

Address of Monsignor Paul Russell
***Chargé d’Affaires a.i.* of the Holy See**
to the Chinese Regional Bishops’ Conference
Autumn Plenary Assembly
Tuesday, 25 November 2014

Dear Archbishop Hung,
Dear Bishops,

It is always a pleasure for me to be with you on the occasion of your Plenary Assembly. My presence here is a sign of your communion with the Holy Father as well as a sign of the Holy Father’s concern and interest in you and in your ministry as a successor of the apostles.

This morning, I would like to propose a mediation on the state and role of the laity. In 2011, you celebrated a Year of the Laity, but I did not have an opportunity to speak to you about the laity at that time because other things were happening. There are several reasons for my choice of topic here today. This past year and this coming year, the Synod of Bishops is reflecting on the family. In my opinion, considerations regarding the family should be seen in the wider context of a consideration of the laity. Also, yesterday Pope Francis met with the Heads of Roman Dicasteries to discuss various ways to reorganize the Roman Curia. Some commentators have suggested that the Pontifical Council for the Laity will be raised to the level of a Congregation, which will take responsibility for family life, youth, and women. (It seems that another Congregation will be created for social concerns; this Congregation will take responsibility for tasks which are currently the responsibility of the Pontifical Councils for Justice and Peace, “*Cor Unum*”, Migrants, Health Care Workers and *Caritas Internationalis*.) Also, four days ago, without any fanfare, the Church marked the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church *Lumen gentium* (21 November 1964). For the first time in history, the Church proposed a dogmatic teaching on the state and role of the laity. This teaching was subsequently given expression in the *Code of Canon Law* in 1983 and other Church documents. Pope Francis has taken this topic up again in his Encyclical Letter *Evangelii gaudium*. I have taken the liberty of extracting the relevant passages from *Lumen gentium*, the *Code of Canon Law*, and *Evangelii gaudium*. I provide you with the full Chinese-language text of these documents.

I would like to highlight a few passages from these documents to reflect on with you today.

Lumen gentium, Chapter IV, entitled “The Laity” says this:

[30.] There are certain things which pertain in a special way to the laity, both men and women, by reason of their condition and mission. [...] [Bishops] know how much the laity contribute to the welfare of the entire Church. [Bishops] also know that they [the Bishops] were not ordained by Christ to take upon themselves alone the entire salvific mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary they [Bishops] understand that it is their noble duty to shepherd the faithful and to recognize their ministries and charisms, so that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one mind.

At the beginning of paragraph 31 is a definition of the laity.

[31.] The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church. [...] What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature. [...] But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. [...] Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.

Lumen gentium offers a positive assessment of the laity’s involvement in temporal affairs. The laity work from within to bring the light of the gospel to mundane affairs. There are some circumstances when only lay people can bring the light of Christ.

[33.] The lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. [...] Now the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth. [...] Besides this apostolate which certainly pertains to all Christians, the laity can also be called in various ways to a more direct form of cooperation in the apostolate of the Hierarchy. [...]

The laity share in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly role.

[34.] For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ".

This is the priestly role of the laity. They also share in Christ's prophetic role.

[...]

[35.] The laity go forth as powerful proclaimers of a faith in things to be hoped for, when they courageously join to their profession of faith a life springing from faith. This evangelization, that is, this announcing of Christ by a living testimony as well as by the spoken word, takes on a specific quality and a special force in that it is carried out in the ordinary surroundings of the world.

In connection with the prophetic function is that state of life which is sanctified by a special sacrament obviously of great importance, namely, married and family life. For where Christianity pervades the entire mode of family life, and gradually transforms it, one will find there both the practice and an excellent school of the lay apostolate. In such a home husbands and wives find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children. The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come. Thus by its example and its witness it accuses the world of sin and enlightens those who seek the truth.

Consequently, even when preoccupied with temporal cares, the laity can and must perform a work of great value for the evangelization of the world. [...]

The laity shares in Christ's kingly role.

[36.] The faithful, therefore, must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, as well as its role in the harmonious praise of God. They must assist each other to live holier lives even in their daily occupations. [...] Therefore, by their competence in secular training and by their activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them vigorously contribute their effort, so that created goods may be perfected by human labor, technical skill and civic culture for the benefit of all men according to the design of the Creator and the light of His Word. May the goods of this world be more equitably distributed among all men, and may they in their own way be conducive to universal progress in human and Christian freedom. In this manner, through the members of the Church, will Christ progressively illumine the whole of human society with His saving light.

Moreover, let the laity also by their combined efforts remedy the customs and conditions of the world, if they are an inducement to sin, so that they all may be conformed to the norms of justice and may favor the practice of virtue rather than hinder it. By so doing they will imbue culture and human activity with genuine moral values; they will better prepare the field of the world for the seed of the Word of God; and at the same time they will open wider the doors of the Church by which the message of peace may enter the world.

[...] The temporal sphere is governed by its own principles, since it is rightly concerned with the interests of this world. [...]

[37.] The laity have the right, as do all Christians, to receive in abundance from their spiritual shepherds the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the assistance of the word of God and of the sacraments. They [the laity] should openly reveal to them [the pastors] their needs and desires with that freedom and confidence which is fitting for children of God and brothers in Christ. They are, by reason of the knowledge, competence or outstanding ability which they may enjoy, permitted and sometimes even obliged to express their opinion on those things which concern the good of the Church. [...] Let the spiritual shepherds recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church. Let them willingly employ their prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action. Further, let them encourage lay people so that they may undertake tasks on their own initiative. Attentively in Christ, let them consider with fatherly love the projects, suggestions and desires proposed by the laity. However, let the shepherds respectfully acknowledge that just freedom which belongs to everyone in this earthly city.

[...]

[38.] Each individual layman must stand before the world as a witness to the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus and a symbol of the living God. All the laity as a community and each one according to his ability must nourish the world with spiritual fruits. They must diffuse in the world that spirit which animates the poor, the meek, the peace makers—whom the Lord in the Gospel proclaimed as blessed. In a word, "Christians must be to the world what the soul is to the body."

These are beautiful passages from *Lumen gentium* dating from 50 years ago.

The teaching of the Council was taken up in the *Code of Canon Law*, so we see many of the same themes in the *Code of Canon Law*.

The *Code of Canon Law*, Book II on the People of God, Part I, The Christian Faithful (Canons 204 - 207), as well as Title I, The Obligations and Rights of All

the Christian Faithful (Canons 208 - 223) speak about the rights and obligations of the laity.

Canon 208: From their rebirth in Christ, there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality regarding dignity and action by which they all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ according to each one's own condition and function.

In the Code of Canon Law there is a series of Canons, from Canon 212 to Canon 223, which list the rights of the lay faithful.

Can. 212 §2. The Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires.

§3. According to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons.

Can. 213 The Christian faithful have the right to receive assistance from the sacred pastors out of the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the word of God and the sacraments.

Can. 214 The Christian faithful have the right to follow their own form of spiritual life so long as it is consonant with the doctrine of the Church.

Can. 215 The Christian faithful are at liberty freely to found and direct associations for purposes of charity or piety or for the promotion of the Christian vocation in the world...

Can. 216 ...All the Christian faithful have the right to promote or sustain apostolic action even by their own undertakings, according to their own state and condition. Nevertheless, no undertaking is to claim the name Catholic without the consent of competent ecclesiastical authority.

Can. 217 ...The Christian faithful have the right to a Christian education by which they are to be instructed properly to strive for the maturity of the human person and at the same time to know and live the mystery of salvation.

Can. 218 Those engaged in the sacred disciplines have a just freedom of inquiry and of expressing their opinion prudently on those matters in which they possess expertise, while observing the submission due to the magisterium of the Church.

Can. 219 All the Christian faithful have the right to be free from any kind of coercion in choosing a state of life.

Can. 221 §1. The Christian faithful can legitimately vindicate and defend the rights which they possess in the Church in the competent ecclesiastical forum according to the norm of law.

§2. The Christian faithful also have the right to be judged according to the precepts of the law applied with equity.

§3. The Christian faithful have the right not to be punished with canonical penalties except according to the norm of law.

After indicating the rights of the faithful, the *Code of Canon Law* lists the obligations of the faithful.

Can. 222 §1. The Christian faithful are obliged to assist with the needs of the Church ...

§2. They are also obliged to promote social justice and, mindful of the precept of the Lord, to assist the poor from their own resources.

Can. 223 §1. In exercising their rights, the Christian faithful... must take into account the common good of the Church, the rights of others, and their own duties toward others.

These are the rights of all the Christian faithful. The next series of canons speaks of the obligations and rights of the lay Christian faithful (Canons 224 - 231).

Can. 225 §1. Since, like all the Christian faithful, lay persons are designated by God for the apostolate through baptism and confirmation, they are bound ...to work so that the divine message of salvation is made known and accepted by all persons everywhere in the world.

This canon means that lay persons have an obligation to evangelize. It is not something they *may* do, it is something which is their duty to do. Evangelization is not the exclusive work of the ordained.

§2. ...They are also bound by a particular duty to imbue and perfect the order of temporal affairs with the spirit of the gospel and thus to give witness to Christ, especially in carrying out these same affairs and in exercising secular functions.

Can. 226 §1. According to their own vocation, those who live in the marital state are bound by a special duty to work through marriage and the family to build up

the people of God.

§2. Since they have given life to their children, parents have a most grave obligation and possess the right to educate them. Therefore, it is for Christian parents particularly to take care of the Christian education of their children ...

Can. 227 The lay Christian faithful have the right to have recognized that freedom which all citizens have in the affairs of the earthly city...

Can. 228 §1. Lay persons who are found suitable are qualified to be admitted by the sacred pastors to those ecclesiastical offices and functions which they are able to exercise according to the precepts of the law.

§2. Lay persons who excel in necessary knowledge, prudence, and integrity are qualified to assist the pastors of the Church as experts and advisors, even in councils according to the norm of law.

Can. 229 §1. Lay persons are bound by the obligation and possess the right to acquire knowledge of Christian doctrine appropriate to the capacity and condition of each in order for them to be able to live according to this doctrine, announce it themselves, defend it if necessary, and take their part in exercising the apostolate.

§2. They also possess the right to acquire that fuller knowledge of the sacred sciences which are taught in ecclesiastical universities and faculties or in institutes of religious sciences, by attending classes there and pursuing academic degrees.

§3. If the prescripts regarding the requisite suitability have been observed, they are also qualified to receive from legitimate ecclesiastical authority a mandate to teach the sacred sciences.

These are quotations from the *Code of Canon Law*. Many of these ideas from *Lumen gentium* and the *Code of Canon Law*, Pope Francis himself has taken up and expressed in the Encyclical Letter *Evangelii gaudium*, under the title “Other ecclesial challenges.” I think these observations are very important for the Church in Taiwan.

102. Lay people are, put simply, the vast majority of the people of God. The minority – ordained ministers – are at their service. There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church. [...] A clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular Churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive

clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making. Even if many are now involved in the lay ministries, this involvement is not reflected in a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political and economic sectors. It [lay ministry] often remains tied to tasks within the Church, without a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society. The formation of the laity and the evangelization of professional and intellectual life represent a significant pastoral challenge.

103. The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess. [...] We need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. Because “the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace” and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures.

104. Demands that the legitimate rights of women be respected, based on the firm conviction that men and women are equal in dignity, present the Church with profound and challenging questions which cannot be lightly evaded. [...] It can prove especially divisive if sacramental power is too closely identified with power in general. It must be remembered that when we speak of sacramental power “we are in the realm of function, not that of dignity or holiness”. The ministerial priesthood is one means employed by Jesus for the service of his people, yet our great dignity derives from baptism, which is accessible to all. [...] In the Church, functions “do not favour the superiority of some vis-à-vis the others”. Indeed, a woman, Mary, is more important than the bishops. [...]

Pope Francis speaks of youth ministry.

105. Youth ministry, as traditionally organized, has also suffered the impact of social changes. Young people often fail to find responses to their concerns, needs, problems and hurts in the usual structures. As adults, we find it hard to listen patiently to them, to appreciate their concerns and demands, and to speak to them in a language they can understand. For the same reason, our efforts in the field of education do not produce the results expected. [...]

106. ...Progress has been made in two areas: the awareness that the entire community is called to evangelize and educate the young, and the urgent need for the young to exercise greater leadership. We should recognize that despite the present crisis of commitment and communal relationships, many young people are making common cause before the problems of our world and are taking up various forms of activism and volunteer work. [...]

The teaching of the Church in *Lumen gentium*, the *Code of Canon Law*, and *Evangelii gaudium* form the basis of some of my own observations which I would now like to share about the Church in Taiwan.

As we all know, the number of Catholics in Taiwan has not increased and in the future, if current demographic trends continue, this number will decrease.

Sometimes there is an impression that the Church in Taiwan is old and tired and dying; other times there are communities which are very much alive and well-organized. I have a mixed impression of the Church in Taiwan; sometimes I have the impression that the Church is not doing well; other times there are things which are very bright and wonderful and the Church shows herself very much alive. We must work to vivify those areas which seem old and tired and promote those areas which are alive.

The Church in Taiwan is becoming increasingly more diverse. We are all aware of this diversity which must be respected. In addition to the aboriginals (40% of Catholics of Taiwan), those whose families have lived in Taiwan for a long period of time, and those who came from China 60 years ago, there are increasing numbers of Catholic immigrants. If Catholic immigrants were counted in official statistics, they would be approximately 30% of the Church in Taiwan. (Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Tainan Diocese is one example of this.) The immigrant community is growing and will continue to grow. And the presence of Catholic migrants brings life to the Church in Taiwan.

In Taiwan, the formation of Catholic laity is bearing fruit, but more progress needs to be made to develop lay spirituality and lay leadership.

In 2009, Fr Benoit Vermander S.J. wrote an article in an online periodical about the Church in Taiwan (“Taiwan’s Hidden Ground of Love” in *eRenlai Magazine*, 19 October 2009). He made four points which I think are very important and valuable.

First, I have seen the Taiwanese Catholic Church grow in quality, if not in quantity. From 1992 on, I have seen more and more laypeople following formation in theology and spirituality, enriching their prayer life, and addressing social challenges. I have seen a Church more diverse in its cultural and political opinions and in the ethnic origins of its leaders. I have seen a greater sensitivity to global challenges and to other Asian churches.

Second, I have the impression that the Church is still relying too much on the clergy, that the latter [the clergy] is still reluctant to abandon its power, and that not enough space is given to the creativity and diversity of Christian groups. More creativity and freedom are indispensable if the church wants to grow – or even simply to live more happily.

Third, I have been struck by the role played by individuals when they dare to play the role they feel called to fulfill. For instance, when layman or religious individuals decide to work toward more interaction between Taiwanese and Filipinos believers, to care for prisoners, or to develop aboriginal liturgies, he or she is quickly able to leave a mark, and often a deep one. So, what we need first and foremost are responsible, decisive individuals, anchored in a life of prayer, with a clear conscience of their gifts. We need individuals who work with tenacity and audacity to the realization of a goal that they deem to be meaningful.

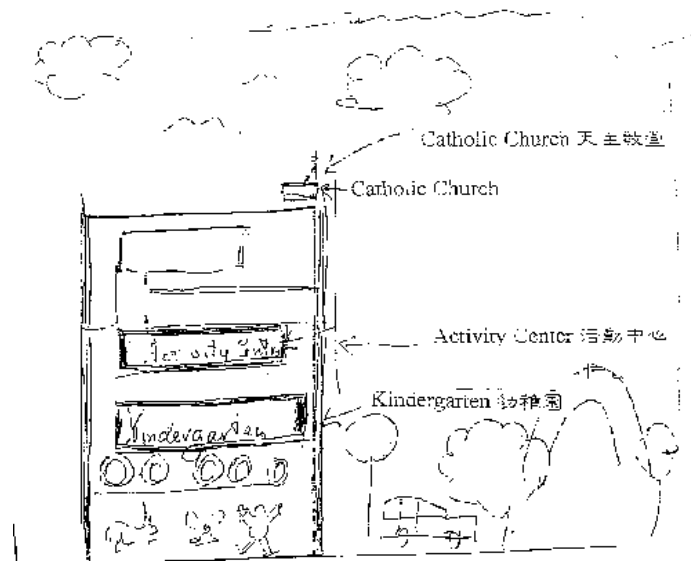
Fourth, the defects of the Church are often the ones of society at large. For instance, obsession with finances and with so-called “management” (often poorly done), along with a hierarchical structure of decision, are not shortcomings proper to the Church. Rather, they reflect how much the Church remains embedded in the values of the society she is called to evangelize. The Church is still not counter-cultural enough...

Very often the clergy still remain in firm control of decision-making in *mundane* matters – not *spiritual* matters – mundane matters such as finances and the maintenance of church buildings.

There is a danger for clerics to pretend to be lay – the laicization of the clergy – as well as for the laity to assume attitudes of clerics – the clericalization of the laity. I see in Taiwan many priests, for example, who do not wear – and refuse to wear – clerical attire because they feel that wearing clerical attire creates a distance between themselves and other people. But we know that wearing clerical attire not only does not create a distance, it creates closeness between the priest and other people. Fr Santos and I often take the MRT [public transportation] and people often stop us to speak with us; if we were dressed in lay attire, no one would stop to speak with us. On the other hand, in Taiwan there are many lay people who are very solicitous to always wear a cross. The lay people want to proclaim publicly their faith. Bishops and priests have their own proper role. The laity have their own proper role. We need to re-read our Church documents to remain on a firm foundation of understanding. Clerics and lay people each have an inherent dignity. It is rather not that the laity are at the service of clerics, but clerics are at the

service of the laity. Pope Francis emphasizes in many different contexts that the Bishops and priests are at the service of the laity.

- There is a danger for bishops and priests to get caught up in temporal affairs, more properly the domain of the laity. Fortunately or unfortunately, the reality is that the Church in Taiwan is very heavily institutional. The Church in Taiwan has very many institutions: universities, colleges, high schools, kindergartens, hospitals.
- I often have the impression that Church leadership in Taiwan is more focused on mundane matters rather than spiritual realities. I base this judgment on my experience over the number of years I have been here and on the number of mundane issues brought to the Nunciature for attention, including administrative matters and financial administration in various Catholic institutions. If I must spend so much time and energy on such mundane matters – those that rise to the level of the Nunciature – I can only imagine how much more time and energy you Bishops must have to spend on such matters. There is something wrong.
- Someone sent me a cartoon which I would like to share with you. This cartoon is an exaggeration, but captures something of the reality of the Church in Taiwan. Sometimes I have an impression that we give great amounts of our time, energy and effort to administrative and financial activities, and the spiritual is reduced to something rather small.



In many of the churches today, the 1st floor is a garage, 2nd floor is a kindergarten school, 3rd floor is an activity center, and the top most floor is the church. Which is our priority: the Church or earning money from the kindergarten school?

- Time spent by bishops and priests on temporal affairs – which we never do very well anyway because we are not trained in this area – is time taken away from prayer and the ministry of the word – the areas of our true expertise. The Apostles faced this issue and decided to commission “men of good repute” and ordain them deacons. It is not time for deacons in Taiwan, but it is time for qualified lay people to take this burden off of us. Otherwise we are left with a distorted image of the Church. I say this as an encouragement, not as a condemnation.

Involvement of Bishops and the clergy in mundane, temporal affairs is the worst use of our time and the worst service Bishops and clergy can give to the faithful. God did not call us to our vocation and endow us with spiritual power through the laying on of hands to be financial administrators of mundane, temporal matters. God called us to be shepherds, true pastors and to be instruments of spiritual graces. We must re-focus on what is properly ours. We have to free ourselves from this burden.

Maybe we can find some concrete suggestions for ways forward.

There needs to be deeper catechesis and faith formation of the laity. Perhaps this can be accomplished through conferences or short-duration retreats (not necessarily reserved to those who are baptized) characterized by a welcoming and spiritual atmosphere. Special attention also needs to be paid to the burning issues of the day: social issues such as proposed “same-sex” marriage; medical and ethical issues such as euthanasia and various other medical technologies; and how to conduct business in a Christian way.

Bishops need to be teachers of the faith. As guardians of the Catholic faith, bishops have the duty to preach and remind and teach and explain the full teaching of the Church, the totality of the faith, what the Church believes and proposes. Otherwise people will remain ignorant, or pick and choose. Lay people need deeper catechesis and faith formation. The Church in Taiwan needs to pay more attention to this area.

Your dioceses are small; you have many opportunities to speak with your priests; please use these opportunities to form your priests so that they can be good shepherds to their people.

You need to use your own structures and organization. For example, in your Bishops' Conference, you Bishops are Presidents of various Commissions. But there are Commissions or sections within Commissions which are working only nominally or are not working effectively for lack of qualified staff and financial resources. One particular challenge is the Commission for the Doctrine of the Faith and Catechetical Instruction and the Commission for Education and Culture. Every now and then, something happens which shows that there is something wrong in the areas of faith and education. Sometimes speakers are invited from abroad or from within Taiwan to give presentations, conferences or workshops, but the speakers do not support and sometimes even undermine the teaching of the Church. The speakers do not present the Church's teaching, but their own ideas. I can think of several concrete examples. You Bishop-Presidents of the Commissions need to see that your respective Commissions should have a qualified and dedicated Executive Secretary or Secretary and are functioning well.

The promotion of bible study among Catholics is also very important, but you must develop the correct resources. Many countries have developed fine resources, but the problem in Taiwan is that it is not easy for you to use these resources because you have to translate them into Chinese.

Another important issue is the careful selection of seminarians and their formation. Candidates for priesthood must be selected well. And once they are selected, they must be given the tools they need to be effective preachers and teachers of the faith in contemporary society. This past week the Nunciature sponsored a workshop on canon law relating to the process for determining a declaration of nullity of marriage, the processes for a dissolution of the bond in *favor fidei* and in marriages which have been ratified but not consummated. We sought to bring healing to those in broken marriages. We have to help people pick up the broken pieces of their lives. But what is needed more is proper marriage formation to prevent broken marriages. We need to help spouses have good, solid marriages. The Church in Taiwan needs a young generation of priests who are able to address effectively all the contemporary social and moral issues. Priests have to be able to help the lay people so that the lay people can address these issues.

There needs to be formation in proper leadership. The laity has a need to learn how to make personal decisions as morally responsible people who are reflective and prayerful. The laity also needs to know how to make community decisions among the various choices which touch our common life as a Church. The laity needs more concrete indications about how to live together the life of faith in Christian community.

This is about the inner life. For the inner life, the laity needs faith formation and spiritual formation. Many things must occur before this can happen.

Once the laity has this inner life, then this inner life can be shared. Evangelization flows from the inner life.

There needs to be more reflection on different levels on strategies of evangelization in Taiwan. Catholics run the risk of adopting a ghetto mentality and becoming self-referential – closed-in. Catholics need to leave behind this feeling of being a tiny minority with its tendency to remain closed in on self. Catholics, when they know who they are, are then willing to share “the hope that is in them”. Once Catholics know the faith, then they can then share the message of Jesus confidently and respectfully. Catholics need to interact with civil society in a joyful and confident manner. This is the only way to make Taiwan’s largely non-Christian and non-Catholic population appreciate the values which come forth from faith and the contribution that the Church is making in Taiwan. This is not primarily the responsibility of the Bishops. The Bishops’ responsibility is to encourage lay Catholics to devise and undertake projects to further integrate the Church in civil society. Obviously the laity must be empowered and given true responsibility. The Bishops responsibility is to empower the laity and give them true responsibility.

Thank you for your attention.

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Six Announcements

1. Holy Communion for Anglican students at the faculty of theology

Holy Communion has both a ‘vertical’ aspect – it is communion with God – and a ‘horizontal’ aspect – it is communion with the pope, bishops, and other Catholics.

In the Catholic understanding, communion is a communion in faith; we all believe the same things. It is a communion in morals; everyone who receives communion should be in the state of grace and not in mortal sin. It is a communion in governance; in the Eucharistic Prayer, we pray ‘in communion with our pope and bishop’; there is a hierarchical communion; those who receive acknowledge themselves to be under the spiritual authority of the pope and local bishop. Reception of Holy Communion is a sign of an already achieved unity in faith, morals and governance. Receiving communion is not about nice feelings, but about coherence in belief. The faculty of theology should have good, clear theology.

2. Translation of documents

The translation of Church documents into Chinese has been a difficult issue. The Holy See has entrusted your Bishops’ Conference with the translation of Church documents. I quote the 1 August 2014 letter from Archbishop Hon to Archbishop Hung: ‘It would be very useful if the Chinese Regional Bishops Conference, together with the dioceses of Hong Kong Macau, gather a team of good and qualified translators (who have studied theology and translation) and, at the same time, establish a <translation fund>. Whenever the Holy Father or the Church publishes a document in need of being translated, it could be given to these persons, who would proceed with the translation in a professional way and in a reasonably short time. The translators would be paid from the <translation fund>.[...] You have been providing this service in the past. For example, the *Code of Canon Law* was translated by Bishop Wang, who did an excellent job.

3. Digitalization of sacramental data

There are concerns about the web-based digitalization of sacramental data. You have an answer from Rome. You have to keep sacramental data in the traditional way. Digitalization cannot replace sacramental records. There are many problems with digitalization. There is the potential for the system to be hacked. One good solar flare will destroy all digital data. The best way to keep sacramental records is in a book, in handwriting, in ink. There is a reason for the tradition of the Church. The intention behind the digitalization of sacramental data is good, but it cannot replace the traditional way.

The parish archive is very important. Priests should realize that keeping sacramental records is not about paper, but about people. Keeping good

sacramental records is a profound act of charity towards people. If a person cannot find his or her sacrament records, they face enormous difficulties. Priests should be reminded of this and it should be taught to the seminarians. Priests should be encouraged to keep accurate and clear sacramental records. The writing must be legible. The *Code of Canon Law* foresees that the Vicars Forane – the Deans of the different regions – make regular parish visitations and one of the responsibilities of the Deans is to inspect parish sacramental records. The Vicars Forane have a responsibility to ensure that the things you are describing never occur. To throw out sacramental records is a sin. It is a tremendous disservice to those people whose records were preserved in those books. As for digitalization, if you can find a way to keep them securely, you are not forbidden from doing that; but digitalization cannot replace the traditional way.

4. The National Eucharistic Congress

I have a letter from Archbishop Piero Marini, President of the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses, about your National Eucharistic Congress. He asked me to express to Archbishop Hung and to Bishop Lee and to the organizers of the event his gratitude for the care with which the event was planned and executed. He asks me to express his satisfaction and heartfelt thanks and the thanks of the Pontifical Committee for the hard work with which the Congress was prepared and for the intense participation of the clergy and the faithful during the various celebrative moments. Good job!

5. Marriage

We just concluded the week-long course for canonists on healing failed marriages. As the course concluded, last Sunday, we were with Father Al Doyle to inaugurate the Catholic singles' website. This is an initiative to help Catholics in Taiwan find other Catholics to marry. I think this is a fine initiative and I encourage it. If we are to have good, strong Catholic life in Taiwan, we need good, strong Catholic families. The statistics are not good. Because Catholics in Taiwan comprise only 1% of the population, it is very difficult for a Catholic to find a Catholic marriage partner. About 73% of Catholics in Taiwan marry non-Catholics. According to one study, over half of these Catholics in mixed marriages are estranged from the Church; 34% become less than fervent, attending mass only monthly; only 15% remain fervent; only one out of three children in these mixed marriages are baptized. The same study shows that in Catholic marriages only 9% are estranged from the church; 28% attend mass only monthly; 63% remain fervent; 94% of their

children are baptized. Catholic singles in Taiwan hope to find a Catholic marriage partner and many would welcome help from the Church in doing so. For this reason, I support this initiative and wish its success. We need to promote marriage between Catholics and help our Catholic singles find a Catholic marriage partner.

6. Gender issues

Along this same line of thought, Taiwan is facing increasing pressure from homosexual groups to legalize so-called same-sex marriage. Society is also facing other gender-related issues. Because some recent words of the pope have been taken out of context and misquoted, I would like to share with you some letters written by the pope when he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires. The first is a letter from Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio to Dr Justo Carbajales, Director of the Department of the Laity of the Episcopal Conference of Argentina; he writes: “The essence of being human tends to the union of man and woman as reciprocal realization, attention and care, and as the natural way of procreation. This confers on marriage a social transcendence and public character. Marriage predates the state, is the base of the family, the cell of society, and predates any legislation and even the Church itself. Hence the adoption of the bill in question [legalizing marriage for persons of the same sex] would signify a real and grave anthropological setback. Marriage (composed of male and female) is not the same as the union of two persons of the same sex to distinguish is not to discriminate but to respect; to differentiate, to discern, is to value with propriety, not to discriminate.”

To the Carmelite Nuns, Cardinal Bergoglio wrote (22 June 2010): “The identity of the family, and its survival, are in jeopardy here: and father, mother, and children. The life of so many children who will be discriminated beforehand due to the lack of human maturity that God willed them to have with a father and a mother is in jeopardy. [...] Here, the envy of the devil, through which sin entered the world, is also present, and deceitfully intends to destroy the image of God: man and woman, who received the mandate to grow, multiply, and conquer the earth. Let us not be naïve: it is not a simple political struggle; it is an intention which is destructive of the plan of God. It is not a mere legislative project (this is a mere instrument), but rather a <move> of the father of lies who wishes to confuse and deceive the children of God.” From these texts, we can see that the Pope’s position on this issue is very clear.