

PRESENTATION OF THE MOTU PROPRIO "APOSTOLATUS PERAGENDI"

With the **Motu Proprio Apostolatus Peragendi**, the Supreme Pontiff gives the **Consilium de Laicis** a permanent and clearly defined form, at the expiry of its experimental period. As will easily be gathered from a reading of the document, this form is in many ways new and very different from the previous one, which had existed since the setting up of the **Consilium** in January 1967.

For a better understanding of the form and tasks of the restructured Council, there follow a number of indications of the main aspects conferred on it by the dispositions of the **Motu Proprio**.

1. One notes first of all two alterations in the name.

The **Consilium** is given the title **Pontificium**. This is intended to mean that the Council assumes a different position in the Roman Curia: it acquires, over and above the simple consultative function it has had until now, a much wider function, linked to the **potestas ordinis et jurisdictionis**, referred to in Article II of the **Motu Proprio**, and therefore a function of participation in the **regimen Ecclesiae** in matters regarding the life and activity of the laity.

The title **de Laicis** is also changed to **pro Laicis**. This new form expresses a greater similarity between the Pontifical Council and the Sacred Congregations, all of which have the preposition **pro** to indicate their service to the Bishops, Clergy, Religious, etc.

2. There are more notable changes with regard to its structure, with a view to fitting it better for dealing with the tasks assigned to it.

A first change is the setting up of a Presidential Office. Its task is to decide the questions of greater importance dealt with in the Council. It will be presided over by the President of the Council and formed by three Cardinals and also the Secretary.

A second change, stemming from the fact that the Cardinal President resides in Rome, is the suppression of the post of Vice-President. The latter is an exception to the norms of **Regimini**

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Ecclesiae Universae, for cases where Presidents reside outside Rome. As in the Departments of the Curia, the Secretary becomes the second authority.

The Members (who will also include some Bishops and other ecclesiastics) will meet in Plenary Session in Rome once a year. The Consultors on the other hand will not do so, but, as in the case of the other bodies of the Curia, will normally assist with written opinions.

3. The most significant innovation in the Council, however, is on the level of its spheres of competence.

The Pontifical Council is competent not only for the apostolate carried out by the laity (individual and collective), but also for the orientation of their lives as lay Christians and for the application of the ecclesiastical laws that concern them.

The *Motu Proprio* then indicates some particular instances of this competence: encouraging the laity to a more dynamic participation in the Church's life and mission; orienting and where necessary promoting apostolic initiatives; dealing with questions concerning organizations for the apostolate or spirituality of lay people, on the international or national level, pious associations, the Third Orders, etc.; encouraging a more effective presence of lay people in the Church's liturgical, catechetical, sacramental and educational activity; watching over correct observance of the ecclesiastical laws regarding the laity and assisting in resolving by administrative means conflicts involving lay people; supervision of the organic collaboration of lay people in Pastoral Councils.

The vast field in which the competence of the Pontifical Council for the Laity will be exercised will very often touch upon the competence of many Departments of the Roman Curia. The Council will therefore constantly have to harmonize its action with them in an exchange that must become ever more close and intense.

4. The question of the Committee for the Family receives special attention in the *Motu Proprio Apostolatus Peragendi*. In view of the fact that family questions are in a profound sense lay questions, the Holy Father has decided that the Committee for the Family, which he set up in January 1973, should be attached to the new Pontifical Council for the Laity. Thus, while preserving its own form, specific structure and identity, the Committee for the Family is inserted into the Council for the Laity, sharing the same President.