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1st General Congregation
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**PRESENTATION OF THE REPORTS OF THE 10 WORKING GROUPS
ESTABLISHED BY POPE FRANCIS**

Group 1

«Some aspects of the relations between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church» (SR 6)

THEME

In recent decades, many Eastern Catholic faithful have left their historical territories of origin (Middle East, Ukraine, Caucasus, Eritrea and Ethiopia, etc.). The process has intensified in recent years, with emigration still influenced by various factors, in particular wars, political unrest and economic instability. This has created numerous situations and challenges within the so-called “diaspora”, which directly and in some ways unprecedentedly involve the relationship between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church. The Eastern Catholic Churches have asked the Holy Father to erect their own ecclesiastical circumscriptions for the diaspora, but the vastness of the territories and, often, the scarcity of clergy render them unable to resolve the problem.

All this takes place in the ecclesial context characterized by the Second Vatican Council. The Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* and other relevant subsequent documents, first of all the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, as well as many ordinary magisterial pronouncements of the Pontiffs, are unanimous in exhorting all Eastern faithful to “preserve their legitimate rites and their discipline” (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 6), inviting the entire ecclesial community to protect this constitutive and irreplaceable heritage that belongs to the identity of the entire Catholic Church. The responsibility for these faithful thus falls increasingly also on the Latin episcopate. However, in the contemporary diaspora context, the majority of Latin faithful still struggle to understand and accept different ritual traditions. Indeed, for many Catholics, and not only lay people, the richness given to the Catholic Church by the encounter between Western and Eastern Christian traditions and which stands out in the communion of numerous Churches *sui iuris*, remains unknown; “Catholic” is often mistakenly understood as an exclusive equivalent of “Latin” or “Roman.”

In light of these premises, several issues require attention. For instance, the requests for “transfers of ecclesial ascription” i.e., the “Latinization” of Eastern faithful; the concession of bi-ritualism to Eastern priests, who are often called to replace the increasingly fewer Latin

clergy, effectively abandoning ministry in their own Churches of origin and even incardinating in the Dioceses where they serve and by which they are generously compensated; adaptations to the Latin rite in order to enter institutes of consecrated life in the Latin Church; the difficulties of cultural integration; the need for a specific catechesis addressed to the faithful; questions related to the territory, jurisdiction and mission of the Eastern Catholic Churches.

Precisely to facilitate the understanding and resolution of these problems, Group 1 proposes to examine carefully the question of the *pastoral care of Eastern Catholics in the diaspora*, especially those who are without their own Ordinary.

This work is intended to flow into a document of the Holy See, prepared by the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches and addressed by the Holy Father to the Latin Bishops, containing some guidelines on these aspects. As Pope Francis stated when addressing the same Dicastery in the speech given on 27 June to the participants in the assembly of the Reunion of Aid Agencies for the Oriental Churches (R.O.A.C.O.): “Today, many Eastern Christians, perhaps more than ever before, are fleeing conflicts or migrating in search of work and better living conditions. Many, therefore, are living in the diaspora. I know that you have reflected on the pastoral care of those residing outside their traditional territory. This is a timely and significant problem. Some Churches, due to the massive migrations of recent decades, now have most of their faithful living outside their traditional territory, in places where pastoral care is often lacking due to the scarcity of priests, structures, and adequate training. As a result, those who have already had to leave their native lands behind, now also risk losing their religious identity and, with the passing of generations, the spiritual heritage of the East, an invaluable treasure for the Catholic Church, is weakened. I am grateful to the Latin dioceses that welcome Eastern Christians and that respect their traditions. I urge them to show particular concern, so that these, our brothers and sisters, may keep their rites alive and flourishing. I encourage the Dicastery to work to this end, also by establishing principles and norms that can help Latin bishops to aid the Eastern Catholics living in the diaspora”.

METHODOLOGY

In view of organizing periodic meetings for the drafting of the aforementioned document, which will first highlight the reasons why the Catholic Church considers it essential to value and conserve the heritage and ritual identity of the Eastern faithful, the group began by considering various issues, articulated in a questionnaire, to which the members were invited to respond. Here are some of the 25 questions posed: what is required of Latin Bishops with respect to Eastern faithful present in the territory of their dioceses and without their own Hierarchy, or to help an Eastern Pastor who struggles to reach his faithful? What forms of collaboration are possible and appropriate in a territory where there are multiple rites? What mutual knowledge exists and how can this be improved? How can canonical legislation be applied, deepened or improved to promote the pastoral care of Eastern Catholics in the diaspora? What is the role of the Holy See in all this?

Each member of the group was invited to respond to the questionnaire by September, so as to proceed in an authentically synodal participatory manner to address issues that are not easy to resolve, the careful examination of which precludes the precise establishment, at the present time, of stages and timing of an itinerary that, started within the synodal context, will continue under the care of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches.

Once the responses to the questionnaire have been collected, catalogued and possibly integrated, the group will meet and the various parts of a first outline of the document will be entrusted to various specialists. The group itself will then specifically review the resulting draft. Subsequently, a Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches will convene to examine the draft and outline the final process in order to submit the text to the Holy Father.