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Audience of the Holy Father with the participants in the first Plenary Assembly of the Secretariat for Communication

At 10.00 this morning, in the Consistory Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the first Plenary Assembly of the Secretariat for Communication, taking place in the Vatican from 3 to 5 May 2017.

The following is the full text of the Pope's address:

Holy Father's Address

Dear Cardinals,

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am very pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the First Plenary Assembly of the Secretariat for Communication, in which you are engaged in deepening mutual knowledge and in examining the steps taken so far by the Dicastery, which I wanted for a new communication system for the Holy See, as well as reflecting on a theme more current and evocative than ever, that of digital culture.

I thank the prefect, Msgr. Viganò, for his introduction, and I wish to express my gratitude to him and to those of you present, and also to those who have contributed in various ways to the preparation of the work of these days.

The argument considered in the Plenary is one of those closest to my heart: I have already considered it on various occasions. It concerns studying the new criteria and methods of communicating the Gospel of mercy to all people, in the heart of different cultures, through the media that the new digital cultural context makes available to our contemporaries.

This Dicastery, which will celebrate its second anniversary the coming 27 June – two candles – is undergoing full reform. And we must not be afraid of this word. Reform is not “whitewashing” things a little: reform means giving another form to things, organizing them in another way. And it must be done with intelligence, with gentleness, but also, also – allow me to use the word – with a little “violence”, but good, good violence, to reform things. It is undergoing full reform inasmuch as it is a new situation, and is taking by now irreversible steps. In this case, indeed, it is not about the coordination or merger of previous dicasteries, but rather the construction of a truly *ex novo* institution, as I wrote in the instituting *Motu proprio*: “The current context of communications, characterized by the presence and development of digital media, by the factors of convergence and interaction, demands both a rethinking of the Holy See’s information system, and a commitment to reorganize it, while appreciating what has been developed historically within the framework of communications of the Apostolic See, certainly moves towards a unified integration and management. For these reasons”, I continued, “I believe that all of the realities which, in various ways up to the present have dealt with communications, should be incorporated into a new Dicastery of the Roman Curia, which will bear the title Secretariat for Communication. In this way, the Holy See communications system will respond ever better to the needs of the mission of the Church”.

This new communication system arises from the need for so-called “digital convergence”. Indeed, in the past every method of communication had its own channels. Every form of expression had its own medium: the written word, the newspaper or books; images, photographs; and moving images, cinema and television; the spoken word and music, radio and CDs. All these forms of communication today are transmitted with a single code that uses the binary system. In this framework, therefore, *L’Osservatore Romano*, which from next year will become part of the new Dicastery, will have to find a new and different way to be able to reach a number of readers superior to what it can achieve in paper form. Even Vatican Radio, which for years has become a series of portals, needs to be revised in accordance with new models and brought into line with modern technologies and the needs of our contemporaries. With regard to the radio service, I would like to emphasize the effort that the Dicastery is making with regard to countries with limited technological means (I think, for example, of Africa), for the rationalization of the short waves, that have never been abandoned. And this I wish to underline: they have never been abandoned. In a few months’ time, the Vatican Publishing House, the former Multilingual Vatican Typography and, as I said, *L’Osservatore Romano*, will become part of the great working community of the new Dicastery, and this will require willingness to harmonize with a new productive and distributive plan. The work is great, the challenge is great, but it can and must be done.

History is, undoubtedly, a patrimony of valuable experiences to conserve and to use as an impetus towards the future. Otherwise it would be reduced to a museum, interesting and beautiful to visit, but not able to provide the strength and courage to continue on the journey.

The demanding effort of the formation and training of staff falls within this ambit of the construction of a new communication system.

Dear brothers and sisters, the work that awaits you is extensive and complex. With the contribution of each one of you, this reform will be accomplished, “[taking] into account the historic development of the Apostolic See’s structure of communication and [moving] towards a unified integration and management” (Statute of the Secretariat for Communication, 6 September 2015).

I therefore encourage you to work in the study commissions, with detailed analyses and, once the routes to be taken have been identified, to decide and proceed courageously according to the chosen criteria.

In addition, I ask you to ensure that your guiding criterion is apostolic, missionary, with special attention to situations of hardship, poverty, difficulty, in the awareness that these too must be faced nowadays with suitable solutions. In this way it becomes possible to take the Gospel to all, making the most of human resources, without substituting the communication of the local Churches and at the same time supporting the ecclesial communities most in need.

Let us not be overcome by the temptation of attachment to a glorious past; let us instead form a great team to respond better to the new challenges of communication that today’s culture poses, without fear and without

imagining apocalyptic scenarios.

While I renew my thanks to you for having accepted to work in this field which is so important and delicate to the mission of the Church, I wish to extend my greeting and my gratitude also to the recently appointed Consultors. I urge you to offer a witness of collaboration and fraternal sharing, and I invoke upon all of you the Lord's blessing, by the intercession of Mary Most Holy Mother of the Church; with her tenderness, may she watch over you.
