Good News to people today? I am well aware of some apostolate initiatives in the USA, where I have lived most of my life, which flourished in the past, but which have not been renewed over the years and now exist almost only 'on paper'. They are no longer frequented and no longer attract young people.

2. A second aspect: **continually putting the charism into practice**. It is not a matter of 'updating' the charism in the sense of changing it, of adding to it or of subtracting from it. It is a matter of applying it in new ways. It is to bring it into contact with the needs of people today and with the new pastoral situations we live in, in the certainty that from this encounter the charism will release new creative and vibrant energy. In some members of movements there can be a risk of continuing to wearily repeat, verbatim, the words of the founder, his or her recurring ideas and personal style. This, in reality, is not 'fidelity to the charism'; it is just outward adherence to it. Those, on the other hand, who have truly 'assimilated' the charism and grasp its essence, do not limit themselves to external repetition; they allow themselves to be inwardly 'moulded' by it. Their intelligence, their will, their sensitivity and their affectivity are made fruitful by the spiritual force of the charism. Consequently, they are able to express that same charism with new language, with new styles, with new planning skills and with new missionary initiatives. Let us remember that the charism, in itself, is nothing other than a particular way of welcoming Christ. Christ must enter the heart and transform it. When Pope Francis was addressing one of your organisations, he said, "Remember that the central core is

not the charism. The central core is only one, it is Jesus, Jesus Christ!... All spirituality, all charisms in the Church must be decentralised: at the centre there is only the Lord!”<sup>8</sup> When this happens, new fruits of holiness and apostolate also emerge.

3. A third aspect I would like to recall here concerns the **proclamation of the kerygma**. Quite a few of your movements are places of Christian instruction and they have a variety of very good methods and educational programmes. It starts, more often than not, with the proclamation of the kerygma. This is given during retreats or seminars where people, even those far from an experience of faith, experience a personal encounter with the love of Jesus Christ who gave his life for our salvation and our deliverance. I invite you to ensure that this proclamation, which is capable of changing lives, resonates continuously in the faith education courses you offer. It is not a proclamation that comes at the beginning and is then left out, but as the pope rightly points out, “It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways ... All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma.”<sup>9</sup> As the pope asserts the centrality of the kerygma, he identifies some characteristics of the proclamation that are necessary today: “it has to express God’s saving love which precedes any moral and religious obligation on our part; it should not impose the truth but appeal to freedom; it should be marked by joy, encouragement, liveliness and a harmonious balance which will not reduce preaching to a few doctrines which are at times more philosophical than evangelical...”<sup>10</sup>

In the meetings for human and spiritual orientation that you offer to adolescents, young people, adults and couples, therefore, take care to express precisely this love of

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<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, *Address to the Communion and Liberation Movement*, 7 March 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 164 -165.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



Jesus that saves; that it comes before any moral or religious obligation; and show how beautiful and joyful it is to live as Christians. This will ask a lot of you: closeness, willingness to dialogue, patience and a cordial welcome to the men and women that the Lord places on your path today.<sup>11</sup>

4. Another aspect is **witness of life**. The Holy Father is holding a series of catecheses on ‘the passion for evangelisation’. A few weeks ago, in one of these catecheses, he presented the figure of Matteo Ricci and spoke of the great impact that his work had on the Chinese people of culture whom he befriended. The pope said that, “Because they saw a man who was so intelligent, so wise ... and so devout, they said, ‘But what he preaches is true, because it is being said by a person who witnesses, he bears witness to what he preaches with his own life.’ This is the coherence of evangelizers.”<sup>12</sup> He went on to say, “this applies to all of us Christians who are evangelizers... What attracts people is the witness of consistency: we Christians must live as we say, and not pretend to live as Christians while living in a worldly way.”<sup>13</sup>

What the pope says is very important for movements. It is not enough to appeal to a charism, it is not enough to show accomplished ventures, it is not enough to have acquired organisational skills, it is not enough to have reached large numbers; what is needed above all is witness of life, the coherence between what we say and what we do, the coherence between the ‘name’ we have made for ourselves in the Church and our real following of Jesus, and our concrete practice of charity, justice and service to others.

I am thinking, in particular, of the witness of life given by the families who belong to your movements and who live their marriage and family vocation with commitment and sacrifice. For this reason, today’s meeting has been structured in such a way as to

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 31 May 2023.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

leave ample space for you to speak. This will be an opportunity to witness to and proclaim the genuine apostolicity of your mission.

5. A fifth aspect I would just like to mention concerns the **vocation that calls us all to fellowship**. In today's world, we are well aware of the scourge of individualism and how people think and live as if others did not exist. It is a world that mourns the death of men, women and children because of senseless wars. It is in this world that the way you live as believers who know that all are brothers and sisters because all are children of the same Father, is a proclamation that is more necessary than ever. In your movements and in your communities, you commit yourselves to love in fellowship, and every day you experience the setbacks and disappointments that such a commitment entails. However, your witness of communion in fellowship is very precious. Let everyone see how you welcome one another in spite of your diversity, and how you allow the difference to become mutually enriching; how you are glad to see the joy of your brothers and sisters and how you suffer with those in sorrow. Do not lose or weaken your commitment to go out to meet others and to see the face of Jesus in theirs. “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (*John 13:35*).<sup>14</sup> The Holy Father urges us on by saying, “Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the ideal of fraternal love!” Your lives in fellowship are a powerful sign in this world, a sign that it is possible for everyone.

6. There is yet another aspect that I suggest you do not lose sight of in your apostolate: **a special love for the poor, for the most disadvantaged**.

We are grateful to all of you who carry out your missionary task where there is poverty and marginalisation, or among those who live in situations of vulnerability --

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<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 101.

I am thinking of the pastoral care you give to young people who are victims of various forms of addiction, to refugees, to the elderly who are increasingly lonely and abandoned, etc. You persevere in bringing the light of the Gospel to every existential periphery that knows only the darkness and weight of oppression, injustice or loneliness. The Holy Father does not tire of insisting on the need to give priority to the poor, and he invites the faithful to give them all the spiritual attention that is their due. I will quote his words that were simple but incisive: “The great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship, his blessing, his words, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith. Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into privileged and preferential religious care.”<sup>15</sup>

7. A final aspect, which I will only touch on briefly, is the **link between apostolicity and synodality**. The subject of apostolicity, on which we will reflect today, is well worth considering in connection with the synodal dimension of the Church. Apostolicity is by its very nature a ‘community mandate’ because Jesus entrusted the apostolic college, not individual persons, with the missionary mandate to go into the whole world. Jesus’ words of authority to the apostles continue to be paradigmatic for the entire Church. He was speaking to all of them and not just to one. It follows, therefore, that apostolicity implies ecclesial communion and moving forward together; it involves creating, cultivating and maintaining strong spiritual bonds. So, the mission to which all movements are called must also be undertaken in accordance with the Magisterium of the Church and the teaching of the present pope, in close communion with the local churches and their pastors, in collaboration with the other members of one’s own movement and also with other movements. There cannot be ‘individual apostolicity’. It would be short-lived and have little effect. Rather, ‘ecclesial apostolicity’ is what is required. This will be in tune with the will

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 200.

of Christ, the very nature of the Church, and the needs of human nature. Human nature does not thrive with individualism, but only when there is closeness to others, mutual enrichment and true fellowship and fraternity.

I sincerely hope that the ideas, reflections and testimonies that we will share today will continue within your organisations and that this important topic will always be a subject of your concerns and serve as preparation for the planning of your future activities.

Thank you for your attention.