



The Lay Centre Web News

2023



Introduction

In the following document, you will find all the notes from The Lay Centre for the year 2023. To easily locate a specific note, you can use the "Command + F" function (or "Control + F" on Windows) and search for relevant keywords. This feature allows you to quickly navigate through the document and find the notes you are looking for. The document serves as a comprehensive collection of all The Lay Centre's notes for 2023, helping you access the information more efficiently.



2023

Dies Academicus 2023: Letters from the Jesuit Missions, by Elia Gittardi

By Stefanie Bross

The Lay Centre community held, on Nov. 25, the “Dies Academicus 2023,” an open day in which they welcome visitors and engage in fruitful intellectual dialogue. Four Lay Centre residents presented topics they have been studying and discussed them with those present in the audience. After the sessions, guests joined the community for lunch. The presentations were very diverse and included topics in history, culture, psychology, theology, and spirituality.

Elia Gittardi, a third-year history and cultural heritage student at the Pontifical Gregorian University, closed the day’s speakers with a talk on “Litterae Indipete.” These letters, sent to the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, totalled over 16,000. Housed at the Arsi Jesu in Rome, they served as unique insights into the selection and desires of Jesuit missionaries.

Gittardi’s presentation emphasized the commonalities in these letters — spirited aspirations for the missions, coupled with an administrative tone akin to job applications. They revealed recurrent themes of obedience, indifference, and a longing for martyrdom, particularly in Japan during severe Christian persecutions. St. Francis Xavier’s influence loomed large, acting as both patron saint and an inspirational figure guiding aspirants toward missions.

Furthermore, these letters had an administrative function, often demonstrating families’ consent for their children’s perilous missions. They also revealed differences in regional Jesuit divisions regarding their perspectives on missions, especially in the Far East.

Gittardi recommended comprehensive works exploring “Litterae Indipete” for a deeper understanding of these letters’ historical, spiritual, and cultural significance within Jesuit missionary endeavors. His presentation highlighted these letters as invaluable sources to understand the fervent aspirations and administrative intricacies of Jesuit missionary selection throughout history.

[Watch his full intervention on The Lay Centre's YouTube channel.](#)



Dies Academicus 2023: The Continuous Response to Divine Calling, by Maria Rocha

By The Lay Centre

The Lay Centre community held, on Nov. 25, the “Dies Academicus 2023,” an open day in which they welcome visitors and engage in fruitful intellectual dialogue. Four Lay Centre residents presented topics they have been studying and discussed them with those present in the audience. After the sessions, guests joined the community for lunch. The presentations were very diverse and included topics in history, culture, psychology, theology, and spirituality.

In her presentation, "Between Revelation and Conversion: The Response of St. Augustine and Paul Claudel," Maria Rocha, a Philosophy graduate student at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum), delved into the essence of revelation through the experiences of these two iconic figures. Inspired by a seminar led by Professor Jean-Luc Marion, Maria applied Marion's insights to examine how revelation unfolded in Augustine and Claudel's lives.

She highlighted the importance of witnesses, resistance, and paradoxes in understanding revelation. Both Augustine and Claudel encountered moments that transcended the ordinary, leading to resistance before a deeper understanding unfolded. Maria described conversion not as a singular event but an ongoing process. Augustine saw his conversion as a daily alignment of his relationship with God, while Claudel's reflection on the Annunciation portrayed life as a continuous response to divine calling.

She concluded by echoing the significance of being a witness, connecting it to Hans Urs von Balthasar's reflections on the simplicity of Christianity. Maria emphasized aligning one's will with divine purpose, portraying life as a perpetual response to the divine call. Through Augustine and Claudel's narratives, Rocha's presentation revealed the transformative power of revelation and the enduring journey of conversion that defines the human experience.

[Watch her full intervention on The Lay Centre's YouTube channel.](#)



Dies Academicus 2023: A Call for Europe to Return to Christian Roots, by Filip Veber

By Stefanie Bross

The Lay Centre community held, on Nov. 25, the “Dies Academicus 2023,” an open day in which they welcome visitors and engage in fruitful intellectual dialogue. Four Lay Centre residents presented topics they have been studying and discussed them with those present in the audience. After the sessions, guests joined the community for lunch. The presentations were very diverse and included topics in history, culture, psychology, theology, and spirituality.

Filip Veber, a theology scholar and doctoral student at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (Santa Croce), delved into Joseph Ratzinger's profound insights on "Creative Christian Minorities," advocating a return to Christian roots as a solution for contemporary Europe. He applied his in-depth understanding of Ratzinger's teachings to highlight the urgency for modern Christian communities to embody creative minorities within their societal contexts.

Drawing parallels with historical instances, such as the Jewish exile in Babylon, Veber elucidated how these minority groups thrived and sustained their identity despite challenging circumstances. Ratzinger's proposition of Christian minorities as transformative agents resonated throughout the presentation, emphasizing the importance of dialogue between faith and culture.

Veber's narrative emphasized Ratzinger's belief that by reconnecting with Christian roots, Europe can rediscover its moral and spiritual foundations. That Europe should return to its Christian roots, as proposed by Ratzinger, presents a compelling solution to the cultural complexities faced by contemporary Europe.

[Watch his full intervention on The Lay Centre's YouTube channel.](#)



Dies Academicus 2023: Temperaments and Personality Development, by Daniela Niño Giraldo

By Stefanie Bross

The Lay Centre community held, on Nov. 25, the “Dies Academicus 2023,” an open day in which they welcome visitors and engage in fruitful intellectual dialogue. Four Lay Centre residents presented topics they have been studying and discussed them with those present in the audience. After the sessions, guests joined the community for lunch. The presentations were very diverse and included topics in history, culture, psychology, theology, and spirituality.

Daniela Niño Giraldo delved into the intriguing concept of temperaments, namely, the phlegmatic, sanguine, choleric, and melancholic archetypes. Drawing from a diverse academic background that includes international business and philosophy, as well as her current graduate work in philosophy at the Pontifical University Santa Croce, Daniela navigated the complex terrain of these innate predispositions.

Central to her discussion was the profound correlation between temperaments and the development of one's personality — a fundamental element in the pursuit of happiness. Giraldo utilized the analogy of the four elements to vividly illustrate the distinct characteristics and behaviors associated with each temperament, offering a compelling framework for understanding their nuances. She likened the temperaments to natural elements: sanguine akin to wind, choleric to fire, melancholic to earth, and phlegmatic to water. These comparisons highlighted how these dispositions reflect our natural reactions to external stimuli.

Her presentation highlighted the importance of comprehending these natural dispositions not just within oneself but also in others. Giraldo emphasized that such understanding fosters personal growth and facilitates interactions, creating a foundation for mutual appreciation and support. Moreover, she advocated for the integration of diverse temperaments, elucidating the idea that appreciating these differences can lead to collective enrichment. Her insights resonated as a call to embrace diversity, encouraging an environment where varied temperaments serve as catalysts for personal and communal development.

[Watch her full intervention on The Lay Centre's YouTube channel.](#)



Accedi il sito in inglese per notizie aggiornate

By The Lay Centre

For more information about events and activities, follow us on our [English website](#) and subscribe to our newsletter by sending an email to info@laycentre.org.



Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the publication of 'Evangelii Gaudium'

By The Lay Centre

Source: [Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development](#)

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development held a symposium on November 24 to reflect on its impact within the pontificate of Pope Francis, on its meaning for the Church and for the world at large.

The *Evangelii Gaudium* is the first document of the Magisterium of Pope Francis. It was published on November 24, 2013, the Solemnity of Christ the King, and is considered by many to be a "programmatically" Apostolic Exhortation in which the Holy Father placed at the center of ecclesial pastoral care "the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world."

In order to proclaim the Gospel with joy, Pope Francis exhorts the Church to a "missionary transformation," deepens the "social dimension of Evangelization," explaining some of the community and social implications of the kerygma, social inclusion of the poor, the search for common good and social peace, and social dialogue as a contribution to peace.

Among the guests of the Roman Curia at this moment of reflection were Sr Nathalie Becquart of the General Secretariat of the Synod and Sr Helen Alford of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences.

Message from Pope Francis

In a message addressed to the participants of this Symposium organized by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Pope Francis thanked the realization of this initiative and recalled that when ten years ago he wrote the *Evangelii Gaudium* he invited Christians "to a new stage in the proclamation of the Gospel" in which he proposed to "recover the missionary joy of the first Christians, full of courage, tireless in the proclamation and capable of great Active resistance."

"The proclamation of the Gospel in today's world continues to require from us a counter-cultural prophetic resistance to pagan hedonistic individualism," the Holy Father wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation.

In addition, the Pope called for "to have the same sentiments of Jesus Christ" because "our evangelizing mission and our Christian life cannot ignore the poor."



To this end, the Holy Father suggested creating "new social structures" that are founded on a new mentality to "renounce the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and attack the structural causes of inequity."

"If we do not achieve this change of mentality and structures, we are condemned to see the climate, health, and migratory crises deepen, and particularly violence and wars, putting at risk the whole human family, poor and non-poor, integrated and excluded, because we are all in the same boat and we are called to row together," Francis said.

Finally, the Pope encouraged, ten years after the publication of *Evangelii Gaudium*, to reaffirm that "only if we listen to the often-silenced cry of the earth and of the poor can we fulfill our evangelizing mission, live the life that Jesus proposes to us and contribute to resolving the grave problems of humanity."

Dialogue among the participants

The program of the symposium began with the reading Pope Francis' message in Spanish and an introductory talk by Cardinal Michael Czerny.

This was followed by Argentinean Juan Grabois, who shared how he first met and got to know Jorge Bergoglio. A number of participants took part in the two hours of dialogue including Sr Nathalie Becquart, Sr Helen Alford, Fr James Hanvey, Giuseppe De Marzo, and Filipe Domingues.

[Symposium for the 10th anniversary of Evangelii Gaudium](#)



Lay Centre Summer Week discusses lay leadership in the Catholic Church

By The Lay Centre

The Lay Centre's summer program on lay leadership ran for the third time this past July 9-14. The innovative program, aimed particularly at young adults, is designed to unleash the potential of lay leaders to contribute to the Church's most pressing challenges. The balanced and efficient format, which includes sessions with speakers from Rome and the United States, also allows for participants to visit the city and its historical sites.

While attending the week, program participants had a weeklong experience of community life at The Lay Centre, which might inspire them to return to Rome for a longer stay, to study or to work. Participants came from Afghanistan, Brazil, Cameroon, Hungary, Mexico, Pakistan, South Korea, Ukraine, and the United States.

Designed together with Letty Garcia, associate director at Harvard Business School, the Summer Leadership Development Program focused on the needs of young professionals who work — or wish to work — in Church institutions. While participants can be from any field or profession, they are united in their commitment to discerning a call to serve others, motivated to tackle some of the Church's biggest challenges.

The weeklong program takes a holistic approach to leadership formation, including the human, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions. This is an evolution of the pilot program that The Lay Centre held in previous years with members of its resident community. In the second year, the program was open to outsiders as well, which proved to be very positive.

This time, the goal was to propose an entirely new program, designed specifically for an external cohort.

"I especially liked how the program combined an understanding of leadership with the traditions of the Church and its vision for the laity, which really resonated with me as a young lay person working in the Church," one participant said.

The topics addressed included: What is Leadership?; Exploring Your Call to Leadership; Leadership Perspectives from the Rules of St. Benedict; Spiritual Conversation and Leadership; Letting Go of Fear and Saying 'Yes' to Leadership; Leadership and Self-Awareness; Communicating Joy in a World in Crisis; A workshop on Synodality; and Leading with Purpose.

"The program helped me to understand my gifts and purpose in a concrete way. It gave me actionable steps in discernment and concrete leadership and career advice. Also, it



gave me an opportunity for prayer and conversation to help me discern the next steps for my future,” another person said.

How to apply

The next Summer Leadership Development Program will take place in the second week of July 2024. While applicants can be from any field or profession, they are united in their commitment to discerning a call to serve as leaders motivated to tackle some of the Church's biggest challenges.

The program is designed for lay leaders with diverse experiences and backgrounds and at least three years of professional experience – however, exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis.

Focused on developing self-awareness and emotional intelligence, participants of this program will define their own path to authentic leadership and return to their daily work, ready to lead with greater enthusiasm and confidence.

If you are interested, please contact info@laycentre.org. There are scholarships available to cover the cost of the program.



Dies Academicus 2023: Join us for dialogue and lunch on Nov. 25

By The Lay Centre

The Lay Centre community invites all of its friends in Rome to attend our "Dies Academicus 2023", an open day in which we welcome visitors but also engage in fruitful intellectual dialogue. Four of our residents will present topics that they have been studying recently and discuss them with those present in the audience. After the sessions, guests are invited to join the community for lunch.

The Saturday morning starts at 10 AM and ends with lunch at 1 PM.

Click on the banner to register!

[Link to registration](#)



A week of fellowship, culture and spiritual enrichment in Rome

By Stefanie Bross

The first week of the academic year at The Lay Centre was full of activities aimed at strengthening the residential community and providing a practical orientation about life in Rome. Under the theme, "Together: Lay Leaders in Christian Perspective," community members journeyed together, from Sept. 25 to Oct. 1, to set the tone for the academic year.

Building on a new tradition, the community started the week with a pilgrimage and Mass at St. Peter's Basilica. The pastor of St. Peter's, Father Agnello Stoia, O.F.M. Conv., took the community on a private visit to the tomb of the apostle.

On that same morning, Lay Centre community members visited the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development, where they learned about the work of the Church in promoting the dignity of every human being.

Lunch was offered at Trattoria degli Amici, a restaurant run by the St. Egidio Community in the Trastevere neighbourhood. The restaurant is dedicated to providing meaningful employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in a warm and inclusive atmosphere.

Subsequently, art historian Christiaan Santini – who is also The Lay Centre's operations manager – took participants on a special visit of the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere and the underground sites of the Church of San Cosimato. On another day, he took Lay Centre community members to the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, another pillar of the Church of Rome.

Caring for others and unity in prayer

The week included a workshop session on safeguarding minors and vulnerable people, led by Dr. Angela Rinaldi, professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University's Institute of Anthropology. She emphasized the importance of promoting safe environments in the Church and spoke about the responsibility of each individual.

Volunteers from the ecumenical Taizé community joined Lay Centre residents for a beautiful moment of prayer for unity and peace in the community and in the Church. On a separate evening, The Lay Centre opened its doors to fraternal delegates from various Christian denominations, mostly from Switzerland, who came to Rome to join the grand event of the week – an ecumenical prayer vigil in St. Peter's Square on Sept. 30, under the theme, "Together: Gathering of the People of God."



The event gathered thousands of young Christians from diverse traditions in prayer, praise, and silence. Presided over by Pope Francis, the event emphasized recognizing Christ in diversity, building fraternity, and caring for creation.



October 2023: Community Evenings at a Glance

By The Lay Centre

As is tradition, Wednesdays at The Lay Centre offer moments of dialogue on topics that reinforce the spirit of hospitality and community. Esteemed guests help the resident community in laying the foundation for a year characterized by unity, dialogue, and meaningful encounters.

“Together” is the theme that will accompany the community throughout the 2023-2024 academic year. The theme was inspired by the ecumenical vigil in St. Peter's Square with Pope Francis, held Sept. 30 to pray for the works of the first general assembly of the Synod on Synodality, and to pray for Christian unity and peace among peoples.

The themes of the many workshops organized in Rome that day before the vigil will inspire the Wednesday gatherings this academic year.

In October, we addressed the following themes: “Together, welcoming each other across borders for a life which is more beautiful and more just”; “Together with believers from throughout the centuries through cultural journeys in Rome”; “Together, seeking the source of communion in God in prayer”; “Together, let us build Europe,” and “Together, announcing Christ at the new frontiers of mission.”

Some highlights

At the inaugural community evening of the academic year, Father Vivian Boland, O.P., a respected expert in Thomas Aquinas and professor at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum), presided over Mass. After dinner, he spoke about how Dominicans build a strong community, emphasizing the significance of fellowship and the importance of sharing spiritual growth among members. Nurturing a fruitful community life depends on sharing silent prayer, but also intentional shared moments of conviviality and leisure.

On a separate evening, Bishop Paul Tighe, secretary of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, spoke about how Christians can engage in fruitful dialogue with contemporary culture, which is not always welcoming to messages from the institutional Church. He also shared insights on the dicastery's work, emphasizing cultural initiatives that promote encounter among people from diverse backgrounds.

On the feast of St. Luke, Cardinal Joseph Tobin, archbishop of Newark, New Jersey, and a member of The Lay Centre's board of directors, joined the community for Mass and dinner. A member of the synodal assembly of the Synod on Synodality that month,



Cardinal Tobin spoke about the movements of the Holy Spirit within the Church, promoting unity in diversity among Church members. He invited Christians to become good and attentive listeners.

In the last community evening of October, The Lay Centre discussed Christianity and the Church in Italy. Father Rocco D'Ambrosio, a professor of political philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and Prof. Isabella Santini, PhD, an economist, statistician and professor emeritus professor of both the Gregorian and La Sapienza universities, spoke about their pastoral experiences in the country. She is a lay woman who has served the Church for more than 30 years in different instances, particularly in charity initiatives and as a teacher.

He shared the statistics on Catholicism in the country and listed some challenges the Church faces in the secular age. He said even though Catholic culture is very integrated into Italian culture, fewer people have been attending Church services. On the other hand, he expressed optimism about the fact that many – even if they are not Christians – still search for God and wish for a deep spiritual life.

Contributed: Stefanie Bross



ANALYSIS: Synod proposes ways to renew Church life and highlights the baptismal dignity of all faithful

By Filipe Domingues

A summary document of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops was published Oct. 28 as a partial result of the Synod on Synodality. The document is a fruit of the efforts carried out in a “climate of reciprocal listening and sincere dialogue” during a month of meetings in the Vatican.

After a nearly two-year consultation process in local churches worldwide, more than 360 delegates came to Rome to discuss and propose paths for renewing Church life.

The Synod assembly continued to be a meeting between bishops, but this time it included lay men and women, consecrated people, priests and deacons. The sessions did not aim to provide answers to controversial questions, but to expose important themes for the Church and, as much as possible, identify consensus. In a process of listening to each other – and of listening together to the Holy Spirit – they started from the principle that the synodal style is essential for the Church to move forward.

[The synthesis report](#) is in view of preparing for the next assembly to be held October 2024.

“In this summary report, we collect the main elements emerging from the dialogue, prayer and confrontation that characterize these days,” the text reads.

“We discovered, in fact, that walking together as baptized, in the diversity of charisms, vocations, ministries, is important not only for our communities, but also for the world,” it continues.

The three parts of the report address convergences, “matters for consideration” and proposals for various topics.

Church as people of God

The guiding principle of the document is that the Church is both “Mystery and People of God, called to holiness,” as stated at the Second Vatican Council. This means that all members of the Church, through baptism, are equal in dignity, even though each person’s journey and calling may be expressed differently in their life. This principle, in other words, “values the contribution of all baptized people, in the variety of their vocations, to a better understanding and practice of the Gospel.”



One of the main fruits of the Synod has been to reinforce in Catholics the “growing awareness of our identity as faithful people of God, within which each one bears a dignity derived from baptism and called to co-responsibility for the common mission of evangelization,” the report states. For this to be fully experienced, it is necessary to build a Church that is “God’s home and family,” closer to people, especially to those who suffer most, one that is “less bureaucratic and more relational.”

Pay attention to those on the ‘outside’

Before any consensus can be reached, in the context of a more synodal Church, the assembly discussed several theological and ecclesial concepts that require further reflection. Starting from Church Tradition, the document says, it will be necessary to revise the Code of Canon Law, so practices and structures can be adjusted to new needs.

Centered on the Word of God and the Eucharist, the document says, it is possible to welcome into the Church members of all “tribes, languages, peoples and nations” (Ap 7,9). And it is necessary to nurture “the same mind... as Jesus Christ” (Phil. 2:5) by recognizing and cultivating “sensitivity to the richness of the variety of expressions of being Church.”

The report states that the world needs a Church to welcome everyone, that is particularly attentive to the poor, to those who are victims of “many forms of material poverty,” those excluded from society and ecclesiastical structures, and those who are vulnerable and suffering – such as migrants, the elderly, the lonely, the exploited, and victims of abuse, war and environmental catastrophes.

The Synod recommends greater dissemination of the teachings of the Church’s social doctrine and calls for a reappraisal of the paths of formation and initiation into Christian life.

It also encourages Christian communities to listen to and accompany those furthest from the Church.

“In different ways, people who feel marginalized or excluded from the Church because of their marital status, identity and sexuality also ask to be heard and accompanied, and for their dignity to be defended,” says the text. “In the Assembly, there was a deep sense of love, mercy and compassion for people who are or feel hurt or neglected by the Church, who want a place to return ‘home’ and where they can feel safe, be heard and respected, without fear of feeling judged. Listening is a prerequisite for us to walk together in search of God’s will. The assembly reiterates that Christians must always show respect for the dignity of every person.”

Unity in ministries

Much has been said about the participation of the faithful in the life of the Church and the different ways of experiencing full reciprocity through the various ministries. Some of



them are formal ministries, such as the ordained ministry (bishop, priest and deacon) or the instituted ministries (lector, acolyte and catechist). Others are informal, but no less important. They are expressed within and outside the liturgy and include charity to the poor, formation and care for the sick.

In promoting the full communion of all Christians, the assembly recommends getting to know the identity and mission of the Eastern churches and other Christian confessions better. “There cannot be synodality without the ecumenical dimension,” the summary report reads.

There was also much reflection on the role of the bishop as a pastor of the people of God who are entrusted to him and on the interaction, in an increasingly participatory and synodal Church, among local bishops and with the pope, bishop of Rome.

Furthermore, based on the principle that “the Church is a mission” and that “every Christian is a mission in this world,” the assembly reiterates that “the family is the pillar that supports every Christian community.”

The family is “a community of life and love, a privileged place for education in faith and Christian practice, which requires particular support within communities.” Lay men and women “contribute in a vital way to carrying out the mission in all environments and in the most common situations of each day,” it states.

The assembly is especially attentive to two essential categories: young people and women.

“Churches all over the world have expressed a clear request that the active contribution of women would be recognized and valued, and that their pastoral leadership increase in all areas of the Church's life and mission,” says the text. “In order to give better expression to the gifts and charisms of all and to be more responsive to pastoral needs, how can the Church include more women in existing roles and ministries? If new ministries are required, who should discern these, at what levels and in what ways?”

Among the spaces in which lay people, including young people, live, the report mentions digital culture, the world of work and business, youth cultures, economics and politics, scientific research, education, arts and culture, training, work directed toward “care for our common home” and participation in public life. Wherever they are present, lay Christians “are called to witness to Jesus Christ in everyday life and to explicitly share the faith with others.”



Walking with the disciples of Emmaus

By Stefanie Bross

Amid the tranquility of the Capuchin cloister in Frascati, Lay Centre residents began the new academic year with a three-day retreat, led by Father Fernando Millán Romeral, O.Carm. Father Millán is a professor of theology at Comillas Pontifical University in Madrid and the former prior general of the Carmelite Order. A cherished friend of The Lay Centre, he guided participants through the captivating narrative of the disciples of Emmaus in the Gospel of Luke.

The retreat mirrored the journey of Cleopas and the “unnamed disciple,” whose encounter with Jesus transforms their uncertainty into a deep experience of faith. Beginning with some insights on Luke and his writing, Father Millán gave participants questions for their personal reflection. Beyond having ample space for contemplation, attendees also had the opportunity to engage in private conversations with Father Millán and seek spiritual guidance.

“I particularly liked our final session, which introduced us to a new dimension of spirituality; the portrayal of the Emmaus story by great masters like Caravaggio, Velázquez and Rembrandt,” said Karina Gandur, who studies ecumenism at the Pontifical Gregorian University. She also highlighted the openness and willingness of participants to share deep and personal insights with one another.

Building Community

The various forms of prayer and worship integral to the retreat – Lectio divina, the serenity of Adoration, the Liturgy of the Hours, the meditative ambiance of Taizé chants, and the sacredness of Mass – became moments of great communion.

However, on Saturday evening, participants shared a different ambiance in a moment of conviviality.

“This academic year The Lay Centre community has members from 15 different countries with varied cultural and religious backgrounds,” said Dr. Filipe Domingues, The Lay Centre’s deputy director. “It was truly beautiful to witness how this group of people is now becoming a unique and vibrant community.” Before departing for Rome, each participant shared with the group one spiritual insight and one pearl of wisdom gained during the retreat, which will serve as guiding lights in the challenging academic and spiritual journey that lies ahead.



Day trip is opportunity for Lay Centre community to reflect on faith and science

By The Lay Centre

On May 20, The Lay Centre's residential community took a day trip to Castel Gandolfo, on the outskirts of Rome, where the Vatican Observatory is located. The visit, guided by Father Gabriele Gionti, SJ, included a tour of the Observatory's museum, where it was possible to see images produced by the Observatory, archive documents and telescopes—which still work!

The visit concluded with an in-depth discussion of the relationship between faith and science, or more specifically, theology and science, and how popes throughout history have interpreted this dynamic.

Born in Capua, Italy, Father Gionti is an astronomer whose area of research involves, particularly, Cosmology and Quantum Gravity. More about him and the Observatory: <https://www.vaticanobservatory.va/>



FULL VIDEO: Watch eight presentations approaching catechesis from the perspectives of synodality, the domestic church and personal experience

By The Lay Centre

Watch eight full presentations in this video, including by Archbishop Ian Ernest, representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Holy See and director of the Anglican Center in Rome; Sister Albertine Ilunga Nkulu, FMA, member of the International Council for Catechesis of the Dicastery for Evangelization; Methodist missionary couple Rev. Dr. Daniel and Grace Pratt Morris Chapman; and five Lay Centre scholars approaching catechesis from the perspectives of synodality, the domestic church and personal experience.

All were among the presenters at the five-day conference in Rome, “Grace and Action: The ministry of catechists in the footsteps of St. Paul.” The July 17-21, 2023 experience was part of the joint leadership development initiatives of The Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas and Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology (ICSST), Seton Hall University.

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH ALL VIDEOS FROM THE CONFERENCE](#)



FULL VIDEO: Watch the lectures by Cardinal Marengo and Archbishop O'Toole on catechesis in today's world

By The Lay Centre

Two full presentations are included in this video.

In the first, Cardinal Giorgio Marengo, IMC, bishop of the Apostolic Prefecture of Ulaanbataar, Mongolia, speaks about the challenges and opportunities for evangelization and catechesis in Mongolia in his 22 years of ministry in the country, first as a missionary and then as a bishop.

In the second, Archbishop Mark O'Toole of Cardiff, United Kingdom, unpacks and reflects on the Apostolic Letter issued *motu proprio* by Pope Francis in 2021, with which the pope instituted the ministry of catechists: "Antiquum Ministerium."

Cardinal Marengo and Archbishop O'Toole were among the presenters at the five-day conference in Rome, "Grace and Action: The ministry of catechists in the footsteps of St. Paul." The July 17-21, 2023 experience was part of the joint leadership development initiatives of The Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas and Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology (ICSST), Seton Hall University.

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH ALL VIDEOS FROM THE CONFERENCE](#)



FULL VIDEO: Bishop Paul Tighe and Dr. Aline Amaro da Silva speak about catechesis in the digital world

By The Lay Centre

Listen to Bishop Paul Tighe, secretary of the Vatican Dicastery for Culture and Education, and Aline Amaro da Silva, a journalist and theologian from Porto Alegre, Brazil, speak about catechesis in a digital world, especially among the youth.

Bishop Tighe and Dr. Amaro da Silva were among the presenters at the five-day conference in Rome, "Grace and Action: The ministry of catechists in the footsteps of St. Paul." The July 17-21, 2023 experience was part of the joint leadership development initiatives of The Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas and Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology (ICSST), Seton Hall University.

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH ALL VIDEOS FROM THE CONFERENCE](#)



Sr. Albertine Ilunga Nkulu, FMA speaks about the institution of lay catechists - Video in Italian

By The Lay Centre

Sister Albertine Ilunga Nkulu, FMA, is a professor of catechetics in Congo and a member of the International Council for Catechesis of the Dicastery for Evangelization. In this video (in Italian), Sister Albertine shares how her research on the ministry of lay catechists led her to discover the high regard of the Church in Europe for the formation of lay catechists already underway in many dioceses in Africa. The process of selection and formation of lay catechists in Africa may inspire local churches in other parts of the world, keeping in mind their distinct cultural and societal realities, she says. However, Pope Francis' institution of the ministry of catechist is also an occasion for the Church in Africa to review its current programs in light of the pope's motu proprio and in view of synodality.

Sister Albertine was among the presenters at the five-day conference in Rome, "Grace and Action: The ministry of catechists in the footsteps of St. Paul." The July 17-21, 2023 experience was part of the joint leadership development initiatives of The Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas and Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology (ICSST), Seton Hall University.

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Archbishop Ian Ernest speaks about catechesis and ecumenism

By The Lay Centre

Archbishop Ian Ernest is the Archbishop of Canterbury's personal representative to the Holy See and director of the Anglican Centre in Rome. In this video, the archbishop speaks of prayer as “essential” and “foundational” if one is to live as a disciple of Jesus and witness to him. In particular, he speaks of the importance of engaging in prayer with Christians of other traditions, fostering greater communion, enriching relationships, and offering new perspectives. The primary component of entering into dialogue with the other is listening, which has emerged very strongly in the Synod on Synodality, initiated by Pope Francis, he says.

Archbishop Ernest was among the presenters at the five-day conference in Rome, “Grace and Action: The ministry of catechists in the footsteps of St. Paul.” The July 17-21, 2023 experience was part of the joint leadership development initiatives of The Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas and Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology (ICSST), Seton Hall University.

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH ALL VIDEOS FROM THE CONFERENCE](#)



Catechesis, family and ecumenism - Daniel and Grace Pratt Morris-Chapman share their testimony

By The Lay Centre

Rev. Dr. Daniel and Grace Pratt Morris Chapman are a missionary couple, ministering to migrants and others in need in Rome through the Methodist Church. In this video, the couple speaks about how the overflowing love of God in their lives impels them to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. They reflect on the multicultural dimension of their ministry in Rome and on the importance of being attentive in ministry to the different cultures and cultural norms of the people they seek to serve. As they prepare to leave Rome for their new assignment in Uganda, the couple witnesses to God's faithfulness to his promise in Scripture, providing them with a sense of family, wherever they have gone in the world for the sake of the Gospel.

The couple was among the presenters at the five-day conference in Rome, "Grace and Action: The ministry of catechists in the footsteps of St. Paul." The July 17-21, 2023 experience was part of the joint leadership development initiatives of The Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas and Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology (ICSST), Seton Hall University.

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Archbishop Mark O'Toole speaks about catechesis as a vocation

By The Lay Centre

In this video, Archbishop Mark O'Toole of Cardiff, an archdiocese that straddles England and Wales, reflects on the decision of Pope Francis to reestablish and formalize the ancient ministry of the catechist, citing the First Letter to the Corinthians (12:28), in which St. Paul speaks about the people whom God has designated in the Church.

To be catechist is a vocation that extends outward in service to the Church and to the world and that calls the person to “enter more deeply” into a “personal relationship with Jesus Christ,” he says. He also points out how the role of the catechist may differ from one diocese to the next, depending on the need and the history of each local Church.

Archbishop O'Toole was among the presenters at the five-day conference in Rome, “Grace and Action: The ministry of catechists in the footsteps of St. Paul.” The July 17-21, 2023 experience was part of the joint leadership development initiatives of The Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas and Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology (ICSST), Seton Hall University.

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH ALL VIDEOS FROM THE CONFERENCE](#)



Grace and Action: Participants comment on catechesis program organized by Lay Centre and ICSST in Rome

By The Lay Centre

The five-day conference and pilgrimage, “Grace and Action: The ministry of catechists in the footsteps of St. Paul,” unlocked numerous insights for participants, mostly lay catechists and church workers in parishes in the United States and Mexico. In this video, meet participants who share how this program in Rome has invited them to greater prayer and trust in the Holy Spirit, deeper and more meaningful relationships, more authentic witness to the Gospel, and greater freedom to share their faith with others.

“Catechizing and evangelizing are more than teaching,” said one participant. “It’s being a witness.”

The July 17-21, 2023 experience was part of the joint leadership development initiatives of The Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas and Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology (ICSST), Seton Hall University.

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Cardinal Giorgio Marengo speaks about the Church in Mongolia, catechesis and the role of the laity

By The Lay Centre

Cardinal Giorgio Marengo, IMC, the youngest cardinal of the Catholic Church, leads the Apostolic Prefecture of Ulaanbataar, Mongolia, a missionary jurisdiction that comprises all of Mongolia. In this video, he speaks about the Church as a minority in many societies around the world today and the “tremendous role” of lay people “in being ambassadors” of Christ in such a context. Most people involved in direct evangelization in Mongolia, where the church began its pastoral mission officially only 31 years ago, are lay people, he says. In areas of the world where the Catholic community is tiny, the Church relies on the witness of lay people, who are closer than the clergy or consecrated men and women to the everyday experience of people.

Cardinal Marengo was among the presenters at the five-day conference in Rome, “Grace and Action: The ministry of catechists in the footsteps of St. Paul.” The July 17-21, 2023 experience was part of the joint leadership development initiatives of The Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas and Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology (ICSST), Seton Hall University.

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VIDEO: Highlights of our Rome conference on the ministry of catechesis in the footsteps of St. Paul

By The Lay Centre

Five days of prayer, learning, encounter, pilgrimage — and more

This video captures the stunning beauty and spirit of a catechetical conference and pilgrimage in Rome on the theme, “Grace and Action: The ministry of catechists in the footsteps of St. Paul.”

The July 17-21, 2023 experience was part of the joint leadership development initiatives of The Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas and Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology (ICSST), Seton Hall University.

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH ALL VIDEOS FROM THE CONFERENCE](#)



SAVE THE DATE: On July 17, a Summer Conference organized by The Lay Centre and ICSST

By The Lay Centre

You are invited to the opening event of this seminar.

Click below to register.



Young professionals share experience working at the Vatican

By The Lay Centre

At a weekly community evening April 26, three Lay Centre residents spoke about their experience this past year working for the Holy See. Through the generosity of benefactors, the young professionals were supported as Vatican Fellows by The Lay Centre, which provided a welcoming community setting and professional development while they served in different dicasteries of the Roman Curia.

Alex Campbell, one of the Vatican Fellows, is currently working at the Vatican Secretariat of State in the multilateral section. He said he was surprised with how much effort goes into reaching a consensus on the international political floor, on micro and macro levels. He also noticed the need to give voice to the Church on the international stage, highlighting the special role that the Holy See has as an international mediator.

Joseph Tulloch works in the English section of Vatican News, part of the Dicastery for Communication. He spoke about the differences between Vatican News and other media outlets. Vatican News is translated into 40 languages, including languages spoken by smaller populations, and reaches a large audience worldwide, he said. He commented on Pope Francis' particular communications style, which privileges informal interviews to external media outlets.

Pedro Weizenmann, who works at the General Secretariat of the Synod, spoke about learning more regarding the meaning of synodal conversion. He referred to a homily of Cardinal Mario Grech, who leads the General Secretariat of the Synod. He spoke about the need for Christians to be learning and listening constantly in order to improve. These attitudes should be cultivated as a Church in its ongoing search for God, he said.

Campbell and Tulloch are from the United Kingdom and Weizenmann is from Brazil.

The community Mass earlier that evening was presided by Father Alexis Ossola, a canon lawyer from the Archdiocese of Paris. He reminded the faithful in his homily that the Easter season means living with the Risen Christ and listening to



God's Word, staying united to Christ. The Risen Christ bestows the real food of life and guides us to knowing the will of the Father, he said.



Befriending others is key to peace, says cardinal

By The Lay Centre

On May 10, The Lay Centre hosted Cardinal Michael Luis Fitzgerald, president emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, for the celebration of the Eucharist and dinner. The cardinal in his homily reflected on the journey of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, recounted in the Acts of the Apostles. The two apostles travel through many cities on their way to Jerusalem and proclaim what God has accomplished through them. They speak about the conversion of the Gentiles and “lobby” for the position they will uphold in Jerusalem, said Cardinal Fitzgerald. While lobbying is a very human behaviour, the Spirit sometimes can be present in it. In this instance, the apostles prepared the way for the Spirit to work.

Cardinal Fitzgerald then reflected on the Gospel of the day, in which Jesus invites his apostles to remain in Him, using the word “remain” no less than 11 times. Many times, people do not experience the blessing of seeing the fruits of their labour. However, they need not be in a hurry and they must allow time for the fruits to grow.

In conversation later that evening, Cardinal Fitzgerald spoke about the Abrahamic Family House, which opened in Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates, Feb. 16. The site, which consists of a mosque, a Catholic church, a synagogue and an educational centre, was inspired by the Document on Human Fraternity that Pope Francis and Ahmed El-Tayeb signed in 2019. The synagogue is dedicated to Maimonides, a Jewish thinker, the church to St. Francis of Assisi, and the mosque to Imam Al-Tayeb.

In a lively Q&A that followed, the cardinal responded to a question about how to be a missionary today, underlining the importance of a person’s character and how they live their faith. A missionary-minded person will not convince others so much by their words, but by how they live their faith, he said. Before taking on doctrinal discussions, people should befriend others, which is key in order to even talk together in peace, he continued. In response to another question, the cardinal said he perseveres in hope because people are good-hearted in their core. Bad people exist, he said, but the Spirit of God is at work in the world and this is the source of our hope.



He spoke about his background in Christian-Muslim dialogue, prior to joining the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. He recalled a talk he gave in a Muslim institution about spirituality, in which he quoted the Quran, and was asked why he was not Muslim if he spoke so highly about Islamic spirituality. It was only then that he started speaking about Jesus, the Incarnation and the Resurrection. The cardinal said he would not have started on this topic, had he not been asked this question. However, he could not avoid responding with what is at the core of Christianity, after he was asked what he believed.

Contributed: Filip Veber



Join us: A Reflection on The Lay Centre's Journey and Future Steps

By The Lay Centre

Recognizing The Lay Centre's many accomplishments since 1986, the time has come to map out next steps and to reflect once again on our vision and mission in view of the challenges facing the world and the Church. Before deciding what comes next, we would like to invite you to participate in a short brainstorming session. This meeting will be held via Zoom and will allow all participants to share their ideas in small working groups.

Click on the image below to register:



Religion is an important factor in foreign policy, says ambassador

By The Lay Centre

Can ambassadors make a difference in the world around them? That was the theme of The Lay Centre's community evening April 19. In a conversation after dinner, Chiara Porro, Australian Ambassador to the Holy See, and her husband, Rien Schuurhuis, spoke about her work and the need for building bridges between Church and society.

Being part of a broader network of countries that have diplomatic relations with the Holy See is what makes this post unique, the ambassador noted. Currently, 85 countries maintain embassies to the Holy See. Besides the direct dialogue between two parties, the Vatican is a privileged place to obtain information about other parts of the world where Australia does not have a strong diplomatic presence, such as parts of Africa and the Middle East.

Ambassador Porro, who has been in Rome for three years, recalled the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Australia and the Holy See. The milestones include three papal visits to Australia, among them a visit for World Youth Day in 2008. That same year, Australia officially opened an embassy in Rome to the Holy See.

As the only ambassador to the Holy See from the Pacific region, she said she feels responsible for being, as much as possible, a representative voice for all the region. She said religion is still of great importance to society and that other countries in the Pacific are not as secularized as Australia.

She highlighted the importance of taking religion seriously in foreign policy – something she has learned more about over the years working in Rome – and has been sharing that view with other Australian diplomats.

Earlier in the evening, The Lay Centre community gathered to celebrate Mass, presided over by Father Joseph L. Farrell, OSA, vicar general of the Order of St. Augustine.

Contributed: Filip Veber



Vatican journalists weigh in on Pope Francis and the Holy See at The Lay Centre

By Joseph Tulloch

It was an unusual community night at The Lay Centre March 29. Rather than having one speaker, as usual, we had three – all journalists. They had come to participate in a discussion on the pontificate of Pope Francis, from the perspective of their respective media outlets.

First up was Christopher White, Vatican correspondent for the National Catholic Reporter, a lay-led U.S. newspaper. He stressed Pope Francis' efforts to weave processes outlined in the Second Vatican Council into official Church structures, offering the Synod on Synodality as one example.

Next to speak was Lay Centre resident Mirticeli Medeiros, who, in addition to her PhD studies in church history at the Pontifical Gregorian University, reports on the Vatican for the Brazilian television channel Globo News and other media outlets. She described Pope Francis as “a reformer,” pointing to his recent reform of the Roman Curia – only the fifth, she pointed out, in the Catholic Church's 2,000-year history.

Finally, Lay Centre residents heard from Sister Bernadette Reis, an editor at Vatican News, the Holy See's official media network. She emphasized Pope Francis' ability to speak to people's everyday experience, referring to his “theology of the ordinary person.” While Pope John Paul II was a philosopher, she said, and Pope Benedict XVI a theologian, Pope Francis is above all a pastor.

These three interventions were followed by a lively Q&A session.

One questioner raised the topic of Pope Francis' catechesis on old age, saying she had found it very moving and was saddened it had not received more attention.

In response, White suggested that the elderly have been a key priority of Pope Francis from the outset of his pontificate, noting that he has regularly spoken of the importance of intergenerational ties.

Sister Bernadette added that the pope was extremely affected by the many grandparents who died alone during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Recently, she said, he told an interviewer that he feels most at home when spending time with fellow elderly people.

The evening drew to a close with a question concerning the resistance to Pope Francis found in some sectors of the Church today. Here, Medeiros stressed that Pope Francis' reforms ought not to be interpreted as a radical break with the past, but rather as an effort to make the Church more faithful to its ancient tradition.



Mission and service: Pope Francis' vision for lay ministry in the Church

By Filipe Domingues

Two words sum up the essence of the presence of the lay faithful in the life of the Church: mission and service. This is Pope Francis' vision for the full and active participation of the lay faithful in Church life, which he presented in a speech on “Lay people and the ministeriality of the synodal Church” during the plenary meeting of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life on April 22. [Full speech here](#)

This vision is not just about enabling lay people to do more – which would be merely a functional approach to their ministry – but about preparing them to participate intensely in ecclesial life and to bear witness to Christian values in the world, the pontiff said.

“All ministries, indeed, are an expression of the sole mission of the Church, and they are all forms of service to others,” Francis said.

All forms of ecclesial tasks have in common “the willingness to serve the brethren, and in them, to serve Christ.”

Referring to the apostolic exhortation “*Evangelii gaudium*” he added: “Only in this way may all the baptized be able to discover the meaning of their own life, joyfully experiencing being a mission on this earth, that is, being called, in different ways and forms, to bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing, and letting themselves be accompanied.”

The origin of ministries

In his speech, Pope Francis sought to differentiate “instituted” ministries from the ministries carried out in activities of an ordinary, everyday nature, in the life of the Church and in the world. To live and carry out a ministry, he said, is to participate in the “prophetic and regal function of Christ, not only within the Church, but also in the environments where they are engaged.”

Among the instituted ministries, the laity can be lectors, acolytes and catechists. “These ministries are characterized by a public intervention of the Church – a specific act of institution – and a certain visibility [of the laity]. They are connected with ordained ministry [bishops, priests and deacons], because they involve



various forms of participation in the task that is proper to them, even if it does not demand the sacrament of ordination,” he said.

However, instituted ministries and those that require ordination, “do not represent the full extent of the ministeriality of the Church, which is broader and, ever since the first Christian communities, regards all the faithful,” he said.

The origin of the full ministeriality of the Church, Francis said, lies in two pillars: baptism and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism makes all the faithful fully the disciples of Jesus, called to “take part in the mission He entrusted to the Church,” and opens each person to the gifts of the Spirit, he explained.

“The ministeriality of the faithful, and of lay people in particular, stems from the charism that the Holy Spirit distributes within the people of God for its edification: first a charism appears, inspired by the Spirit; then, the Church acknowledges this charism as a useful service to the community; finally, in a third moment, it is introduced and a specific ministry spreads,” said the pope.

Areas to privilege

He encouraged the laity to meet the demands of today's world, attending to those who need “welcome and solidarity,” such as migrants and the poor, in addition to those who experience “new forms” of suffering and isolation.

“The ministry thus becomes not only a simple social commitment, but also something beautiful and personal, a true Christian witness,” he said.

The pope asked that special attention be given to families, mainly to “situations of matrimonial crisis, problems of separated and divorced people and of those who live in a new union or have remarried.” He recalled the “educational mission of the family” as a “ministry of evangelization” and initiation into the Christian faith. There are ministries, Francis said, that depend on the sacrament of matrimony and family life as a foundational basis.

Pope Francis said ministries must never become “self-referential,” that is, they should not be seen as titles or positions to be occupied, nor should they lead to “social, political and economic” benefits. It is necessary to avoid [the clericalization of the laity, he often says](#). Instead of a mere “intra-ecclesial” role, lay ministries



must be of service to the community, that is, an “application of the Gospel in the transformation of society.”



Community retreat reflects on how to avoid apathy, distractions with dedication and hope

By The Lay Centre

“Living Faithfully in Liminal Times” was the theme of The Lay Centre’s second semester community retreat. Led by Father Daniel Huang, S.J., a professor of missiology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, the retreat was a time of reflection in preparation for Easter.

Father Huang invited Lay Centre residents to shift from a “hyperactive to a receptive mode of hospitality” and to make space for God in silence and prayer. The retreat took place at the Ad Gentes Centre, near Lake Nemi in the outskirts of Rome.

Father Huang recalled the words of Pope Francis – “We are not in an era of changes, but in a change of era” – made manifest in wars, the social divisions and polarization in the public sphere, as well as in the crises in democracy, ecology and health. These are times of “great insecurity,” he said, and the concept of “liminality” creates a sense of transition between the past and the present.

Father Huang reminded participants that prayer requires attention. Entering a prayerful mode means turning one’s attention toward God in active pursuit of God. He invited community members to start the journey of becoming a “non-anxious presence,” despite the challenges and instabilities of today’s world. It is necessary to move “from fear to trust,” he said.

All are invited to bring peace into the reality around them, he said, for only a non-anxious presence can “reset the system” and help others to move from fear to trust. In this spirit, he invited participants to move from apathy and distractions toward dedication, from acedia, spiritual indifference and boredom to a joy and happiness that only God can provide.

The retreat was an invitation to move “from desolation to consolation,” expressed in hope and charity. Participants were encouraged to think about where they were in life and the transition they were living at that moment, and then to allow themselves to be illuminated by God on the way.



Father Huang said the risen Christ is the one who brings the fullness of consolation, for when he appears to different people in Scripture – as described in John 21 – he exercises his role of great consoler and offers forgiveness and redemption.

Contributed: Filip Veber



Cardinal Arthur Roche invites Lay Centre residents to contemplation and self-reflection

Contributed: Alex Campbell

Cardinal Arthur Roche, prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship, was hosted at The Lay Centre for a community evening March 22.

In an informal conversation after Mass and dinner, Cardinal Roche shared his perspective on a range of topics with Lay Centre residents. He also invited community members to contemplation and self-reflection, urging them to boldly face the questions that arise within them.

The cardinal challenged the community to consider what deeper subliminal influences shape and form their beliefs, personality and actions. He shared his experience during Lent of giving up television and limiting his internet use. This, he said, had cleared his mind and given him the space and time to examine the influence of this technology on his life.

Linking this to synodality, Cardinal Roche suggested that responses to the current Synod on Synodality were uneven around the world partly due to these different influences. As well, some people think the Synod is a democratic process and others consider it to be a consultative exercise with no practical outcomes.

Instead, the Synod is a journey that fosters fraternity and makes it possible for people who travel along it to make their voice heard, he said.

In his homily on John 5:17-30, the cardinal reflected on his experience as a hospital chaplain, a role he held for seven years. He described how dying patients would reach out to loved ones, seeking reconciliation and healing if divisions had existed between them. The cardinal pointed out that this is also true of Jesus in Scripture, as he approached his crucifixion.

We, too, must reconcile, he said, by embracing faith. A path to reconciliation is found by committing to an active relationship with God, he said. He also assured his listeners that God will never abandon them.

Contributed: Alex Campbell



Sister Patricia Murray encourages community members to see themselves as leaders

By The Lay Centre

One way or another, everyone is a leader, said Sister Patricia Murray, I.B.V.M., during The Lay Centre's community evening March 1.

Sister Murray is the executive secretary of the [International Union of Superiors General](#). After Mass and dinner with the community, she encouraged Lay Centre residents to see themselves as leaders, as they all will make a difference in their respective communities in one way or another.

Aside from those people identified as leaders due to the rank they hold in an organization or hierarchy, she distinguished between two other kinds of leaders: servant leaders and transformational leaders.

"When a leader speaks from the place of authenticity and honesty, people hear what God wants to tell them," she said.

This means that, through a true spirit of leadership, it is possible to be creative and work together with others, who have different expertise and skills.

She shared her different experiences over the years as a leader and as a communicator, including in places like South Sudan where the collaboration among leaders resulted in an improvement of people's lives.

That evening, Mass was celebrated by Father Douglas W. Marcouiller, S.J., general counselor of the Society of Jesus.

Contributed: Filip Veber



Abbot Primate Gregory Polan speaks about 'listening' in Benedictine spirituality

By The Lay Centre

Listening with the ear of the heart allows for the possibility of being drawn by the Holy Spirit into something new and unexpected, said the abbot primate of the Benedictine Order during a community evening at The Lay Centre March 15.

Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, O.S.B., spoke that evening about the spirituality of the Order of St. Benedict and the importance of listening. The abbot primate serves as the elected representative of the Benedictine Confederation of monasteries in the Catholic Church.

He highlighted that the Rule of St. Benedict begins with the exhortation to “Listen carefully ... and incline the ear of your heart.” When the saint writes about listening with “the ear of the heart,” he makes a distinction between “listening” and “hearing.” By listening to the Spirit in prayer, one may be pushed toward something new and unexpected, which may have never even come to mind before, said Abbot Polan.

To listen with the ear of the heart means to “play” with the Holy Spirit, presenting all challenges during this honest and attentive “conversation” with God, he continued. If a person pays attention to whom and to what they listen, they can realize that which they do not listen to and understand where the voice of God is in their lives. Abbot Polan invited community members to develop this ability to listen, for it has an impact on how one communicates with the people around them.

The Rule of St. Benedict, written about 1,500 years ago and adapted by hundreds of other religious orders throughout history, is still relevant today, he added.

During the Mass, Abbot Polan reflected on the exchanges between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus was always concerned about people’s actions. However, unlike the Pharisees, he looked at people’s hearts, that is, to what gave meaning and direction to their actions, he said. To listen with the ear of the heart and to be responsive to the Word of God with faith leads to life and blessing, for Jesus wants not just a person’s actions but also their heart, he said. By opening up to Jesus and his grace, one chooses life in abundance.



Contributed: Filip Veber



Leaders take the focus off 'I' and put it on God, says religious sister

By The Lay Centre

When you speak about yourself, avoid using “I,” said Sister Marie Kolbe Zamora, OSF, at The Lay Centre’s residential community gathering Feb. 15. Sister Kolbe is a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity and holds a doctorate in theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University. Currently, she serves as an official for the General Secretariat of the Synod.

In speaking about leadership in Church organizations, she recalled a quote attributed to Cardinal Leo Jozef Suenens: “Non dico io, io, io, ma Dio, Dio, Dio” (“I do not say I, I, I, but God, God, God”). Although people may not always seek leadership, circumstances often force them to step up and take responsibility, she said. Sister Kolbe also mentioned the importance of a Catholic approach to leadership, which is servant leadership. Servant leaders do not submit to the needs and abilities of others for their own desires, but take stock of their gifts to contribute to the greater good.

Leadership is a gift from God to be used for the benefit of others, she said. In her own case, she never received any formal leadership training but learned from her life experiences and from her family in the United States. Today, one of her many capacities is to help others to develop their leadership skills.

She also distinguished between leaders and administrators. While different, they are equally important. The former may focus on the vision or mission of an organization, whereas the latter may concentrate on pursuing expected outcomes. Mixing up these roles often leads to confusion in Church organizations, she added.

She also used examples from the lives of St. Maximilian Kolbe and St. Francis of Assisi to illustrate great Catholic leadership. Over dinner, Sister Kolbe spoke about her work and current experience at the Synod’s office.

Overcoming spiritual blindness

On the same evening, Father Showraiah Guvvala, OSB, from India, presided over Mass. He is a professor in the faculty of theology of the Pontifical University of St.



Anselm. Father Guvvula preached on the passage in the Gospel of Mark (8:22-26) where Jesus heals a blind man. Father Guvvula explained how this miracle can represent the healing of our own spiritual blindness.

One experiences blindness when one cannot make sense of life. It is in these moments, he added, that one should turn to God for understanding and clarity. One must recognize that discernment cannot be done alone. We need the “healing touch of Jesus,” who will provide the opportunity for us to grow spiritually, he said.

Contributed: Filip Veber



Enrolment at Rome's pontifical universities at 16,000 in 2022

By The Lay Centre

Almost 16,000 students from 125 countries are enrolled in Rome's 22 pontifical universities and institutes. A [report released Feb. 23](#) with statistics on the 2021-2022 academic year indicates that Rome's pontifical system of higher education is a sample of global catholicity.

The students, among them lay, clergy, and religious, come to Rome mostly to study theology, philosophy, and canon law, but other disciplines are also common, such as education, social sciences, and psychology.

During the press conference on the 2022 Report of the Pontifical Universities and Institutions of Rome, Father Luis Navarro, president of the association of pontifical universities and institutes, CRUIPRO, and rector of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, spoke of the importance of a stronger collaboration among the universities to promote unity and collaboration. Despite the different charisms and approaches of these universities, ultimately the knowledge acquired there addresses human needs in the world and must be rooted in reality, he said.

Challenges and opportunities

Among the challenges mentioned in the presentation of the report are the need to collaborate with secular and international academic institutions and to maintain a high quality of education, often challenged by the uneven quality of the students' academic backgrounds.

Sister Piera Silvia Ruffinatto, fma, vice president of CRUIPRO and rector of the Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences Auxilium, said the future of pontifical universities lies in valuing and promoting research, integrating libraries and resources, facilitating the access of external researchers, and promoting graduate degrees (licentiates and doctorates).

Rome's pontifical universities are connected to 221 research centers and universities around the world.

Recognized and canonically instituted by the Holy See, Roman pontifical universities follow the constitution "Veritatis gaudium," which says the defining



characteristics of these institutions is that they “foster and teach sacred doctrine and the sciences connected therewith, and ... have the right to confer academic degrees by the authority of the Holy See.” The oldest is the Pontifical Gregorian University, founded in 1551; the youngest is Holy Cross, founded in 1984.

Of the 22 pontifical institutes and universities overseen and regulated by the Dicastery for Culture and Education, 15 began as an initiative of religious men and women, underlining their longtime commitment to education in Rome.



Community evening focuses on building strong foundation, finding purpose

By The Lay Centre

People of our time struggle to find balance in life. Young people, but not only, are constantly searching for projects that will inspire them and give them purpose. On Feb. 28, Jesuit Father Michael Rossmann, well-known for his one-minute social media homilies, visited The Lay Centre and spoke about how the inspirations of the Holy Spirit are the structure and foundation for those who believe in Christ.

Father Rossmann, who presided over the Eucharistic celebration, reminded community members that all of us need a framework in life in order to flourish. However, in a world overflowing with information and instability, it is often difficult to have a sound and healthy foundation. We are all searching for love and freedom, but the world around us does not always provide these things, he said.

Taking inspiration from the readings of the day, Father Rossmann mentioned the apparent contradiction between the book of Genesis, in which Adam and Eve were told not to eat the forbidden fruit, and the passage of the Gospel of Mark (7:14-23), in which Jesus says that all food is clean – it is from within the human person that comes all evil. Jesus also says that blindly following the letter of the Law does not lead us to God. Even if order and structure help one to search for meaning in life, a sense of who one is, it is only a change of the heart in Christ that will guide his followers to meaningful and peaceful freedom.

Over dinner, Father Rossmann spoke about his one-minute homily project, which he began to post on his social media in 2017. It is hard to share a thoughtful message online while being informal and approachable, he said, even more so as social media conventions tend to promote the production and dissemination of superficial and “viral” content.

Nevertheless, he prepares his reflections on the Gospel with care and makes it as personable as possible, he said.

During the pandemic, he took the time to synthesize the ideas from his videos and publish them in a book: “The Freedom of Missing Out.” The book departs from the premise that the anxiety of choosing a course of action will limit other options. He focuses on “the fear of missing out,” which is prevalent in the minds of



young people today, and suggests that one should feel free to leave behind some apparently “good” choices in order to make other “great” ones. One of them is to pursue a truthful life in Christ.

Contributed: Filip Veber



Lay Centre alum completes doctorate in biblical theology

By Filipe Domingues

On March 3, Lay Centre alumnus Massimiliano Lolli from Bologna successfully defended his doctorate in theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University. The theme of his dissertation was "The Samaritan question in the Gospel of Luke. Soteriological, Christological and ecclesiological implications." Parallel to his pastoral ministry in his local church, particularly with young people, he now intends to become a biblical theology professor in Bologna.

While working a full-time IT job at the UniCredit bank and on his doctorate, Lolli has dedicated a lot of time to accompanying a group of 50 young people in his diocese. His journey witnesses to the commitment of lay people who embrace their mission to work for the Church, support young generations and never cease to put themselves at the service of others.

During a community evening at The Lay Centre on March 8, he reminded current community members how important it is to have "travel companions" who become points of reference on the journey of studying in Rome. He also encouraged everyone to follow their dreams and aspirations with strength and tenacity.

By Filipe Domingues

Filipe Domingues: Pope Francis marks 10 years of pontificate, but what is still to come?

By Filipe Domingues

Pope of the poor, of migrants, of the imprisoned, the excluded, pope of mercy, of the environment, of the Amazon, of the people, of simplicity, of peace. Pope of the reforms, the “change of era”, the “polyhedral” vision, of the “economy of Francis,” the “tenderness of God” and the “joy of the Gospel.” Pope of discernment, evangelization, synodality.

Pope Francis celebrates the 10th anniversary of his pontificate this March 13. During this time, he managed to accumulate these and many other titles – it is even difficult to talk about everything he has done so far. Many have treated this milestone as the final phase of his pontificate. It's hard to know. At 86 years old, in good health and unwilling to resign, as he has said several times, Argentine Jesuit Jorge Mario Bergoglio may still be pope for a long time.

But what does he still want to do? Francis answered this question in an interview with the Argentine newspaper La Nacion, published on March 10: “I'm very realistic, I like to feel the touch of things. [I have] the desire to swim forward, to open doors. Opening doors, that pleases me a lot. Opening doors and walking the paths.” With that in mind, what path will his pontificate take from here?

‘The Church is not a business’

First, a note for context: As a man of governance, Francis is, above all, someone who initiated a series of processes in the Church. In his apostolic exhortation “Evangelii gaudium,” in 2013, he wrote that “time is superior to space” and, therefore, it is necessary to work always looking at the long term, “without the obsession of immediate results.”

The “dynamism of reality” must be faced with patience, giving time to processes. Pope Francis works a lot, maybe too much. He hardly takes days off; he knows the time he has at his disposal is not long. He also knows seeds planted today take time to grow. Most of the processes he started have yet to mature calmly.



The tendency, at this 10-year mark – which Pope Francis did not want to celebrate, as he prefers to avoid self-referential situations – would be to look back and take stock of what he has accomplished. However, he himself said in an interview with the Italian newspaper *Il fatto quotidiano*, published on March 12, that the one who will make this sort of assessment “is the Lord, whenever he wants.”

“The Church is not a business, nor is it an NGO, and the pope is not a delegated administrator, who at the end of the year must make ends meet. The Church belongs to the Lord. We are simply asked to humbly listen to his will and put it into practice,” he said. “You have to tune in with the Lord, not with the world.”

Pope Francis has given several interviews in recent weeks and celebrated a discrete and private Mass with cardinals on the morning of March 13.

More participation

Pope Francis believes the Church is always “on the way” and is therefore synodal. It is a path to be walked together, to be traveled between siblings in Christ, with mutual trust in unity, respecting differences. It is listening to one another. More than that, it is a spiritual process, listening to God's will. “The synodal path is the path that God expects from the Church of the third millennium,” he said.

A Church that is more participatory, more open and in tune with the signs of the times – as requested by the Second Vatican Council – lives communion and mission better. The principle of synodality, according to the theological commission of the current Synod (2021-2024), is “the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God.” In other words, the gifts of the Spirit come to all baptized believers “and are manifested in many ways, with equal dignity.”

In practice, this means promoting the so-called “culture of encounter” within the Church – something that needs to extend beyond this pontificate. Pope Francis, who believes in and promotes this vision, is not always benevolently understood, and this was recognized by the Synod itself as a natural part of the synodal process.

In his message for the 56th World Communications Day, the pope wrote: “In the Church too there is a great need to listen and to listen to one another. It is the most precious and fruitful gift we can offer each other. We Christians forget that the service of listening has been entrusted to us by the one who is the listener par excellence and in whose work we are called to participate.”



The reforms continue

Ten years ago, in March 2013, Francis was elected to reform the Church – even in this he alludes to the saint of Assisi, St. Francis. The speech that convinced many cardinal electors that he would be the right man at the right time was delivered after Benedict XVI's resignation and before the conclave at the meetings, or general congregations, held among the cardinals in Rome as they prepared for the election of the new pope.

At that moment, the archbishop of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Bergoglio, who had traveled with a suitcase for a few days in Rome, said the Church, in order to evangelize, needed to renew its “apostolic zeal” and be an “outgoing Church.” The church needed to go out of its way and move toward the peripheries, “and not only the geographic peripheries, but also the existential ones.” The Church needed to be close to those who live “in sin, pain, injustice, ignorance and lack of faith” or any other form of misery, he said.

While some people knock on the door of the Church to enter and do not always find it open, “the self-referential Church has the pretense that Jesus Christ is inside, and does not let him out.” The “self-referential Church” believes it has its own light, instead of reflecting the light of Christ in the world, he said.

Since being elected, therefore, he has sought to put this vision into practice, starting with the reform of the Roman Curia, which he officially instituted a year ago with the apostolic constitution “*Praedicate evangelium*.” To reach this point, he created the Council of Cardinals (C9), fulfilling a demand that had been voiced prior to his election. The nine cardinals on the council assist the pope in governing the Church and, especially, in the reform of Vatican structures.

The reform continues. Francis says more needs to be done. He says the Roman Curia still works like a monarchical court – as if he were a king with absolute powers, who needs to be cajoled and sated – and that, in his words, “is a leprosy,” a disease in the heart of the Church. The reform of apostolic zeal must therefore place the Gospel at the centre of everything, and recognize the pope as bishop of Rome, successor of the Apostle Peter, a fisherman called by Christ to lead his own people.

Travel, documents, catecheses

So far, Pope Francis has made 40 apostolic trips, visiting 58 countries, in addition to 36 trips within Italy. He published three encyclicals, the first, “*Lumen fidei*,”



written together with Benedict XVI, in 2013, and two others on his own: “Laudato si” (2015) and “Fratelli tutti” (2020). His apostolic exhortations are also very important in punctuating his 10 years as pontiff: “Evangelii gaudium” (2013), “Amoris laetitia” (2016), “Gaudete et exsultate” (2018), “Christus vivit” (2019) and “Querida Amazonia” (2020).

At his Wednesday general audiences, he has carried out 13 cycles of catechesis on spiritual topics, on the Resurrection, the sacraments, on St. Joseph, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Church as the people of God, the family, mercy, hope, the “Our Father” and spiritual discernment, among other themes.

It is in these documents that he consolidates his thought and his teaching in history. It is in the catecheses that, as a pastor, he speaks directly to the faithful on the spiritual themes he believes are most relevant for them. He guides them in faith, and he plans to continue. On his 86th birthday in December, Pope Francis was asked about knee pain and his trouble walking. He good-naturedly replied: “One governs with their head, not with the knee.”

Going back in time, 10 years ago, in that speech to the general congregations before the conclave, he described who the new pope should be – without knowing that it would be him: “A man who, since the contemplation of Jesus Christ and from the adoration of Jesus Christ, may help the Church to go out of her way towards the existential peripheries, may help her to be a fruitful mother who lives the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing.”



'Grassroots Ecumenism' equips lay people for meaningful dialogue

By Laura Ieraci

CHICAGO — A joint Lenten series offered by a Presbyterian church and a Catholic church in small-town Clarkston, Washington, during the COVID-19 pandemic is the inspiration and model behind a new book that seeks to equip and engage lay people in ecumenical dialogue at the grassroots level.

Karen Petersen Finch, author and professor of pastoral leadership, is working to promote ecumenical dialogue among the laity in her new book, *Grassroots Ecumenism: The Path Towards Local Christian Kinship* (2022). Petersen Finch, an ecumenist and ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church, teaches at the Presbyterian College and at McGill University in Montreal, Canada.

Her book elaborates on the concept of “local ecumenism,” which has not gotten much traction in academic circles to date, she says. Aside from the book *Local Ecumenism* (1984), edited by André Birmele, there is very little mention of local ecumenism in the literature, she says.

Indeed, most references to local ecumenism indicate that “it should be happening, but it isn’t,” she adds. The local ecumenism Petersen Finch is promoting goes beyond fellowship, neighborliness and shared good works to engage differences in doctrine.

Petersen Finch admits “the idea of actually dialoguing in a doctrinal way at the grassroots level is pretty rare.” However, she insists that grassroots ecumenism “has to have the doctrinal piece.”

“Because if doctrine is part of the problem, it needs to be part of the solution,” she continues. “And lay people know that’s what keeping them apart, not just culture, not just attitudes. It’s really different truth claims.”

Beliefs underlying Petersen Finch’s proposals are that “lay people can thoroughly understand the doctrine of their own church and can dialogue skillfully with the beliefs of neighboring churches” and that “the work of national and international experts on church unity is not finished until the lay people in local settings participate in it.”



“We’re not assuming that lay people are somehow stupid,” she says. “You don’t need to be trained for 100 years in theology to participate in a dialogue where the seeds of collaboration can happen and begin to grow.”

She admits that adult faith education is “consistent work,” but this does not discount an adult Christian’s ability to engage in ecumenical dialogue that goes beyond good works.

Petersen Finch says she has seen occasions for ecumenical dialogue become opportunities for “supercharged adult education,” motivating adults to learn more about their own faith tradition in order to have the ability to engage the other and enter into relationship with them.

“You carry the face of your tradition and it’s concretized,” she says.

Grassroots Ecumenism tells the story of how members of Holy Family Roman Catholic Church and First Presbyterian Church met over five weeks in Lent 2022 to dialogue on differences in doctrine. The book also elaborates on their method of dialogue and the impact on the community.

The lay faithful were joined by their pastors, who were both supportive of the dialogue. Pastors’ involvement “makes a huge difference,” says Petersen Finch, giving church members “that permission to engage.”

For those who are interested but intimidated by their lack of skill in ecumenical dialogue, Petersen Finch teaches dialogue skills in her book and presents them in ways that are easy to learn. The book also offers the theological foundations and reflections on the participation of the laity in ecumenical dialogue in ordinary life.

At the heart of the dialogue process is friendship, which must be nurtured and developed, says Petersen Finch, who has noticed in many church communities the tendency for some members to be more naturally “ecumenically minded.”

“They’ve already created a web of relationships through an interchurch network, maybe it’s a Bible study, maybe it’s just a long friendship between a Catholic woman and a Presbyterian woman,” she says.

She proposes that churches find these people “and put the opportunity and the resources in their hands.”



Petersen Finch first conducted part of her research and writing during a sabbatical in Rome 2018, living during that time at The Lay Centre, an intentional ecumenical and interreligious community of lay scholars. She completed her book during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Cecil M. Robeck, theologian, ecumenist and Assemblies of God minister, whom she befriended at The Lay Centre, wrote the forward.

The book was launched last fall in Clarkston and received excellent reviews from scholars, but the intended audience, says Petersen Finch, is the people in the pew. She hopes many communities will use *Grassroots Ecumenism* as a handbook to guide their local efforts at ecumenical dialogue. The book even includes samples for flyers and meeting schedules.

Petersen Finch underlines that her book is also about “the power of small movements.”

“While the world is moving away from the other, these small, humble, gentle movements are the kingdom seeds,” she says. “Local ecumenism is really about peacemaking in a dark world.”

Grassroots Ecumenism: The Path Towards Local Christian Kinship is available for purchase at [New City Press](#) and on [Amazon](#).



Deepening our friendship with Christ: an Online Lenten Retreat

By The Lay Centre

The Gregorian University Foundation is pleased to again offer you an opportunity to deepen your Lenten prayer and draw closer to Jesus Christ through an online Lenten retreat based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. Retreat directors from the Pontifical Gregorian University, the Pontifical Biblical Institute, and the Pontifical Oriental Institute have assembled a team of experts in Jesuit spirituality and prayer to provide participants with a rich and meaningful prayer experience.

You can find out more about presenters by clicking [HERE](#).

Director Donna Orsuto and Lay Centre alumna Samantha Lin will be among the presenters.



Earthquake in the Southeast of Turkey: Support the interventions of Caritas for this emergency

By The Lay Centre

In the aftermath of the devastating earthquake disaster, "Caritas Tyrkiye" in cooperation with its partners has been promptly activated to intervene in supporting the people affected like the sole authorized representative of the CARITAS institution in the country.

For donations refer to:

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How to help!

You can contact the national focal point at g.longo.caritas.tr@gmail.com about the aid you wish to realize through Caritas Turkey.

New clothes especially Winter children-baby clothes and winter clothes-boots, Diapers and baby food, Food parcels, Blankets.

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Joint event on Christian unity reflects on baptism, prays for dialogue

By The Lay Centre

Among the activities for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (Jan. 18-25), The Lay Centre joined Centro Pro Unione in hosting an event that reflected on the gifts all Christians share through their baptism and prayed for a renewed dialogue, on Jan. 19.

Rev. Dr. Dirk G. Lange, assistant general secretary for ecumenical relations at the Lutheran World Federation, spoke on the theme “Baptism: Ecclesiological Implications of the Latest Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission.” Rev. Lange is also a professor of worship at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minneapolis, where he holds the Frederik A. Schiotz Chair of Christian Missions.

Rev. Lange spoke of his participation in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission, whose work led to the publication of [a report](#) that represents a concrete engagement in dialogue among the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the Lutheran World Federation.

The report points to the ongoing study and discussion to sort out ambiguities and misunderstandings among members of these Christian traditions. It declares the will to continue dialogue based on a mutual recognition of baptism between Catholics and Lutherans.

The goal of unity, he said in a [recent interview](#), is “a dynamic of growth that includes within it continual discovery, participation, and sharing.”

“There is always something unfinished in this growth, which cannot be defined as a ‘defect’ to be corrected, but rather as a mutual invitation into ongoing growth,” he said.

The lecture was followed by an ecumenical Celebration of the Word, led by The Lay Centre community. Clemency Flitter, ordinand of the Church of England and a Lay Centre resident, shared a reflection on the readings.



“To reach out with love, to deconstruct systems of injustice, to seek unity, is not part of the kingdom of God. It is the kingdom of God. Though we were once far off, through Christ we may be one,” she said.

Other members of the community led different moments of prayer; Alex Campbell and Fabjola Lekaj performed a musical interlude.

Concluding the Week of Prayer with a Vespers service Jan. 25, Pope Francis underlined the need for a common journey, arising from a true desire for unity. He recalled the theme of this year's Week of Prayer – “Do good; seek justice” (Is 1:17) – [explaining that God admonishes](#) us to renounce evil and urges us to change.

A culture of encounter is strongly encouraged by Pope Francis, who was in Congo and South Sudan on his 40th apostolic trip at the time of publication. He was traveling to South Sudan with Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury and Rt. Rev. Iain Greenshields, moderator of the general assembly of the Church of Scotland. Archbishop Welby said of their trip that they go “as brothers in Christ to worship together and witness to the God who reconciles us.”

The joint event held by the Centro Pro Unione and The Lay Centre was rooted in a tradition that dates to the 1960s, when the “Foyer Unitas Casa” was at Piazza Navona. In the Palazzo Pamphili, the collaboration between the Ladies of Bethany and the Friars of the Atonement began in view of the Second Vatican Council. The Lay Centre inherited this tradition from the Ladies of Bethany.

Watch the video of the event, produced by the Centro Pro Unione, below:

[YouTube video player](#)



Prayer, vocations and the pastor of St. Peter's Basilica

By The Lay Centre

The third round of community evenings for the 2022-2023 academic year was dedicated to moments of dialogue with guests willing to share about their life and mission for the Church in Rome.

Community evenings this year have been held around themes that touch on the synodal dimension of the Church. This time, among the 10 thematic nuclei proposed by the Synod, the community discussed "Dialogue in Church and Society," "With the Other Christian Denominations," and "Authority and Participation."

Recent guests included:

- Father Michele Gianola, undersecretary at the Italian Bishops' Conference, who spoke about vocational discernment.
- Archbishop Ian Ernest and his wife, Kamala, Rev. Fr. Teodosio Roman Hren, OSBM, Rev. Matthew Laferty, and Rev. Daniel Chapman, who joined an ecumenical prayer service.
- Father Agnello Stoia, OFM Conv., the parish priest of St. Peter's in the Vatican, who spoke about the pastoral life of this unique church.

The joys and challenges of promoting vocations

Father Gianola visited The Lay Centre on the vigil of the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Over dinner, he shared interesting aspects of and stories from his ministry and underlined the importance of sustaining lay vocations in the Church. He recalled that all Christian vocations have a common root, which is the call of baptism.

He said the different vocations in the Church are in a relationship of reciprocity in a way comparable to the multiple faces on a polyhedron. He invited everyone to constantly pray for new vocations and to be open to welcome God's presence in life through Jesus Christ.

"Do good; seek justice." (Is 1:17)



In preparation for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (Jan. 18-25), The Lay Centre community organized an ecumenical prayer service Dec. 17, led by Archbishop Ian Ernest, the Archbishop of Canterbury's personal representative to the Holy See and director of the Anglican Centre in Rome. It was an opportunity for a deeper reflection on the theme of the Week of Prayer, chosen by the Minnesota Council of Churches, USA, and inspired by the first chapter of the Book of Isaiah: a call for justice in the face of oppression everywhere in the world.

Other guests included Father Teodosio Roman Hren, OSBM, vicar general of the Ukrainian Catholic Apostolic Exarchate in Italy, erected by Pope Francis in 2019, for the pastoral care of Ukrainians in Italy and San Marino. The exarchate currently has 62 priests and 170 parishes. Father Hren is a canon lawyer and invited professor at several pontifical universities in Rome.

Rev. Matthew Laferty, director of the Methodist Ecumenical Office in Rome, and Rev. Daniel Chapman, minister of the Ponte Sant'Angelo Church, were also guests in attendance.

Being Pastor of St. Peter's Basilica

On the first gathering of the new year, Jan. 11, The Lay Centre community had the opportunity to meet the pastor of St. Peter's Basilica, Father Agnello Stoia, OFM Conv. He spoke about his work in building bridges between the Diocese of Rome and the Holy See.

His position is quite unique as one of the first collaborators of another Franciscan, Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, OFM Conv., who is archpriest of St. Peter's Basilica, vicar general of His Holiness for Vatican City, and president of the Fabric of Saint Peter.

St. Peter's Basilica must be recognized as a place of prayer where one can experience God at the heart of the Catholic Church, he said. One of his main projects, aimed at revitalizing the spiritual life of that local church, is the "Lectio Petri" series, which features events throughout the year related to the life and ministry of the Apostle Peter. The inauguration of the series was marked by a video mapping event, a video on the life of Peter that was projected on the façade of St. Peter's for two weeks last October.

While St. Peter's parish has a very small territory – the basilica itself and the square – its mission is directed to the world, Father Stoia said, describing this mission as a heart that receives and pumps blood from and to different parts of the Church's body.



These evenings are important for community members to strengthen their friendships and discuss issues relevant to their academic and professional journeys.

Contributed: Filip Veber



Interview: 'Pope Benedict XVI was misunderstood on interreligious dialogue'

By Filipe Domingues

Emil Anton, a Finnish scholar and Lay Centre alumnus, offered comment on the pontificate of Benedict XVI, deceased Dec. 31, 2022, from the perspective of interreligious dialogue. His dissertation for his doctorate in theology at the University of Helsinki focused on the work of the late pope. The title of his research, published in 2019, is “Ratzinger and the Religions: Studies on Pope Benedict XVI and Interreligious Dialogue.”

“Benedict’s main point was that faith and reason go together and that religion should never be used blindly to justify irrational acts of violence,” Dr. Anton said.

Read the full interview below.

LC: How would you describe Benedict’s contribution to interreligious dialogue?

EA: When I began working on my doctoral dissertation on Pope Benedict XVI and interreligious dialogue, some laughed and said it would be a very short one. Indeed, interreligious dialogue played a relatively minor role among the theological concerns of Joseph Ratzinger, and he is mostly remembered negatively in this regard. The Vatican declaration “Dominus Iesus” in 2000, signed by Cardinal Ratzinger, stated that followers of other religions were objectively in a “gravely deficient” state, and the Regensburg lecture of 2006 included a quote about Islam having brought to the world things “evil and inhuman.”

However, Ratzinger’s contributions to interreligious dialogue cannot be reduced to these instances. In fact, as in so many areas of theology, here, too, he made several important contributions.

Before becoming pope, he wrote a very important book on the topic, titled “Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions,” and as pope he produced as many as 188 texts relating to interreligious dialogue in less than eight years.

In proportion to the length of his pontificate, this makes him just as active in the field of interreligious dialogue as Pope John Paul II, or even a little more active.



LC: What are some of the main misunderstandings of Joseph Ratzinger's theology of religions and interreligious dialogue?

EA: First and foremost, Ratzinger often has been portrayed as a dogmatic exclusivist who regarded the Catholic Church as the only way of salvation. This is very far from the truth – he once surprised journalist Peter Seewald by saying there were as many ways to God as there were people.

Joseph Ratzinger was actually a very generous and open inclusivist, which means that he believed that lots of non-Christians – in fact, the majority of people – would finally be saved through a purgatorial encounter with the loving Christ who is the truth, the way and the life. Other religions can help put people on the path toward God and, according to Ratzinger, this happens “on a large scale.”

The Church serves as a necessary spiritual force and intercessor that enables “the many” to be finally saved. What is needed in the individual is some kind of basic openness to God. This is beautifully expanded upon in the historic encyclical “*Spe Salvi*.”

LC: In your view, what did Benedict XVI think interreligious dialogue could accomplish?

EA: Benedict XVI explicitly granted that the purpose of interreligious dialogue is not to convert the other but to grow closer to the truth together in mutual respect of non-negotiable fundamental choices.

On the other hand, some have claimed that Benedict regarded interreligious dialogue as an impossibility and wanted to focus on intercultural dialogue instead.

Despite a short turn toward this direction at the beginning of the pontificate, Benedict repeatedly stated that there are many forms of dialogue: the dialogue of daily life, the dialogue of social action, theological dialogue and spiritual dialogue of religious experience. He also regarded interreligious dialogue as a necessity, not an optional extra in the life of the Church.

LC: Could you comment specifically on his relationship with Islam?

EA: He was accused of misrepresenting Islam or, conversely, praised for a correct portrayal of Islam as a violent religion [because of the Regensburg lecture]. Both of these views are incorrect: Ratzinger recognized the inner diversity of Islam and



wanted to work with the more noble forms of this religion, those open to reason and dialogue, against the extreme and terrorist interpretations.

Despite the short-lived uproar, the Regensburg lecture actually led to a historic Muslim-Christian dialogue in the form of the document “A Common Word Between Us and You,” signed by 138 Muslim scholars, as well as the establishment of the Catholic-Muslim Forum. In short, Benedict XVI certainly wanted to reject relativism, but at the same time he remained a humble pilgrim, who knew that one can always learn from others, even be corrected by them.

Benedict’s main point was that faith and reason go together and that religion should never be used blindly to justify irrational acts of violence. Rather, religions should stand together as witnesses for peace and the dignity of human life.



The Lay Centre to host Summer Leadership Development Program

By The Lay Centre

This summer, The Lay Centre will begin a new residential program in Rome. The Summer Leadership Development Program is designed to draw out the potential of lay leaders to contribute solutions to the Church's most pressing challenges. The weeklong immersive and intensive program takes a holistic approach to leadership formation, including in its human, spiritual and intellectual dimensions.

Designed together with Letty Garcia, associate director of the Leadership Initiative at Harvard Business School, the program will take place at The Lay Centre, July 9-14, 2023. It will guide participants as they look at their own life journey through a spiritual lens and listen for their call to leadership and co-responsibility in the Church.

Focused on developing self-awareness and relationships, they will define their own path to authentic leadership and return to their daily activities with greater enthusiasm and confidence.

The program is also an opportunity to join a broader network of lay scholars and professionals, opening the door to possible future projects in Rome. Participants will have the opportunity to experience life at The Lay Centre and to receive more information about pontifical universities.

Throughout the week, participants will be immersed in Rome's historic milieu through guided off-site visits related to the themes discussed. Sessions will be held in English.

For more information, please contact info@laycentre.org.

Who is this program for?

- The ideal candidate is a lay person with at least two years of professional experience and who is interested in working for the Church and/or applying some concepts of leadership and Catholic spirituality to their daily life.



- While applicants can be from any field or profession, they are united in their commitment to discerning a call to serve as leaders motivated to tackle some of the Church's biggest challenges.
- While there are no age limits, this program is designed mostly for those who are in the initial stages of their career.
- Full and partial scholarships are available. Contact us to learn more about the costs.

How to apply?

Send your resume and a one-page cover letter to info@laycentre.org.



Donna Orsuto: Remembering Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

By Donna Orsuto

Like many in these days following the funeral of Pope Benedict XVI, I have been reflecting on the many treasures he has left us. I am especially inspired by three themes.

First, he teaches us about the centrality of friendship with Christ. It is obvious from his first homily as pope to his dying words, "Lord, I love you", that this personal and intimate friendship with Christ was at the heart of his life and pontificate. Memorable are the words spoken at World Youth Day 2005 in Cologne, Germany, where he said:

"I repeat today what I said at the beginning of my pontificate: 'If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation.'"

Second, Benedict XVI's teaching on the co-responsibility of the laity paved the way for recent developments in the Church regarding the role and mission of the laity. His words on May 26, 2009, at the Opening of the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome, are still inspiring and worthy of further reflection. He asked the question,

"To what extent is the pastoral co-responsibility of all, and particularly of the laity, recognized and encouraged? Granted there have been efforts in the past, but he notes that 'there is still a long way to go.'"

He asks: "What paths can we take? In the first place we must renew our efforts for a formation which is more attentive and focused on the vision of the Church, . . . and this should be both on the part of priests as well as of religious and lay people to understand ever better what this Church is, this People of God in the Body of Christ. At the same time, he says, it is necessary to improve pastoral structures in such a way that the co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God in their entirety is gradually promoted, with respect for vocations and for the respective roles of the consecrated and of lay people."



This demands a change in mindset, particularly concerning lay people. They must no longer be viewed as "collaborators" of the clergy but truly recognized as "co-responsible," for the Church's being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity.

Finally, as Pope Francis noted recently, Benedict XVI was a great master of catechesis. As prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he had already had a central role in the preparation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

His Wednesday audiences are also precious treasures for making the theology and spirituality of many saints accessible to all the faithful. As Pope Francis continued, "His acute and gentle thought was not self-referential, but ecclesial, because he always wanted to accompany us in the encounter with Jesus. Jesus, Crucified and Risen, the Living One and the Lord, was the destination to which Pope Benedict led us, taking us by the hand. May he help us rediscover in Christ the joy of believing and the hope of living."

Filipe Domingues: The death of Benedict XVI closes a historic cycle in the Church

By Filipe Domingues

With history being made right before their eyes, those who participated at the funeral Mass of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI witnessed the end of an unprecedented era – a cycle that began with Benedict’s resignation Feb. 11, 2013, followed by the election of Pope Francis shortly thereafter, and then the long, almost 10-year coexistence of two popes in the Vatican – a “reigning” pope in office and a retired, or emeritus, pope. The word “emeritus” in its Latin origin refers to one who leaves office by merit, after having fulfilled his duty.

That cycle has ended. Benedict XVI's body now rests in the crypt of St. Peter's Basilica, in the same tomb that had been dedicated to Pope John Paul II, whose body was moved into the nave of the basilica after his beatification. Benedict XVI chose to be buried there and, in death as in life, he remains the timid pontiff who succeeded an acclaimed saint.

A serene end

The atmosphere in St. Peter's Square for Benedict’s funeral Mass on Jan. 5 was neither one of great commotion nor of strangeness – even though, for the first time in history, a pope was presiding over the funeral of his predecessor. (There was only one slightly similar historical precedent). The mood on that cold, misty morning was one of serenity, prayer, silence, depth of spirit and simplicity that recalled the reflective personality and introspection of Benedict XVI.

Those present knew the earthly life of the 95-year-old man, whose intellectual, theological and spiritual legacy, which preceded his pontificate, would be remembered and studied for many years to come. They were also witness to the legacy of a pope who marked history by resigning: a Church that continually reforms itself.

Benedict XVI was the first pope to resign due to “lack of vigour,” as he himself said, opening a door that was previously closed. Now, his successors – including Pope Francis – can consider resignation without taboo, discerning this option with the Holy Spirit in prayer.



A lasting tribute

Benedict XVI normalized the presence of two popes in the Vatican – marked by a cordial relationship and simplicity – something that initially seemed quite complex. The last meeting of these two popes was at the conclusion of the funeral Mass, when Francis bowed before the coffin – a powerful image that stays with us. Never before has a pope so honoured his predecessor, envisioning what may one day be his own future.

After four days of tributes to the pope emeritus, to whom thousands of faithful paid their respects at his wake in the basilica, the days of mourning ended with a Requiem Mass, celebrated by Pope Francis. The Mass included most elements of the funeral rite for a pope, except for those particular to a pope who dies in office. The rite of committal was performed by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, dean of the College of Cardinals. During the opening prayer of the Mass, Francis prayed: “O God, who in your wondrous providence chose your servant Benedict to preside over your Church, grant, we pray, that, having served as the vicar of your Son on earth, he may be welcomed by him into eternal glory.”

People applauded several times and for several minutes as Vatican officials carried the cyprus wooden coffin with Benedict’s remains in procession. Some people in attendance carried banners that exalted him, with the words in Italian “Benedetto Magno,” which means “Benedict, the great”, or “Santo Subito,” which means “Sainthood now” – a phrase that was also present at the funeral of his predecessor, St. John Paul II.

A Good Shepherd

Pope Francis attributed to Benedict XVI the qualities of the Good Shepherd: "grateful, prayerful, sustained" dedication. The "faithful people" had gathered to entrust to God "the life of the one who was their shepherd," he said in his homily. And, like the women at the tomb of Christ, these people brought "the perfume of gratitude and the oil of hope" to the funeral liturgy.

As per tradition, Benedict’s body was prepared as for a pope, except for the symbols of a reigning pontiff, such as the crosier. Among the medals and coins that were minted during his pontificate, a text that summarizes his biography and main achievements was also deposited in the tomb.

"Endowed with vast and profound biblical and theological knowledge, he had the extraordinary ability to elaborate enlightening syntheses on the main doctrinal



and spiritual themes, as well as on crucial questions of the life of the Church and of contemporary culture," says the document.

The document also recalls his words at the time of his resignation from the papacy and at the General Audience that followed two weeks later, on Feb. 27, 2013, when he said: "I will continue to accompany the path of the Church with prayer and reflection, with that dedication to the Lord and to his Spouse that I have tried to live every day until now and that I would like to live forever."

For believers on earth, this cycle ends; but for Benedict XVI, the cycle reopens in eternity.



The Lay Centre community pays tribute to Benedict XVI, a faithful friend of Jesus

By The Lay Centre

The Lay Centre treasures beautiful memories of the human, cultural and spiritual heritage of Pope Benedict XVI, “faithful friend of Jesus,” as he was defined by Pope Francis in his homily on the occasion of Benedict’s funeral.

Some members of The Lay Centre community, who spent Christmas vacation in Rome, had joined the prayers of faithful from all over the world. They waited in line with other young people, the elderly and families to pay their last respects to a humble worker in the vineyard of the Lord. On the day of the funeral, they went to St. Peter's Square in the early hours of the morning to participate in the prayers of the universal Church, together with Pope Francis.

The Lay Centre community expressed the desire to remember the pontificate of Benedict XVI by sharing meaningful quotes and thoughts that reflect his deep faith, his contemplative attitude and the commitment to make Christ known to the world.

Filip Veber, Slovenia

"We have come to believe in God's love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." (Deus caritas est, no. 1)

Evelyn Blacklock, USA

“Without a certain measure of love, one finds nothing. Someone who does not get involved at least for a while in the experiment of faith, in the experiment of becoming affirmatively involved with the Church, who does not take the risk of looking with the eyes of love, is only exasperating himself. The venture of love is the prerequisite for faith. If it is ventured, then one does not have to hide from the dark areas in the Church. But one discovers that they are not the only thing after all. One discovers that alongside the Church history of scandals there is another Church history that has proved to be fruitful throughout the centuries in great figures such as Augustine, Francis of Assisi, the Dominican priest Las Casas, who



fought passionately for the Indians, Vincent de Paul, and John XXIII. He finds that the Church has brought forth in history a gleaming path that cannot be ignored. And the beauty that has sprung up in response to her message and is still manifest to us today in incomparable works of art becomes for him a witness to the truth: something that could express itself in that way cannot be mere darkness. The beauty of the great cathedrals, the beauty of the music that has developed within the context of the faith, the dignity of the Church's liturgy, and in general the reality of festive celebration, which one cannot make for oneself but can only receive, the elaboration of the seasons in the liturgical year, in which then and now, time and eternity interpenetrate—all that is in my view no insignificant accident. Beauty is the radiance of truth, Thomas Aquinas once said, and one might add that the distortion of the beautiful is the self-irony of lost truth. The lasting impression that the Christian faith was able to make upon history testifies to it, to the truth that stands behind it." (Ratzinger, Why I Am Still in the Church)

Maria Teresa Avila Fuentes, Mexico

"Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed. Each of us is loved. Each of us is necessary." Pope Benedict XVI

During a time of vocational discernment, this quote of Pope Benedict XVI helped me to remember the certainty of the love of God for each one of us, and how that love is all due to who God is, not something we win, or merit through our actions. In the end, after all the rich theology that Pope Benedict XVI shared with the world about Christ and his life, the most important thing remains, indeed, that 'Deus caritas est'.

Pedro Paulo Weizenmann, Brazil

"Christianity is not an intellectual system, a collection of dogmas, or a moralism. Christianity is instead an encounter, a love story." Pope Benedict XVI

Bruno Hermes, Brazil

"Together with the Lord in the supreme communion of the Eucharist and reconciled with Him and our neighbor, we will thus be bearers of the peace that the world fails to give. Can the men and women of this world find peace unless they are aware of the need to be reconciled with God, with their neighbor and with themselves? Of high significance in this regard was what the Senate of São Paulo wrote to the Provincial of the Franciscans at the end of the 18th century, calling Brother Galvão a 'man of peace and charity!' Homily of Benedict XVI, May 11,



2007 - Holy Mass and Canonization of the first Brazilian saint Brother Anthony of Saint Anne Galvão, OFM.

It makes me think about how peace, the much-dreamed-of world peace, the much-promised culture of peace, in order to be achieved, requires much more than institutional arrangements and political juggling. Benedict XVI will point out how all this will only bear fruit if it first undergoes a personal conversion.

Amanda Achtman, Canada

Some of my favourite words from Pope Benedict XVI come from a Christmas address he gave in 2011. Drawing on the joyful experiences of World Youth Days and the existentially rich philosophy of Josef Pieper, he said:

"Only from the You can the I come into itself. Only if it is accepted, can it accept itself. Those who are unloved cannot even love themselves. This sense of being accepted comes in the first instance from other human beings. But all human acceptance is fragile. Ultimately we need a sense of being accepted unconditionally. Only if God accepts me, and I become convinced of this, do I know definitively: it is good that I exist. It is good to be a human being. If every man's sense of being accepted and loved by God is lost, then there is no longer any answer to the question whether to be a human being is good at all. Doubt concerning human existence becomes more and more insurmountable. Where doubt over God becomes prevalent, then doubt over humanity follows inevitably. We see today how widely this doubt is spreading. We see it in the joylessness, in the inner sadness, that can be read on so many human faces today. Only faith gives me the conviction: it is good that I exist. It is good to be a human being, even in hard times. Faith makes one happy from deep within."

These words have always cut right to my heart. The reminder that human acceptance is fragile and that our truest longing is to be accepted unconditionally is a key to insight about ourselves and others. I think that reflection on the truth in this paragraph can help us to evangelize our society better while persevering in the hope it takes to do it.



Ecumenical Celebration of the Word animated by the Lay Centre Community

By The Lay Centre

The Centro Pro Unione and The Lay Centre organized an afternoon of prayer and reflection on the occasion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

The event will take place on Thursday, 19 January 2023 at 4:30pm Rome time. The reflection will be led by Dirk G. LANGE - Deputy General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations, Lutheran World Federation and Professor of Worship and Frederik A. Schiotz Chair of Christian Missions, Lutheran Seminary USA.

The topic is "Baptism - Ecclesiological Implications of the latest Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission"

The reflection will be followed by an Ecumenical Celebration of the Word animated by The Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas Community.

Venue: Centro Pro Unione, Via di Santa Maria dell'Anima, 30, 1st floor (Piazza Navona). Rome

IMPORTANT: it is necessary to book in order to attend the event in person or through live streaming. You can [CLICK HERE](#).