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An outbound Church with an outbound laity

Vatican City, 17 June 2016 – "An outboard Church, an outbound laity", was Pope Francis' proposal to the participants in the assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, whom he received in audience this morning. In this specific historic moment, and in the context of the Jubilee of Mercy, he said, the Church is called to be ever more aware of being "the house of the father where the doors are always wide open to each person, with his or her weary life, and of being a permanently outbound Church, an evangelising community that knows how to take the initiative without fear, to reach out to others, to seek out those who are distant and to reach out to crossroads, to invite in the excluded."

He urged those present to raise their eyes and look outwards to the most distant reaches of our world, to the many families in difficulty and in need of mercy, to the many fields of the apostolate that have not yet been explored, to the many laypeople with a good and generous heart who would willingly place their energies, time and abilities at the service of the Gospel if they were involved, valued and accompanied with affection and dedication by pastors and ecclesial institutions. "We need well-formed laypeople, inspired by a sincere and clear faith, whose life has been touched by the personal and merciful encounter with the love of Jesus Christ."

Since the Pontifical Council for the Laity will soon assume a new form, the Holy Father took the opportunity to summarise the various stages in the existence of this dicastery, established at the behest of Blessed Paul VI following Vatican Council II, and which has accompanied the life, maturation and transformation of the Catholic laity over more than half a century.

Francis recalled the new season which, along with lay associations of a long and worthy history has seen the emergence of many movements and new communities of great missionary zeal; movements whose development has been followed by the dicastery, accompanied with care, and assisted in the delicate phase of the juridical recognition of their statutes. There has also been the appearance of new lay ministries, to which a significant number of apostolic activities have been entrusted, and the expanding role of women in the Church. Finally, the creation of the World Youth Days, a "providential gesture of St. John Paul II, a tool for the evangelisation of the new generations", followed with great attention by the dicastery, which also included Karol Wojtyła himself among its members and consultants.

"We can say, therefore, that the mandate you have received from the Council was precisely that of encouraging the lay faithful to be increasingly and better involved in the evangelising mission of the Church, not by 'delegation' from the hierarchy, but rather because its apostolate is participation in the salvific mission of the Church, an apostolate to which all are destined by the Lord Himself by virtue of our baptism and confirmation. Baptism makes each one of the lay faithful a missionary disciple of the Lord, salt of the earth, light of the world, and leaven that transforms reality from within."

"In the light of the journey undertaken thus far, it is time to look anew with hope for the future. Much remains to be done, broadening horizons and accepting the new challenges that reality presents to us. It is from here that the Curia's plan for reform was born, in particular the incorporation of your dicastery with the Pontifical Council for the Family, in connection with the Academy for Life", explained Francis. "I invite you to welcome this reform, which will involve you, as a sign of the appreciation and esteem for the work that you carry out and as a sign of renewed trust in the vocation and mission of the laity in today's Church. The new dicastery that is about to be established will have as a 'rudder', to continue to navigate its course, on one side the *Christifideles laici* and on the other *Evangeliu Gaudium* and *Amoris Laetitia*, and its primary fields of work will be the family and the defence of life."
