Francis: Don't gossip about the synod!
Pray for it

Joshua J. McElwee | Mar. 25, 2015 The Francis Chronicles

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Pope Francis has asked Catholics around the world -- at every level of the church -- to stay away from gossiping about the upcoming Synod on the Family and to instead pray fervently that it will result in a church more committed to witnessing God's love for all.

"There is not need of gossip!" the pope insisted strongly while talking about the synod during his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square Wednesday. "Everyone -- pope, cardinals, bishops, priests, religious, and lay faithful -- we are all called to pray for the synod."

Inviting those in the square and Catholics around the world to say such prayers "with holy insistence," Francis asked that the prayers "may be animated by the compassion of the Good Shepherd for his flock, especially for persons and families who for various reasons are troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd."

The prayers, he continued, should be offered so that the church "will be yet more committed, and yet more united, in the witness of the truth of God's love and mercy for the families of the world."

Summarizing that witness of truth, the pontiff defined it as: "That no one is excluded, may they be inside or outside the sheepfold."

Francis was speaking Wednesday in his audience about two global meetings of Catholic bishops at the Vatican he has called for 2014 and 2015, known as synods. The 2014 meeting was held last October; this year's meeting will be held this October.

The meetings -- which the pope has oriented towards addressing contemporary issues of family life -- are known to be addressing topics sometimes considered controversial in the church, such as divorce and remarriage and same-sex marriage.

Some -- including even cardinals -- have publicly expressed concerns about the pope's agenda or hope for the synods.

The Vatican on Wednesday also announced that Francis has ratified the elections of prelates from bishops' conferences around the world to participate in next October's meeting, confirming another 53 prelates to take part.

The pope is confirming the election of prelates taking part in the synod in several batches, the first of which was announced Jan. 31 with the confirmation of 48 prelates.

That initial confirmation included four representatives from the U.S.: Louisville, Ky., Archbishop Joseph Kurtz; Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput; Galveston-Houston Cardinal Daniel DiNardo; and Los Angeles Archbishop José Gómez.

Francis was addressing the synod meetings Wednesday in his audience as part of a wider reflection, centered on the fact that March 25 is the day celebrated in the Catholic church as the feast of the annunciation -- when Mary is said to have been told by an Angel of God that she would miraculously bear a child.

The story of the annunciation, the pontiff said, "shows us how profoundly the mystery of the incarnation -- as God wanted it -- included not only the conception in the womb of the mother, but also the reception in a real family."
Mentioning also that March 25 marks the publication date of Pope John Paul II's 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, which focuses partly on family life, Francis said: "The bond between the church and the family is sacred and inviolable."

"The church, as a mother, never abandons the family, even when she is disheartened, hurt and defeated in many ways," said the pope. "Even when it falls into sin, or moves away from the Church; it will always do all to search to cure it and heal it, to invite it to conversion and to reconcile with the Lord."

Francis then said the church needs prayer to fulfill that mission, "prayer full of love for the family and for life" and "prayer that knows to rejoice with those who rejoice and suffer with those who suffer."

Tying that mission to the synod, the pontiff then asked all Catholics to pray for the upcoming synod using a prayer to the Holy Family that asks partly that families "never again experience violence" and that "all who have been hurt or scandalized find ready comfort and healing."

The pope invited all to make the prayer for the synod, "even those who feel distant, or that they are no longer used to doing this."

"I ask you all, please do not miss making your prayer," he said. "This prayer for the synod on the family is for the good of all."

In separate remarks to different language groups at the audience, Francis reinforced that Catholics should not gossip about the synod and renewed his call that governments find ways to provide work for those unemployed.

During Spanish language remarks about the synod, the pontiff said bluntly that he wanted "prayers, not gossip!"

In remarks to Italian speakers that reinforced his message in a trip over the weekend to Naples, where he spoke about youth unemployment, the pope said the "logic of solidarity and justice" should not be overcome by the "logic of profit."

Saying it was an injustice when people are not allowed "the dignity of work," Francis implored: "Please, let's fight for this: The justice of work. We must fight for this."

Francis' confirmation Wednesday of prelates taking part in the synod included 19 prelates from Africa; 11 from Central and South America; 11 from Asia and the Middle East; and three from Russia, Belarus, and Croatia.

From Europe, the pontiff confirmed three prelates from Germany, one from Scotland, one from Portugal, one from the Czech Republic and one from Switzerland.

The pope also confirmed the election of two prelates from the Syro-Malabar community, a Syrian rite in full communion with Rome that is based in India.

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