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Audience with members of the Primatial Council of the Confederation of Canons Regular of Saint Augustine

Today the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Primatial Council of the Confederation of Canons Regular of Saint Augustine.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers, good morning and welcome!

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of your meeting of the Primatial Council. I greet you, Fr. Abbot Primate, and I thank you for your words, and you too, Superiors General and the Father Secretary.

Your Confederation was established in 1959 by Saint John XXIII. This structure, even though it is not of a juridical nature, is important to foster communion between the Congregations that constitute it and share the same charism. Indeed, the main aims of the Confederation are to unite the various branches of your Order in a bond of charity, to highlight the evangelical significance of your charism, and to help each other, especially with regard to the spiritual dimension, the formation of the young, ongoing formation and the promotion of culture.

Although each Congregation enjoys its own autonomy, this does not prevent the Confederal Statutes from providing for competences that promote a balance between this autonomy and appropriate coordination, that in any case avoids independence and isolation. Isolation is dangerous. Care must be taken to guard oneself against the sickness of self-referentiality and to preserve communion between the different Congregations as a real treasure. You are well aware of all being in the same boat, and that “no-one contributes to the future in isolation, by his or her efforts alone, but by seeing himself or herself as part of a true communion which is constantly open to encounter, dialogue, attentive listening and mutual assistance” (*Letter to all consecrated*

people on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, 21 November 2014). Practising the spirituality of encounter: this is essential for living the synodality of the Church.

Like any other form of consecrated life, yours too must adapt to the circumstances of the time, of the difference places where you are present, and the cultures, always in the light of the Gospel and your own charism. Consecrated life is like water – if it does not flow it stagnates, it loses its meaning, it is like salt that has lost its flavour and becomes useless (cf *Mt* 5:13). Good memory is fruitful, it is the “deuteronomic” memory of roots, of origins. We must not content ourselves with an archaeological memory, because this transforms us into museum pieces, perhaps worthy of admiration but not imitation; instead, deuteronomic memory helps us to live the present fully and without fear so as to open ourselves up to the future with renewed hope. You too – as Saint John Paul II wrote, “have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things” (Apostolic Exhortation *Consecrated Life*, 25 March 1996, 110).

A fundamental rule of religious life is the following of Christ proposed by the Gospel. Take the Gospel as the rule of life, to the point of being able to say, with Saint Paul: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (*Gal* 2:20). May the Gospel be your guide, so that, keeping away from the temptation to reduce it to ideology, it may always remain as spirit and life for you. The Gospel leads us continually to place Christ at the centre of our life and of our mission. It restores us to our “first love”. And loving Christ means loving the Church, his body. Consecrated life is born in the Church, grows with the Church and bears fruit as Church. It is in the Church, as Saint Augustine teaches us, that we discover the full Christ. God has made us for himself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in him (cf. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.1.). Therefore, as Canons Regular, your main occupation is the constant and daily search for the Lord. Seek him in community life, a reflection of the being of God and his promise and witness that “God is love” (*1 Jn* 4:8,16). May *koinonia* make you all feel that you are builders, weavers of fraternity. Seek the Lord in the assiduous reading of sacred scripture, in whose pages Christ and the Church resonate (cf. Saint Augustine, *Discourses*, 46, 33). Seek the Lord in the liturgy, in particular in the Eucharist, apex of Christian life, which signifies and realises the unity of the Church in the harmony of charity (Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, 25). Seek him in study and in ordinary pastoral work. Seek him also in the realities of our time, knowing that nothing that is human can be foreign to us and that, free from all worldliness, we can animate the world with the leaven of the Kingdom of God. These are the different paths of a single quest, which presupposes the path of interiority, of knowledge and of the love of the Lord, in the school of Saint Augustine: “Do not go outside, come back into yourself. It is in the inner self that Truth dwells” (cf. *De Vera Religione*, 39, 72; *Confessions*, 3.6.11). In this way, the light of the inner Master illuminates temporal realities for us.

Dear brothers, may this time of encounter between you and the Successor of Peter help you to revisit your charism and strengthen the communion of life in accordance with the example of the primitive apostolic community (cf. *Acts* 2:42-47). And this communion also anticipates the full and definitive union in God, and goes towards it.

Thank you for your presence and for your witness in the Church. May Our Lady keep you and intercede for you. I bless you and your communities from my heart. And I ask you, please, to pray for me.
