



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE FORMATION COURSE FOR BISHOPS  
ON THE NEW MARRIAGE PROCESS  
[17-19 NOVEMBER 2016]**

*Apostolic Tribunal of the Roman Rota  
Friday, 18 November 2016*

**[[Multimedia](#)]**

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*Dear Brothers,*

Your presence at this training course, sponsored by the Apostolic Tribunal of the Roman Rota, emphasizes how Bishops, while constituted in accordance with Ordination as *teachers of faith* (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 25), need to learn continually. It is a matter of understanding the needs and questions of mankind today and of seeking the answers in the Word of God and in the truth of faith, studied and ever better understood. The exercise of the *munus docendi* is intimately linked to the *munus sanctificandi* and *munus regendi*. It is through these three functions that the pastoral ministry of the Bishop — based on love of Christ, assisted by the Holy Spirit, and aimed at putting Jesus' message into action — is expressed. Inculturation of the Gospel is founded on this very principle which sees as united faithfulness to the Gospel message and its understanding and translation over time.

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Bl. Paul VI exhorted that evangelization not be carried out in a superficial way, but by adjusting it to concrete situations and actual people. These are his words: "what matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots ... always taking the person as one's starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God" (n. 20). Precisely the attention to people is the theological and ecclesiological motive underlying this training course. Spiritual health, the *salus animarum* of the people entrusted to us constitutes the aim of all pastoral action.

In the First Letter of Peter we find a fundamental reference point of the episcopal office: “Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock” (5:2-3). This exhortation illumines the Bishop’s entire mission, presenting spiritual authority as a service for the salvation of mankind. In this prospective, it is important to eliminate with determination every impediment of a worldly character that renders access to ecclesiastic tribunals difficult for a large number of faithful. Economic and organizational issues must not be an obstacle for the canonical verification of the validity of a marriage.

With a view to a healthy relationship between justice and charity, the law of the Church must not overlook the fundamental principle of *salus animarum*. Therefore, the ecclesiastic tribunals are called to be the tangible expression of a *diaconal* service of right in regard to this primary end. It is appropriately placed as the final word of the Code of Canon Law, so that it may predominate as supreme law and as a value that exceeds the law itself, thus indicating the horizon of mercy.

In this perspective the Church has always pursued this ideal, as a mother who accepts and loves, following the example of Jesus the Good Samaritan. The Church of the Word Made Flesh is “incarnate” in the sorrowful and suffered events of the people; she bows down to her poor and to those who are separated from the ecclesial community or who are considered as outside of it due to the failure of their marriage. However, they are and continue to be incorporated in Christ by virtue of Baptism. Thus, we have the grave responsibility of exercising the *munus*, received from Jesus the Divine Pastor, physician and judge of souls, of never considering them as extraneous to the Body of Christ, which is the Church. We are called not to exclude them from our pastoral concern, but to address them and their irregular and painful situation with all solicitude and charity.

Dear Brother Bishops, you have come from different countries and you have brought to this meeting the solicitations and questions that arise in the area of matrimonial pastoral ministry of the respective Dioceses. These issues require responses and provisions that are not always easy. I am certain that these days of study will help you to identify the most appropriate approach to the various problems. Thus I thank the Dean, Msgr Pinto, for having sponsored this training Course, as well as the relators for their competent juridical, theological and pastoral input.

You will return to your Dioceses enriched with ideas and helpful guidance to carry out your ministry more effectively, especially with regard to the new marriage procedures. It represents an important asset to help the flock which has been entrusted to you grow to the measure of Christ the Good Shepherd, from whom we must learn each day the wise search for the *unum necessarium*: the *salus animarum*. It is the supreme good and is identified with God himself, as Saint Gregory of Nazianzus taught. Trust in the unfailing help of the Holy Spirit who, although unseen, actually leads the Church.

Let us pray to him that he help you and that he also help the Successor of Peter to respond, with

willingness and humility, to the cry for help of so many of our brothers and sisters who need to discern the truth of their marriage and of their life's journey.