



# Pontifical Council for Social Communications

## **42<sup>th</sup> WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY**

*The Media: At the Crossroads between Self-Promotion and Service.  
Searching for the Truth in order to Share it with Others*

May 4, 2008

### **Press Conference**

24 January 2008

Introductory notes of Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, on Pope Benedict XVI's message for the 42<sup>nd</sup> World Communications Day, "*The Media: At the Crossroads between Self-Promotion and Service. Searching for the Truth in order to Share it with Others*".

Before I speak about the Holy Father's message for this year's World Communications Day, I thought I would take this opportunity to give you an update on the work of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. It is also a pleasure to be able to present this message to you here at the Holy See Press Office, as has been done in previous years. My meeting here with you also follows a Mass celebrated for World Communications Day in Vatican Radio's chapel.

Many, if not all of you, are already familiar with the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. In any case, we thought it would be helpful to summarise our work with the folder and enclosed materials which have been distributed to you. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications and the Holy See Press Office have both been important points of reference and assistance for the work you do. In a way you have experienced one of the results of the Second Vatican Council calling on the Church to communicate to the world and to recognize that journalists have the right to request the information they need to carry out their work. In this way, your daily efforts here have become a reality, although not without difficulties. As we know, not everything is perfect, but in the rapidly evolving field of the communications media, this process of improvement is never ending.

The Pontifical Council for Social Communications now has a complete staff, starting with my own presence as the new President, in place of Cardinal Foley, a position entrusted to me by the Holy Father. I am pleased to renew this Council's availability to be of respectful and helpful assistance in the field of communications, a reality at the service of the universal Church through the Catholic media - a friendly voice of all media professionals who believe it is their duty to favour true communication.

In recent months I have had the opportunity to meet with various

representatives of the media, groups of university students, individual bishops and groups of them representing bishops' conferences. Through these contacts and consultations we have decided to take on a number of projects. In particular, we are preparing two international congresses which will take in the first half of this year. The first is scheduled in May and will bring together the heads of schools or departments of communication in Catholic universities. The second meeting in June will gather the directors of Catholic radio stations from around the world. There will be more time to talk about both these congresses later on, during the question and answer time.

That's a brief summary of some of the developments. Now I would like to give you some highlights of the Pope's message for this year's World Communications Day.

The theme is very important, and I would dare say crucial, since it takes us to the heart of sensitive issues which I will try to highlight here and of which you are all aware since you deal with them in your daily work.

When we say that the media are at the crossroads between self-promotion and service, I always think of what Pope Paul VI wrote in 1967 when he issued his message for the first World Communications Day. In 1967, right after the Second Vatican Council, he affirmed that the Church realises "that she is truly and intimately linked with mankind and its history". At the same time, even then, he saw that "the magnitude of this phenomenon, which now embraces both individuals and the whole community of man, is reason for admiration and satisfaction, it also gives cause for reflection and concern."

Why such concern? Paul VI saw very clearly that with the media "it is the responsibility of all that is put to the test".

40 years after that affirmation it is clear how his intuition was right and not only concerns a general responsibility, but one which calls on each individual, each person working in the media.

The media today can be instruments of our hope, "they can and should also be instruments at the service of a world of greater justice and solidarity", as Benedict XVI writes in his message.

It is not by chance that the Pope also makes brief reference to the important role the media can have in playing "a decisive part". Perhaps in reflecting on this aspect we can see how our daily and often hidden work in the media can become part of an important story. In a sense, Benedict XVI is touching on the various areas of human life and societies where the media are a true resource, a blessing for all "in the spread of literacy and in socialization, as well as the development of democracy and dialogue among peoples"

The Pope knows and sees with great clarity that "unfortunately, though, they risk being transformed into systems aimed at subjecting humanity to agendas dictated by the dominant interests of the day." This is how the media challenges us and calls on us in our daily lives to have more understanding and to be more in solidarity with one another.

The Pope offers these reflections for all as a man of faith, as someone who has spent his entire life tirelessly studying and searching for truth, as someone who knows how to think freely. One of these reflections is "that in certain situations the media are used not for the proper purpose of disseminating information, but to 'create' events."

If the media, rather than reporting news, instead, "creates" the news, what

does that mean for humankind? It seems very necessary, given the sensitivity and enormity of these new realities, that more thought should be given to the idea of “info-ethics” in order to deal with this issue in a more direct and helpful way.

The Pope mentions this idea when he writes: “Many people now think there is a need, in this sphere, for “info-ethics”, just as we have bioethics in the field of medicine and in scientific research linked to life.” These words take on an even stronger meaning since the communications media are intimately tied to the human person, and therefore must be ever more respectful of the human person.

These are words of courage. If the media are a challenge, they are first of all for human intelligence. And the Church is not afraid of intelligence or reason. In the Conciliar document *Gaudium et Spes* the Church affirms with joy that “whoever follows after Christ, the perfect man, becomes himself more of a man.” At the same time it is equally true that those who help a man know himself and guide him in the search for truth, will lead him to Christ. The passage from John’s Gospel “you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8, 32) offers a help and a guide to face the modern day challenge for the media, media professionals and consumers: the search for truth – which can be found – is the way towards communion among individuals and peoples.