



Bringing the Gospel to the Streets

Vatican Council Offers Recommendations

VATICAN CITY, NOV. 5, 2009 (Zenit.org).- The power of the Gospel finds unique expression when it is proclaimed on the streets, according to the Vatican's council on migrants and travelers.

This power and the challenges of proclaiming the Gospel to those who live or work on the streets was the subject of the 1st Integrated European Meeting for the Pastoral Care of the Road/Street. The meeting was held at the Vatican last month.

In the final document, dated Oct. 24, the pontifical council offers 57 conclusions and 51 recommendations. These are divided into the various situations this ministry encompasses: those who work on the roads and railways; prostitutes, or the "women of the streets"; children of the street; and the homeless.

As the first conclusion of the conference, the pontifical council statement affirmed: "The pastoral care of the road is a prophetic witness in that it is often unstructured and does not necessarily require specific services or institutions to bring the message of salvation. In many ways the Gospel expresses all its power when it returns to the streets, from where it was originally born."

The council assured that a "journey of faith" is "possible and desirable" for those who suffer, especially on the streets. The obstacle to this evangelization, it said, is often "our own fears."

Support

Regarding those who work on the streets -- truck drivers, railway engineers, etc. -- the pontifical council noted the challenges that come with irregular working hours and long absences from home.

This, "together with restricted or failed social contacts and friendships represent an enormous strain upon many drivers. It is quite frequent for them to attempt to cope with these frustrating situations with excess coffee, energy drinks or by taking pills," the council observed. "Some even become addicted to alcohol or narcotic drugs."

The pontifical council noted regarding street children that unfortunately "new forms" of this phenomenon are arising, "due to the breakdown of family life and increased mobility."

"The Church is uniquely placed to advocate for a changed vision of street children against stereotypes within her own communities and society at large," it affirmed.

The council said it is key for people to see beyond the "criminal element that often characterizes these children" and instead see them as youth with possibilities.

"Education and support can take place in the very society that has excluded many of these children," the statement advised.

Seeking encounter

As a recommendation, the council contended that the Church "needs to find new and imaginative places in which she can meet with drivers -- places of encounter and prayer where people on the move may receive spiritual nourishment."

It suggested mobile or fixed chapels along motorways and the promotion of wayside shrines.

"The development of Christian radio stations is also to be encouraged," the council stated.

It added, "The pastoral care of the families of those who are absent on the roads and railways for long periods should not be forgotten. The familial relationships of drivers are subject to particular strains."

The council recommended "leisure time spent together" for these families, as an "ideal opportunity to reflect upon one's own family circumstances and to exchange views with other families in similar situations."

Regarding the homeless, the council urged pastors to be mindful of those who live on the streets of their parish.

"It is important to emphasize that homeless people belong to any given parish in which they are present," the Vatican council affirmed. "They have right to the ordinary pastoral care offered and to participation in whatever way possible in any territory. The right to a Christian burial, if they are Catholic faithful, and to subsequently be remembered in prayer should not be forgotten."