

Women should play a greater role in Church, says Pope



Women should play a greater role in society and the church, Pope Francis has said, stating that this could be done without sacrificing their essential attention and contribution to their families

Women's distinctive skill sets and sensibilities make them invaluable not only for building "peace and harmony" in families, but for all of humanity, too, he said.

The pope made his remarks during an audience at the Vatican on Saturday with women taking part in a national congress hosted by the Italian Women's Centre, a Catholic women's association promoting greater democracy, solidarity, human rights and human dignity.

In his speech, Pope Francis said, "I strongly wish that (opportunities and responsibilities) may open themselves up further to the presence and participation of women, both in the church as well as in society and the professional sphere," including a greater role in decision making, he said.

However, the pope also said that he hoped such new opportunities and responsibility would not mean forgetting "the irreplaceable role of women in the family."

The "finesse, particular sensitivity and tenderness" women possess "represent a genuine strength not only for the life of families, for creating an atmosphere of peace and harmony," but for the whole of humanity, too, he said.

“Without their approach, without these gifts of women, the human vocation cannot be fulfilled,” he said.

But just as “a greater contribution of feminine genius” is important in the professional world and public sphere, the same gifts “remain essential for the family, which for us Christians is not simply the private realm, but is the domestic church whose health and prosperity is a condition for the health and prosperity of the church and society itself,” he said.

The critical question for each woman, the pope said, is to discern the right balance of work, community and family.

“How is it possible to expand an effective presence in so many areas in the public sphere, in the world of work and in the places where the most important decisions are made and at the same time maintain a special presence in and preferred attention for the family?” he asked.

A “diligent and persistent” prayer life, reflection on the word of God and taking part in the sacraments are key to that process of discernment, the pope said, so that women can always be responding in new ways to the Lord’s call.

Women have an irreplaceable role within the family, he said, particularly in handing down to future generations “solid moral principles” and the Christian faith.

Carol Glatz