



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE FORMATION INSTITUTE
FOR EDUCATORS OF THE CLERGY***

Monday 15 May 2000

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Dear Friends,*

I am pleased to welcome you, the leadership team, priests and men and women religious who are taking part in a formation year at the *Formation Institute for Educators of the Clergy*, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of its foundation shortly after the Second Vatican Council.

Our meeting enables me to salute the attention that the Bishops' Conference of France pays to the formation of future priests and to thank everyone who is involved in the formation of the clergy, particularly the Society of St Sulpice, for the courageous efforts it has made in this area since the beginning of the IFEC, with constantly renewed concern for the needs of Dioceses. My thanks go to all those who have contributed to this institute's development, especially Fr Constant Bouchaud, its co-founder, and Fr Raymond Deville, both members of the Society of St Sulpice, as well as to Fr Pierre Fichelle, from the Diocese of Lille, former superior of the seminary of Merville and also a co-founder. They knew how to develop the insights of the Council in the area of priestly formation, in order to face the difficulties of past decades and to prepare capable guides to help young seminarians and to assist the Bishops in their diocesan administration. I am pleased that the IFEC is now open to priests from other continents and to the superiors of religious institutes, thus showing its concern to support the universal Church. Indeed, to prepare for the future, it is particularly important to form a new generation of priests capable of taking on great diocesan responsibilities and leaders at all levels of the Church.

Discernment and formation in spiritual direction are essential elements for priests entrusted with responsibilities. First of all, they call for work on one's interior life, which you have done during the

year and in a special way through your Ignatian retreat, in order to unify one's priestly life as well as to advance on the way of holiness and love for Christ and his Church. They presuppose interior openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, our master and teacher, and careful attention to human realities and behaviour. They require the priest to be able, with clarity and seriousness, to review his own actions as a pastor and teacher in order, through fraternal guidance, to enable young people to mature in their vocation and grow in their ministry or in religious life. It is ultimately a deep renewal of the individual and of the way he views the priestly ministry to which is committed, so that every mission can bring true joy and be fruitful.

I thank the priests, seminary professors, episcopal vicars and Vicars General, as well as the members of consecrated institutes who, despite their numerous ministerial commitments and tasks of governance, are willing to receive intellectual, spiritual, pedagogical and pastoral formation in order to take an active part in priestly and religious formation, whose importance is critical (cf. Decree *Optatam totius*, Introduction). Many countries are experiencing a lack of vocations and the fragility of young men affected by a world where social problems do not help personalities to mature. It is the task of pastors and all the faithful, by their witness of life, to be models that instil a desire to follow Christ totally and to be able to pass on more directly the call to the priesthood and to religious commitment.

I would also like to call your attention to the continual formation of the clergy, which helps priests to live the various realities of their ministry, to overcome the inevitable crises of life and to be ever more available for their mission. Continual formation makes it possible to deepen their encounter with the Lord in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and strengthens their trusting love for the Church; it allows religious and human knowledge to be updated so that people may be engaged in a more fruitful dialogue. It also encourages fraternal life which is, as it were, the soul of the presbyterate (cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 19). I therefore fervently hope that many people will benefit from a year of formation with the IFEC, in fidelity to the insights that guided its foundation.

As I entrust you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, who accompanied and supported the Apostles in the early Church with her motherly concern, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to all who benefit from your ministry.