



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 9 June 2017*

[Multimedia]

*Dear Cardinals,
Dear Brother Bishops,
Brothers and Sisters,*

I welcome you with joy and I thank Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran for the greeting he addressed to me, also on your behalf. We meet at the conclusion of your Plenary Assembly, during which you considered “*The role of women in education towards universal fraternity*”. Certainly, very rich discussion is not lacking on this theme, which is of the utmost importance for mankind’s journey toward fraternity and peace, a journey which is by no means predictable and linear, but is marked by difficulties and obstacles.

Unfortunately we see that today the figure of woman as an educator towards universal fraternity is obfuscated and often unappreciated, as a result of the many evils that afflict this world and which, in particular, strike women in their dignity and in their role. Women, and even children, are in fact among the most frequent victims of indiscriminate violence. There, where hatred and violence gain the upper hand, [these evils] lacerate families and society, impeding women from carrying out, in communion of intent and of action with men, their mission as educators in a peaceful and effective manner.

Reflecting on the theme you have addressed, I would like to pause in particular on three aspects: *appreciating the role of women, educating towards fraternity, and dialoguing.*

1. *Appreciating the role of women.* In today's complex society, characterized by plurality and globalization, there is need for a greater appreciation of women's capacity for educating towards universal fraternity. When women have the opportunity to fully pass on their gifts to the entire community, the very manner by which society is understood and organized becomes positively transformed by it, managing to better reflect the substantial unity of the human family. Here lies the most valid premise for the consolidation of authentic fraternity. The growing presence of women in the social, economic and political life at local, national and international levels, as well as the ecclesial, therefore, is a healthy process. Women have the full right to be actively included in all areas, and their right must be affirmed and protected, even through legal instruments wherever it may be necessary.

It is a matter of making more room for a more incisive feminine presence. There are many, many women who, in the roles they perform daily, with dedication and integrity, at times with heroic courage, have made and do make the most of their accomplishments, their valuable traits in the most varied, specific and specialized skills, joined with the real experience of being mothers and formators.

2. *Educating towards fraternity.* Women, as educators, have a particular vocation, making it possible for new forms of welcome and mutual esteem to be created and to grow. The female figure has always been at the centre of family education, not exclusively as mother. Women's contribution in the field of education is priceless. Education carries a wealth of implications for woman herself, for her way of being, and for her relationships, through the way she offers herself in regard to human life and to life in general.

Ultimately, all — men and women — are called to contribute to education towards universal fraternity which is then, in the final analysis, education for peace in the complementarity of diverse sensitivities and of proper roles. In this way women, intimately bound to the mystery of life, can do much to promote the spirit of fraternity, with their care for the preservation of life and with their conviction that love is the only power that can render the world livable for everyone.

Indeed, women are often the only ones who accompany others, especially those who are weakest in the family and in society, the victims of conflict and those who must face everyday challenges. Thanks to their contribution, education towards fraternity — through its inclusive and bond-producing nature — can overcome the throw-away culture.

3. *Dialoguing.* It is obvious that education for universal fraternity, which also means to say learning to build bonds of friendship and respect, is important in the field of interreligious dialogue. Women are engaged, often more than men, at the level of the "dialogue of life" in the interreligious sphere, and thus contribute to a better understanding of the challenges typical of a multicultural reality. But women are also able to fully integrate in exchanges at the level of religious experience, as well as in those at the theological level. Many women are well prepared to take on encounters

of interreligious dialogue at the highest levels and not only on the Catholic side. This means that women's contribution must not be limited to "feminine" topics or to encounters only among women. Dialogue is a journey that men and women must undertake together. Today more than ever, it is necessary that women be present.

Women, possessing particular traits, can offer an important contribution to dialogue with their capacity to listen, to welcome and to open themselves generously to others.

I thank you all, Members, Consultors and Collaborators of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, because you perform a valuable service. I hope that you continue to weave the delicate fabric of dialogue with all who seek God and people of good will. I invoke upon you an abundance of the Lord's blessings and I ask you, please, to pray for me.