



CHANGES TO THE ROMAN CURIA

BRENDAN DALY outlines and explains the changes Pope Francis has made to the central government of the Church.

On 21 March 2022, Pope Francis announced the changes in the Curia, the central government of the Catholic Church, with his apostolic constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (*Preach the Gospel*). This document replaces *Pastor Bonus*, the 1988 constitution of Pope John Paul II. It came about because during the pre-conclave discussions in 2013, the cardinals asked for a revision of the central government structures of the Church.

The title of the constitution emphasises that the reform is aimed at facilitating the preaching of the Gospel more effectively.

To Be a Church of the Gospel

The first document a pope issues is

very significant. In the first year of his papacy Pope Francis issued *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), which emphasised evangelisation especially by our actions. Pope Francis wanted all members of the Church to be missionary disciples and wanted all structures of the Church to have a pastoral conversion focused on evangelisation.

Any reform in the Church has to go beyond a structural reform, and must include the interior reform and renewal of each individual Christian including those employed in the Curia.

New Names Signify Service

These recent changes mean Vatican offices are no longer called Congregations and are instead called

Dicasteries (Departments/Offices). There is a whole change in approach to how the central government of the Church operates, and there is an emphasis on how the Curia is to serve both the Pope and the universal Church.

Evangelisation Given Prominence

The Dicastery of Evangelisation of Peoples is named as the preeminent dicastery and is now headed by the Pope himself with two pro-prefects. This reform of the Curia makes the pope a more important figure. Giving this dicastery precedence highlights the importance of evangelisation in the reform.

One pro-prefect will be in charge of the section for the fundamental questions of evangelisation in the world.

The other pro-prefect will be in charge of the section responsible for the new evangelisation and the new particular churches. This section will be responsible for all mission territories such as New Zealand. These mission territories encompass over 60 per cent of the world's population because they include Africa, Asia, Oceania and South America.

The Dicastery for Evangelisation of Peoples will still oversee the processes for appointing new bishops in New Zealand.

New Section to Deal with Abuse

The Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith has already been divided into two sections: disciplinary and doctrinal.

The disciplinary section deals with the gravest crimes such as sexual abuse of minors and absolving an accomplice in a sin against the sixth commandment. These are considered crimes against the faith because these cases are obviously an obstacle to evangelisation. Since 2001, major superiors of religious institutes and all diocesan bishops have been required to report each accusation of abuse they receive to the Doctrine of the Faith. Oversight and direction of these cases is an enormous task.

The doctrinal section of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith continues to decide Privilege of the Faith marriage cases (where one party is baptised); checking the orthodoxy of candidates to be bishops; and addressing doctrinal issues, etc.

The Pontifical Commission for Minors, along with the International Theological Commission and the International Biblical Commission are included as departments within the Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith.

Other Departments

Other Dicasteries include the Dicasteries for the Service of Charity; Eastern Churches; Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Causes of the Saints; Bishops; Clergy; Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life; Laity Family and Life; Promoting Christian Unity; Interreligious Dialogue; Culture and Education; Promoting Integral Human Development; Legislative

Texts; and Communication.

There are bodies for justice: the Apostolic Penitentiary dealing with internal forum matters; the Apostolic *Signatura* overseeing justice in the Church; and the *Rota* judging cases against bishops and marriage cases at third instance etc.

There are also economic bodies such as the Secretariat for the Economy and the Auditor General.

Personnel in Departments

There are significant measures to end personnel having a long-term career in the Curia. Pope Francis is trying to ensure that personnel do not remain in dicasteries for prolonged periods which enable them to form chains of power. No one in top positions and certainly no cleric may serve longer than two five-year terms.

A cleric must view his work at the Curia as being mission service.

Employing clergy and religious is more financially economical than employing lay people.

It is unclear, though, how many lay people will be employed and how long their service will be. Since approximately 2,500 people are employed by the Vatican, budgetary considerations will enter the equation.

Governance of Church Opened to Lay People

Praedicate Evangelium is a significant document opening up the role of lay people in the governance of the Church as it states: "Every Christian, by virtue of Baptism, is a missionary disciple to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus. One cannot fail to take this into account in the updating of the Curia, whose reform, therefore, must provide for the involvement of laymen and women, even in roles of government and responsibility."

A lay person currently heads the Dicastery for Communication. There will obviously be more lay people heading dicasteries in the future.

Every curial institution carries out its own mission in virtue of the power received from the Roman Pontiff in whose name it operates with vicarious power in the exercise of his primary office.

For this reason, any member of the faithful may preside over a department or body, given their particular competence, power of governance or function.

Curial officials have power not from ordination, but because of the power received from the pope.

The laity exercise the ordinary vicarious power of governance received from the pope with the conferral of an office. This confirms that the power of the governance in the Church does not come from ordination but from a canonical mission and appointment to an office.

Canon Needs Revising

This legislation challenges the wording of the text of the current canon 129 which states that lay people can cooperate in the exercise of the power of governance. The wording of canon 129 now needs to be revised.

According to canon 1421 of the 1983 Code, a lay person could be a judge in a marriage case along with two clerics. In 2015 Pope Francis changed the law so two lay persons could be judges with a cleric in a college of three judges. Clearly the lay people would be in the majority and could determine the nullity or not of the marriage in question.

New Developments?

Pope Francis in *Praedicate Evangelium* is implicitly settling the issue of lay people exercising the power of governance by stating that lay people can be appointed to offices in the curia that involve the exercise of the power of governance in the Church.

This has major implications for the Church more generally because in principle, if one can do the greater thing, one can also do the lesser thing.

If lay people can exercise the power of governance at the Apostolic See they can also exercise the power of governance in local churches. 🌿

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