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A visit to young men who have left the priesthood concludes the Pope's Mercy Fridays

Yesterday afternoon Pope Francis visited the Ponte di Nona quarter in the outskirts of Rome to visit with seven families all made up of young men who have left the priesthood in recent years. Four were from the diocese of Rome, where they were parish priests; one was from Madrid, another from Latin America, and one from Sicily.

The Holy Father wished to express his closeness and affection to those who have made a decision often not shared by their fellow priests and relatives. After several years dedicated to priestly ministry in the parishes, the loneliness, the lack of understanding, and fatigue due to the great burden of pastoral responsibility called into question their initial decision to join the priesthood. Months and years of uncertainty and doubts led to the realisation of having made the wrong choice, and they went on to leave the presbytery and to form a family.

The Pope's arrival in the apartment was met with great enthusiasm; the children gathered around to embrace him and the parents were moved. The Holy Father's visit was greatly appreciated by all those present, who felt not the Pope's judgement on their choice, but rather his closeness and affection. He listened to their stories and followed attentively the considerations that were made regarding the development of the legal procedures of the individual cases. His paternal words assured all those present of his friendship and the certainty of his personal interest.

In this way, once again, Francis wished to offer a sign of mercy to those who live in a situation of spiritual and material hardship, highlighting the need for no-one to feel deprived of the love and solidarity of pastors.

Yesterday's visit concluded the series of "Mercy Fridays" which have taken place during the Jubilee Year. In January he visited a rest home for the elderly and a home for patients in a vegetative state; in February, a rehabilitation community for drug users; in March, a reception centre for people with serious mental disabilities; and in June, two communities for elderly and sick priests. In July, during his trip to Poland, the Pope spent his Mercy Friday in silent prayer at Auschwitz-Birkenau, in a visit to a paediatric hospital in Krakow and on the Via Crucis with participants in World Youth Day, attended by young people from Iraq, Syria, and other areas of war and hardship.

In August, the Holy Father visited the Pope John XXIII Community, which welcomes women freed from the

slavery of prostitution rackets, and in September he visited a neonatology ward and a hospice for the terminally ill. Finally, in October he visited an “SOS Village”, a family home for children experiencing personal, family and social difficulties.