

Welcome and introduction to works – Card. Kevin Farrell

Dear friends,

Welcome to the International Meeting on the Promotion and Formation of the Laity. I thank you for accepting this invitation to actively participate in this encounter. It is truly a blessing to have all of you here together to listen and share in what we pray will be a fruitful discussion that will positively contribute to the ways we approach the promotion and formation of the laity throughout the world.

Present with us during these next few days are about 40 delegates from 15 countries – from all continents, and experts in the field of the formation of the lay faithful. In answer to the letter we sent earlier this year to all of you, each country’s representatives will share a 10-minute presentation on best practices regarding the formation of the laity in their specific countries, with a special focus on local parishes and its initiatives. The aim of this two-day meeting is to broaden our understanding of the current conditions of the lay faithful and, just as importantly, to extend our gaze to the increasingly secular corners of society that are easily overlooked when discussing the life of the Church. We cannot limit ourselves to that which is already within the “sphere of the Church,” but we can start by offering support to our brothers and sisters in Christ who may not have the organization or resources to set up programs and initiatives to carry out the mission of evangelization.

First, however, I would like to share a few points about the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, and its mission. In September of 2016, as per the proposal of the College of Cardinals and the subsequent approval of the Holy Father Francis, the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the Pontifical Council for the Family were merged into the singular Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life. The Dicastery involves both clergy and laypeople who work side by side to carry out their tasks of

evangelization. Regarding the laity, the mission of the Dicastery is to “promote in the lay faithful an awareness of co-responsibility, by virtue of Baptism, for the life and mission of the Church, according to the different charisms received for common edification, with particular attention to the special mission of the lay faithful in animating and improving the ordering of temporal affairs. It also promotes the participation of the lay faithful in catechetical instruction, in liturgical and sacramental life, in missionary activity, in works of mercy, charity and human and social promotion. The Dicastery supports and encourages its active and responsible presence in parish and diocesan life, and in the advisory organs of governance present in the Church on a universal and particular level.” (Dicastery for the laity, family and life, established “ad experimentum”, 08.05.2018).

The intention of the Holy See in this new season is to focus more on local parishes, which is where many of the lay faithful, particularly those who are not a part of any ecclesial movement, encounter the Lord and his Church.

The Holy Father Francis has expressed the importance of the lay faithful and the need to avoid clericalization of the laity. What does this mean? As Saint Pope John Paul II put it, “when the sacramental or liturgical roles that belong to the priest are assumed by the lay faithful, or when the [lay faithful] set out to accomplish tasks of pastoral governing that properly belong to the priest,” “the laity becomes a form of clericalism.” Similarly, the “laicization of the clergy” occurs when priests forget that “the core of the Christian priesthood is the offering of the sacrifice of Christ”.¹

Both “the clericalization of the laity and the laicization of the clergy occur when ‘it is not service but power that shapes all forms of government in the Church’”.² Now Pope Francis has turned the gaze of the Holy See to the laity, whose role is as important to the Church as that of the clergy, and must thus be given its due

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Address to the bishops of the Antilles at the “ad limina” visit, 7 May 2002.

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respect and appreciation. We are called to let the laymen be laymen and to let the priests be priests.

With this in mind, and considering the answers we received from you regarding best practices in the formation of the laity, the Dicastery, whose own structure inherently respects the reciprocity between the clergy and the laity, invited each of you, representatives from all over the world, to share some particular ways in which this mission is being lived out, and to explore areas in which the Church can offer additional support.

It is important in these days to remember the cultural differences that inevitably call for different methods and approaches in dealing with the promotion and formation of the laity in various parts of the world. It is in fact because of these inherent differences that we are all gathered here today; if every country faced the same challenges, a report from any one country would have sufficed. Instead, we are all called to contribute to this dialogue in the hope that, each of us drawing from our diverse lived experiences, can offer support to and learn from one another to more fruitfully live out the mission of evangelization in the world today. Recalling once more the words of Pope John Paul II, “the premier place of the exercise of the lay vocation is in the world of economic, social, political and cultural realities. It is in this world that lay people are called to live their baptismal vocation”.³ But in order to go out into the world, we must first acquire the necessary tools and preparation. And what better place to offer said preparation to the lay faithful than the very local parishes they frequent, the places that are at the core of their lived realities within the Church.

This morning, many of you were blessed with the opportunity to listen to His Holiness Pope Francis at the papal audience. With his words of encouragement and

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blessing in our hearts, let us continue with this encounter, asking the Holy Spirit to make it a touchstone that will help us persevere with humility, faith and love through the challenges we may face in carrying out this mission entrusted to us, the Church. And may the unity that we share here in the coming days serve as a reminder that we are not alone on this journey, but rather, have our brothers and sisters in Christ to fall back on should we ever feel overwhelmed.

I thank you once more for your presence, and I pray that you will enjoy the next few days of unity and universality that we have been so graciously given.

With childlike trust, let us now ask our Blessed Mother Mary to bring these our endeavors before our Father in Heaven as together we pray: Hail Mary...