



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE  
**BOLLETTINO**

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## **Audience with participants in the Plenary of the Dicastery for the Clergy**

This morning, Pope Francis received in audience in the Vatican Apostolic Palace the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for the Clergy.

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the meeting:

### **Address of the Holy Father**

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I wish to greet you with affection, and I would like first and foremost to thank all the members of the Dicastery for the Clergy: you have come to Rome from the four corners of the earth to offer your important contribution to the reflection on the ordained ministry and, with you, there are also the consultants of the Dicastery. Thank you for your presence. And thank you to the Cardinal Prefect and the other superiors and officials of the Dicastery, above all for the work you do every day, often in silence and hidden away, in the service of ordained ministers and the seminaries.

On this occasion, I would like first to convey my gratitude, my affection and my closeness to the priests and deacons of the whole world. Many times, I have warned against the dangers of clericalism and spiritual worldliness, but I am well aware that the vast majority of priests work with great generosity and spirit of faith for the good of the holy People of God, bearing the weight of many hardships and facing pastoral and spiritual challenges that are sometimes not easy.

Your Plenary Assembly focuses in particular on three fields of attention: the ongoing formation of priests, the promotion of vocations and the permanent diaconate. I would like to dwell briefly on each one of these themes.

*Ongoing formation.* It is a theme that is spoken of a great deal, especially in recent years, and which had already

been referred to in *Ratio fundamentalis* in 2016. The priest, too, is a disciple following the Lord and, therefore, his formation must be an ongoing journey; this is even more true if we consider that today we live in a world marked by rapid changes, in which new questions and complex challenges that demand a response are always emerging. Therefore, we cannot delude ourselves that it is enough for formation in the seminary to lay sure foundations once and for all; rather, we are required to consolidate, strengthen and develop what we have in the seminary, in a process that may help us to mature in the human dimension, to grow spiritually, to find suitable languages for evangelization, to explore what we need to adequately address the new questions of our time.

I like to recall here that the Scripture says: “*Vae soli* – woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up” (*Ec* 4:10). How important this is for the priest: the journey cannot be taken alone! And yet, unfortunately, many priests are too lonely, without the grace of accompaniment, without that sense of belonging that is like a lifebuoy in the often-stormy sea of personal and pastoral life. Weaving a strong network of fraternal relations is a priority task in ongoing formation: the bishop, priests among themselves, communities in relation to their pastors, religious brothers and sisters, associations, movements: it is indispensable for priests to feel “at home”. You, as a Dicastery, have already begun to weave a global network: I urge you, do everything to ensure that this wave continues and bears fruit throughout the world. Work creatively so that this network is strengthened and offers support to priests. You have a key role for this!

*Care for vocations.* One of the great challenges for the People of God is the fact that, in an increasing number of areas of the world, vocations to the priestly ministry and to consecrated life are declining sharply, and in some countries they are almost dying out. But the vocation to marriage, with that sense of commitment and mission it requires, is also in crisis. Therefore, in the last Messages for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, I wanted to extend the view to the whole range of Christian vocations, and I addressed it in particular to that fundamental vocation that is discipleship, as a consequence of baptism. We cannot resign ourselves to the fact that for many young people the hypothesis of a radical offering of life has disappeared from the horizon. We must instead reflect together and remain attentive to the signs of the Spirit, and you too can carry this task forward thanks to the Pontifical Work for Priestly Vocations. I invite you to reactivate this reality, in a manner suited to our times, perhaps by networking with the local Churches and identifying good practices to circulate. This is an important task!

Finally, the *permanent diaconate*. This was reintroduced by Vatican Council II and, over these decades, it has had a very varied reception. Even today, however, questions are often asked about the specific identity of the permanent diaconate. As you know, the Synthesis Report of the First Session of the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, last October, recommended “carrying out an evaluation of the implementation of the diaconal ministry after the Second Vatican Council” (Synthesis Report 11 g), and also calls for a more decisive focus, among the various tasks of deacons, on the diakonia of charity and the service of the poor (4 p and 11 a). Accompanying these reflections and developments is a rather important task for your Dicastery. I encourage you to work for this and to deploy all the necessary forces.

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you again. Always work so that the people of God may have pastors according to the heart of Christ and may grow in the joy of discipleship. May the Virgin Mary, Mother and model of every vocation, accompany you. I too accompany you with my prayer. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

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