



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY OF THE DICASTERY FOR THE CLERGY

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 6 June 2024*

[[Multimedia](#)]

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. Thank you for your presence. I thank the Cardinal Prefect — that Korean soul that helps us so much! — and I thank the Secretary, Monsignor Andrés Gabriel Ferrada Moreira, who carries all the work forward. Thank you.

On this occasion, I would like first of all 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 faithful 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 main aspects: the ongoing formation of priests, the promotion of vocations and the permanent diaconate. I would like to dwell briefly on each of these topics.

Ongoing formation. It is a topic 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 to which to respond are always emerging. Therefore, we cannot delude ourselves that formation in the seminary is enough, laying sure foundations once and for all: no. Rather, we are required to consolidate, strengthen and develop what we have in the seminary, in a process that may help us mature in the human dimension, which is always journeying; growing spiritually; finding suitable languages for evangelization; exploring 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 and consecrated brothers and sisters, associations, movements. It is indispensable for priests to feel “at home” in this great ecclesial family. You, as a Dicastery, have already begun to weave a global network: I urge you, do everything — please, 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 in this!

Care for vocations. One of the great challenges for the People of God is the fact that, in an ever 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. I am thinking for example of northern Italy. But the vocation to marriage, with that sense of commitment and mission it requires, is also in crisis. That is why, 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 prospect 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 can carry this task forward too, thanks to the Pontifical Work for Priestly Vocations. I invite you to revitalize this Work, in a manner suited to our times, perhaps by networking with local Churches and identifying good practices to implement. This is an important task — let us not forget it!

Lastly, the *permanent diaconate*. This was reintroduced by [Vatican Council II](#) and, over these decades, it has had a very mixed 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 “an assessment of how the diaconal ministry has been implemented since Vatican II” (*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 task that is rather important for your Dicastery. I encourage you to work for this and to deploy all the necessary forces. And beware, because often one thinks of a deacon as a second-rate priest. We see it when some of them are at the altar and they appear to want to concelebrate. May the service of deacons be in favour of orphans, widows, social work, in Caritas, helping parish priests administer the sacraments. Do what you can so that deacons do not feel like second-rate priests. That would be a risk, at this moment.

Thank you very much for all that you have done and for all you will do in these days. 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. The *Ratio fundamentalis* has been made; there is no need to make another one. Let us move forward with this one. 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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