
Permanent Council of Italian Bishops. Msgr. Russo: “Cooperation with the new Government, also for Easter services”

“It's a dialogue, the beginning of a conversation, characterized by cooperation in our joint effort to exit the crisis and develop strategies to revitalise the country, individuals and families”, said Msgr. **Stefano Russo**, Secretary General of the Italian Bishops' Conference, answering questions from journalists during an online press conference for the presentation of the final declaration of the Permanent Council of the Italian Bishops' Conference, held in Rome over the past few days. “We have had several rounds of exchanges with President Draghi and with members of the new government,” Russo said, “starting with the meeting on the Lateran Pacts, during which we met and exchanged ideas with PM Draghi and with the new cabinet ministers.” In reply to a question on Church efforts to help the hardest hit by the current health emergency, the CEI Secretary said: “The experience of the past few months testifies to the Italian Church's commitment to a path of proximity, through Caritas and through countless Italian citizens who are reaching out to the most vulnerable and crisis-stricken people in distress.” “We have managed to respond to difficulties - not only of a financial nature - aggravated by the pandemic,” Msgr. Russo explained on behalf of the Italian Bishops' Conference.

“The commitment of the Italian Church to assist the most disadvantaged will continue, with special attention to the families that have been hardest hit by the crisis”, he said.

“After EUR 156 million last year,” continued the CEI Secretary General, “a proposal has been put forward for a new extraordinary allocation of EUR 60 million for particularly critical situations. The proposal will be submitted to the next General Assembly for approval; the same Assembly will then define the distribution criteria. At the Permanent Council, the bishops also suggested that we should help each other as communities, so that those dioceses experiencing fewer difficulties can help those facing a graver crisis, under the banner of synodality.” With regard to the upcoming Easter services, Msgr. Russo guaranteed that “they will continue being celebrated in full safety, in compliance with the recommendations shared with the government, which show that it's a viable solution that protects everyone's health.” *“All parish communities,” noted the Secretary General of the Italian Bishops, “have complied with the safety measures imposed by the ongoing pandemic and have continued celebrating religious services in full compliance with measures enforced with encouraging results.”* Thus the provisions put in place over the past months “apply also to Easter rites and celebrations.” “Easter is an important time of coming together for the Christian community. Physical health must certainly be protected, but it must be accompanied by spiritual health.” **Other themes addressed by the Permanent Council included, inter alia, employment, low birth-rate, educational poverty and the relevance of the vaccination campaign,** “to be sustained and implemented”. The synodal path asked for by the Pope to the Italian Church, with special emphasis on its implementation and timeframe, will be the subject of debate during the next General Assembly, scheduled to take place in Rome from 24 to 27 May 2021. The Conference on the Mediterranean held in Bari in February 2020 was the first step in a continuing project, also meant to “overcome the crises we are experiencing”, thanks to the Churches’ mutual and fraternal exchanges and support.

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