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Pope: Dignity of women and girls must be protected

Pope Francis upholds importance of protecting dignity of and caring for women and girls, when addressing participants in the international conference "Women Building a Culture of Encounter Interreligiously."

By Deborah Castellano Lubov

The dignity of women and girls must be promoted and protected.

The Holy Father stressed this, as he thanked participants in the international conference "Women Building a Culture of Encounter Interreligiously" on Thursday in the Vatican, for their commitment in this regard.

The conference was organized by the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations in collaboration with the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue at Rome's Pontifical Urbaniana University, from 25-27 January 2023.

The Holy Father welcomed those present and immediately observed that it is not common "for followers of twelve religions from around the globe to come together and discuss important questions concerning encounter and dialogue for promoting peace and understanding in our wounded world."

"The fact that your Conference is devoted to listening to the experiences and perspectives of women is all the more valuable, since our quest for peace must increasingly involve...women. Because women bestow care and life upon the world: they are themselves a path towards peace"

Catholic Church's commitment

"The Catholic Church," Pope Francis stated, "is committed to interreligious dialogue and to furthering understanding and cooperation among followers of different religious traditions."

The Pope told those gathered, that each one of them, with their own traditions, has wisdom to offer the world, infusing "it with a spirit of warmth, healing, and fraternity."

He thanked the conference for devoting energy to rediscovering the feminine aspects of their respective religious traditions and to showing how they contribute to a culture of encounter.

While lamenting that the activity of encounter is becoming rare, the Holy Father stressed, its practice "is one of the greatest gifts you can offer to your families, communities and societies."

Fostering women and girls' dignity

The Holy Father encouraged them to continue their important work together, sharing insight and best practices.

"I am grateful to you for your commitment and effort to foster the dignity of women and girls in particular."

Pope Francis concluded by thanking them again for their presence and offering his warm wishes for their important work.

"Women Building a Culture of Encounter Interreligiously"

With a scope of always respecting women and appreciating their unique contributions, the conference organizers opened "a dialogue" with women of other religious traditions "to talk, walk and work together to foster a better world where each upholds the dignity of all."

To this end, this week's in-person gathering is being held to further reflect on the "culture of encounter" from various female and interreligious perspectives, so as to work together on applying principles of dialogue in their contexts.

The conference, and its dialogues, will consider the role of women and women's leadership in social, economic, religious and political life at local, national and international levels; how to rediscover how our respective religious classics, saints/sages, religious arts and music can be shared to reawaken our spiritual energy, to heal us and the world; how to learn from the stories of women in fostering interreligious dialogue and a culture of encounter.



Pope Francis greets one of the participants at the conference

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