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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 5

**Some Theological and Canonical Matters
Regarding Specific Ministerial Forms (SR 8 and 9)**

1. In dialogue with the General Secretariat for the Synod, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith has decided to proceed with drafting a document on the topic assigned to Study Group 5.

To develop the theme of the place of women in the Church and their participation in decision-making processes and the leadership of communities, the Dicastery will consider and study the following subjects in the document: the specificity of sacramental power; the relationship between sacramental power (especially that which derives from the capacity to administer the Eucharist) and the ecclesial ministries needed for the care and growth of God's Holy People with a view to mission; the origin of ministries; the charismatic dimension of life of the Church; ecclesial functions and ministries that do not require the Sacrament of Holy Orders; Holy Orders as a commitment to service; and the problems arising from an erroneous conception of ecclesial authority.

Particular space will be dedicated to returning to and taking up again some of Pope Francis' own insights, particularly from *Evangelii Gaudium*, 103-104, *Querida Amazonia*, 99-103, and *Antiquum Ministerium*, 3.

2. In the context of this broader reflection on sacramental power, ecclesial ministries, and the charismatic dimension of the Church, it will become easier to give proper attention to the pressing issue of women's participation in the life and leadership of the Church. This includes the question of women's access to the diaconate.

Regarding the latter topic, we would like to share from the outset that, based on the analysis conducted so far—which also takes into account the work done by the two Commissions established by Pope Francis on the female diaconate (the most useful conclusions of which will

be made known in the final version of the document)—the Dicastery judges that there is still no room for a positive decision by the Magisterium regarding the access of women to the diaconate, understood as a degree of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The Holy Father himself recently confirmed this consideration publicly. In any event, the Dicastery judges that the opportunity to continue the work of in-depth study remains open.

3. Even so, the study conducted so far by the Dicastery has set out a particularly interesting way forward: to analyze in depth the lives of some women who—in both the early and recent history of the Church—have exercised genuine authority and power in support of the Church’s mission. This authority or power was not tied to sacramental consecration, as would be in the case, at least today, with diaconal ordination. This is true. Yet, in some cases, one can perceive that it was an “exercise” of power and authority that was of great value and was fruitful for the vitality of the People of God. Therefore, it is a matter of completing a reflection on the expansion of the Church’s ministerial dimension in light of her charismatic dimension, to suggest the recognition of charisms or the establishment of roles of ecclesial service that—while not directly connected to sacramental power—are rooted in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

In this way, the Dicastery intends undertake a closer study of the lives of such figures as Matilda of Canossa, with her energetic support of the papacy; Hildegard of Bingen, with her soaring displays of polyhedral genius, her administration of a monastic community, and her intense pastoral work; Bridget of Sweden, with her constant concern for those who are most poor; Catherine of Siena, with her bold evangelical *parresia*; Joan of Arc, with her generous commitment to her people; Teresa of Ávila, with her contribution to the Catholic Reformation and mysticism; Juana Inés de la Cruz, with her political and literary influence; Mama Antula, with her tireless passion for formation and preaching; Elizabeth Ann Seton, with her commitment to the education of young women; Maria Montessori, with the insights she had in the area of education that were ahead of her time; Armida Barelli, with her great commitment to the Catholic laity; Dorothy Day, with her prophetic drive for social issues; Madeleine Delbrêl, with her profound mystical spirituality; and many other women who have made significant contributions to the life of the People of God. Equally, it will be crucial to listen to those women today who hold leading roles within the People of God and to the Churches to which they belong.

In the light of these beautiful testimonies, the question of women’s access to the diaconate takes on a different perspective. Meanwhile, the in-depth study of their multifaceted Christian witness can help today imagine new forms of ministry that can “create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church” (*EG*, 103).

4. The Dicastery will make use of its own structures (the Doctrinal Office, *Congresso*, *Consulta Ristretta*, the Ordinary Assembly of Members of the Dicastery, i.e., the “*Feria IV*”) in drafting the document. Ultimately, the document will be submitted to the Supreme Pontiff for his evaluation and approval.