

Annual Meeting of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities

“One year after the institution of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life”

Rome, 14 June 2017

Dear friends,

Welcome to our *Annual meeting with the general moderators and representatives of ecclesial movements and new communities*. First of all, I thank you for having responded to the invitation and for your presence here.

As you well know, with the Apostolic Letter in the form of Motu Proprio *Sedula Mater*, of 15 August 2016, Pope Francis instituted the *Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life*, which is governed by a special Statute, approved *ad experimentum* on 4 June 2016 and put into force on 1 September 2016. You can find the text of the Statute on the new site of our Dicastery: www.laityfamilylife.va.

Since 1 September 2016, the competencies and duties previously attributed to the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the Pontifical Council for the Family have converged in the new Dicastery. This Dicastery is now divided into three sections: one for the laity, one for the family, and one for life. The “Laity Section” and the “Family Section” have continued the work carried out by the two former Pontifical Councils. The “Life Section,” on the other hand, is completely new. The Life Section's objective is to privilege a more “pastoral” approach to life-related issues, in comparison to the more “intellectual and academic” approach that characterizes another organism of the Holy See which deals with the same issues, namely the Pontifical Academy for Life.

The Holy Father called me to lead the new Dicastery, entrusting me with the office of Prefect. I spent all my years of pastoral ministry in the United States—first in Washington D.C. and then in Dallas. Being here is, therefore, a great novelty for me and a big change. Yet, this is a job that I have accepted with joy and full disposition to serve the universal Church in this new mission.

A few days ago, on 31 May, the Holy Father appointed Rev. Father Alexandre Awi Mello, National Director of the Schönstatt Movement in Brazil, Secretary of our Dicastery. He will begin his service as the new Secretary in September. The 3 sub-secretaries have not yet been appointed. Meanwhile, in order to ensure continuity and efficiency in the Dicastery's activities, I have appointed two delegates: Msgr. Miguel Delgado Galindo as Delegate of the “Section for the Laity” and Msgr. Carlos Simón Vázquez as Delegate of the “Section for the Family and life.”

We are currently working on the integration of the two former Councils, so that harmony and coordination within the new single Dicastery may enrich, continue and develop all the good work done so far.

With respect to what concerns you more directly, the Statute has confirmed to the new Dicastery its legal competency in the recognition of international associative entities and their pastoral accompaniment. Finally, I have appointed one of our officials, Father Giovanni Buontempo, to be responsible for keeping in touch with each of you and coordinating all the activities of the Dicastery that concern ecclesiastical associations, movements and new communities.

I have sketched this picture out for you so that you understand that the Holy See, in the process of reforming the Roman Curia, has not forgotten the new ecclesial associative realities! Now, in this reform, the *Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life* is, so to speak, your “home” within the Holy See, your main point of reference! Consequently, I have briefly presented the current arrangement of the Dicastery, because it is good that you know the new situation. Moreover, I hope and wish that all of you may find here a “home where the doors are always open,” where you can find acceptance, dialogue, encouragement, and help in facing difficulties, so that you can always follow the right path and so serve in the best possible way, for the good of the Church.

In this perspective, we wanted to maintain the tradition of holding this annual meeting: First, to indicate the continuity in the work of accompanying ecclesial movements, as the Holy See has done now for years. Then, to get to know each other even better. In my first months as Prefect, I had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know some of you, by receiving you in our offices. We have been in close contact with others, since we have taken part, as a Dicastery, in some important events in which they were the main protagonists. For example, the *Second International Congress* of the International Forum Catholic Action (IFCA) and the Anniversary for the 150 Years of existence of Italy's Catholic Action. And, a few days ago, the Golden Jubilee of Catholic Charismatic Renewal. These events of grace that we have lived together and in which the Holy Father himself took part, addressing words of great appreciation and encouragement to you. However, we are meeting many of you here today for the first time; but, surely, there will be other opportunities in the future to speak more calmly and to learn more about your charism and the work you do all over the world.

So, a mark of continuity... mutual acquaintance... Thirdly, the purpose of this encounter is to listen. We know the importance that Pope Francis gives to what he calls the “ear pastoral”: knowing how to spend time listening to others, getting to know their desires, their difficulties, what is really in their hearts. He wants much space for listening, and that the Curia be committed to meeting and listening to those who are involved in evangelization and in daily Christian witness: bishops,

priests, religious and laity. Today, we will certainly not be able to listen to all of you, but we would like each of you to contribute from now on, especially so that we may better understand what you expect from the new Dicastery, the suggestions that you could give to each of the three sections, that for the Laity, that for the Family, and that for Life, in view of carrying out a true and effective service in the Church.

Before giving you the floor, I would like to allow space for two brief interventions, one by Msgr. Simón, Delegate of the “Family and Life Section” and the other by Father João Chagas, Head of the “Youth Section”, who will tell you about two important events for which the new Dicastery is responsible: the 2018 World Meeting of Families in Dublin, and the 2019 World Youth Day in Panama. Both of these events closely concern you, and we hope that many of you will be able to participate. I, therefore, invite you as of now to raise awareness and catechize all your members, and so encourage them to take part.

A final comment on these two pastoral areas: the family and the young. I would like to encourage all the ecclesial movements—not just those who, with their charisma and statute, devote themselves specifically to family ministry, but all without distinction—to be especially attentive to the family, focusing on some points that I am going to indicate. Firstly, form young people to affective maturity and the vocation of marriage from adolescence on, or perhaps even earlier, from childhood. Secondly, use your creativity to determine effective paths of marriage preparation, proposing—in accordance with the Pope's desire—a “matrimonial catechumenate” to the fiancés. Thirdly, accompany young couples in the early years of marriage. Fourth, care for the “permanent formation” of spouses and of the entire family. Fifth, support, help and counsel couples in difficulty.

With regard to the young, I urge you all to employ your charism to boldly speak to the new generations. Have a missionary impetus, especially for young people. The invitation to “go out” that the Pope always addresses to us is also true with respect to the “peripheries of the young.” This is my encouragement: go out to the young people! The movements must be the “young face” of the Church! I am certain that you have the human resources, the creativity, and the spiritual energy to face this challenge which is so vital for the Church. So, do not hold yourselves back. This will be very good for ecclesial movements and new communities, and it will greatly benefit the universal Church.

Thank you for your attention.