



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF CHAD
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 2 October 2014

Dear Brother Bishops,

It is a great joy to welcome you to the Vatican on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit. I cordially thank Bishop Jean-Claude Bouchard, President of your Bishops' Conference, for the words that he addressed to me. This regular pilgrimage of Bishops from the entire world to the Tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul is a particularly significant occasion in order to experience collegiality. Not only does it demonstrate and strengthen the bonds of communion with the Successor of Peter, but it also recalls the brotherly solicitude that each Bishop must have for the other Particular Churches, above all for those located in the same country. I express the hope that you will return to your dioceses strengthened in the conviction that you are not alone in your difficult and demanding mission, but that you have beside you brothers who share the same concern to proclaim the Gospel and to serve the Church in Chad, and also the certainty that the Pope, with the entire universal Church, remembers you in his prayers and encourages you in your ministry.

I would like first and foremost to thank you for the work of evangelization that you are doing. Your communities are growing, not only in terms of numbers but also with regard to the quality and the strength of their commitment. I truly rejoice at the work accomplished in the areas of education, health and development. Besides, the civil authorities are very grateful to the Catholic Church for her contribution to the entire society of Chad. I encourage you to persevere on this path for there is a profound connection between evangelization and human advancement, a link which must find expression and develop in every work of evangelization (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 178). Service to the poor and to the weakest is a true witness rendered to Christ who made himself poor to come close to us and save us. Religious congregations, as well as the laity who work with them, play an important role in this area, for which we sincerely thank them.

It is certain, however, that this commitment to social work cannot alone exhaust the entire work of evangelization; a deepening and rooting the faith in the heart of the faithful — which means a genuine spiritual and sacramental life — are essential if it is to withstand today's numerous trials and in order that the faithful's conduct conform more closely to the demands of the Gospel, enabling them to advance toward true holiness. This is particularly true in a country where the influence of some cultural traditions is very strong, where less morally challenging religious proposals appear everywhere, and where secularization is gaining ground.

It is therefore important that the faithful be firmly formed from the doctrinal and spiritual point of view: the first sphere of this formation is undoubtedly catechetics. I urge you, in a renewed missionary spirit, to update the catechetical methods used in your dioceses. On the one hand, what is good in your cultural traditions must be taken into consideration and enhanced — because Christ did not come to abolish cultures but to bring them to fulfillment (cf. [*General Audience Catechesis, 20 August 2014*](#)) — and on the other, what is not Christian must be openly denounced. At the same time, it is crucial to ensure the accuracy and thoroughness of the doctrinal content of these paths. Such content is expressed clearly in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, to which every formation syllabus should refer.

The concern to provide a quality catechesis necessarily raises the issue of the formation of catechists. They are quite numerous in your dioceses and their role in proclaiming the faith is irreplaceable. Please convey to them my most profound encouragement. The catechist must be properly trained not only intellectually — which is absolutely crucial — but also humanly and spiritually, in order that, as Christ's true witness, his or her teaching may actually bear fruit. Maybe every diocese should have a training centre for catechists, which, in general, could serve in the long term for the on-going training of the laity? In fact, the work of evangelization among the faithful must be continually repeated and deepened.

This is also true with regard to families, who form the “vital cell of society and of the Church” ([*Africae Munus*](#), n. 42) and which are so weakened today. I advise you — but I know you already do so — to pay special attention to them; they need your guidance, your teaching, your protection. And, in the bosom of the family, it is important that the role and the dignity of the woman be valued, in a way that bears an eloquent witness to the Gospel. It is thus fitting that, in this area, “the conduct of the members of the Church be a model for society as a whole” (cf. [*Africae Munus*](#), n. 56).

Lastly, the fruitfulness and the soundness of evangelization certainly depend on the preparation of the clergy. I extend to all the priests my most affectionate greetings. Of course, their task is difficult, often carried out in basic, lonely conditions. So as to support them in their mission, and to ensure that their ministry among the faithful bear fruit, it is important to offer a good formation in the seminaries. I know what an investment — of funds and of people — this is for a diocese. But I highly recommend that you make a concerted effort to choose and train stable and competent

professors. Do not hesitate to commit yourselves personally, visiting the seminaries yourselves, showing you are close to the professors and to the seminarians, the better to appreciate the wealth and understand the short-comings of the syllabus in order to confirm the former and remedy the latter.

Regarding the permanent formation of the clergy, at the diocesan level, in order that everyone may participate, it is certainly necessary to review and remember the needs of the priestly life in all of its aspects — spiritual, intellectual, moral, pastoral, liturgical... — as well as to engender a sincere and enthusiastic fraternal priesthood.

Dear Brother Bishops, the Church in Chad, notwithstanding her growth and vitality, is clearly in the minority amid a population with a Muslim majority and which is still partly attached to its traditional forms of worship. I encourage you to see that the Church, which is respected and listened to, totally retain her rightful place in the society of Chad in which she has become a structural component even where she is a minority. In such a context, I cannot but encourage you to further interreligious dialogue, so happily begun by the late Archbishop Mathias N’Gartéri Mayadi of N’Djamena, who strove so hard to promote the coexistence of the different religious communities. I think that similar initiatives should be continued in order to discourage the development of the violence which victimizes Christians in some of your neighbouring countries. Furthermore it is very important to maintain the good relations you have established with the civil authorities, which facilitated the recent signing of a *Framework Agreement* between the Holy See and the Republic of Chad, which, once ratified, will greatly help the Church’s mission. May you be able to implement this *Agreement* fully, for a greater spread of the Gospel!

With this hope, entrusting all of you, besides the priests, consecrated people, catechists and all the faithful lay people of your dioceses, to the protection of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, and to the intercession of St John Paul II, I wholeheartedly impart the Apostolic Blessing.