



20th Plenary Assembly of SECAM

Card. Michael Czerny S.J., Prefect

Kigali, Rwanda, 31 July 2025

I am delighted to join you today, as I recall eight happy years of service in Africa from 2002 to 2010; so this is a homecoming. I feel “back home”. I am happy that the Church, Family of God in Africa, is gathered in this 20th Plenary Assembly of SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) under the theme: Christ, Source of Hope, Reconciliation and Peace.

In the Roman Curia that helps both the Pope and the Bishops, three Dicasteries directly serve, not a particular sector, but the overall mission of the Church. They are the Dicasteries for Evangelisation, for Charity, and for Integral Human Development, three expressions of the mission of the Church. Our Dicastery’s work takes up the mission of Christ who came that all may have life and have it abundantly (cf. John 10,10).

The Dicastery, established by Pope Francis in 2017, expresses the Church’s renewed commitment to all the dimensions of integral human development. Our inspiration comes from the Gospel, a Church of the poor and with a preferential option for the poor. This Gospel commitment takes the Church into various fields of concern: violations of human dignity and human rights, economic and social injustice, insecurity and violence, unemployment and exploitation, environmental degradation, the problems of displacement and humanitarian emergencies, criminality and threats to democracy, traffic in persons, sickness, insecurity, drugs and arms – indeed, all serious concerns to local churches. One can call these “global issues”, but we focus on the specific obstacles, in each diocese and conference, to the people’s integral human development. We stand ready to help the Churches to pastorally accompany their people in confronting the obstacles and developing integrally so that they may have life “in abundance,” “man fully alive” as St Irenaeus says. In this way, the Dicastery supports the mission of the Holy Father and of the Bishops to “proclaim the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15), to evangelize human societies everywhere, ensuring that no one is excluded. Thus, the Dicastery combines the Gospel, sound doctrine and effective pastoral action.

Pope Leo XIV has taken up this approach and given it new impetus. For example, regarding artificial intelligence, ethics and corporate governance, he said that the Church wishes to contribute to a serene and informed assessment of AI in light of the “integral development of the human person and society”. This entails taking people’s well-being into account, not only materially, but also intellectually and spiritually; it means safeguarding the inviolable dignity of each human person and respecting the cultural and spiritual riches and diversity

of the world's peoples. Ultimately, the benefits or risks of AI must be evaluated precisely according to sound ethical, social and indeed spiritual criteria.¹

This has been the resolve of SECAM over the years. The Kampala document says that:

“The Church is a Family of interconnected persons. Love, acceptance, forgiveness, commitment, and intimacy constitute its very fabric; as well as the celebration of faith, pardon, joy and sharing. It is a community in which justice, peace and mutual love are realized and lived. We enter into this communion of the Church through Baptism preceded first by hearing and accepting the word of God and attaching oneself to Christ, the eternal Word of God” (§ 81).

Everyone wants development. For our Church-Family of God in Africa – and for the Dicastery, too – full development flows from life in Christ. For example, economic development is of great importance, but our concept must be broader and deeper than the narrow certainties of the world's dominant economic actors and financial institutions. In this spirit, the Dicastery supports the pastoral initiatives and advocacy of local Churches in favour of true development.

The Dicastery's approach involves three steps: listening and dialogue, research and reflection, communication and restitution.² This is the experiential or inductive method of *Gaudium et Spes*. The Pastoral Constitution does not propose a technique for analysing reality; rather, it provides a model of the Church as close to the world, situated in history, perceiving and comprehending the signs of the times which the Holy Spirit brings to light in the course of human time and action. Accordingly, the Dicastery strives to furnish dynamic support to the local Churches in their discernment, planning and action aimed at human development in all its dimensions.

Here, then, are the Dicastery's three sections:

Listening-Dialogue: What, in your area, are the principal “joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of the people, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted” (cf GS 1)? The Dicastery maintains a two-way bridge with the local Church and its various ministries promoting integral human development. Listening carefully to the Bishops and their co-workers, the Dicastery welcomes your questions and concerns, your needs and challenges.

Research-Reflection: In search of responses to the challenges, the second section deploys the many needed social and theological disciplines and applies Catholic social teaching. It offers new perspectives, new ways and means, good practices for the local Church to use to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to its society.

Communication-Restitution: The third section works to ensure that useful pastoral results and good practices are formulated, formatted and communicated to the local churches, so that they can apply them in a creative and suitable manner; and so that the good practices

¹ Cf. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-06/pope-leo-on-ai-exceptional-tool-but-cannot-forget-human-dignity.html>

are also shared with the wider Church and the world. Thus, the Church extends a helping hand to people – especially the poor – in their struggle to overcome obstacles to their human development and fulfill their human and divine vocation.

In addition to the work of the three sections, the Dicastery is also responsible for distributing annual Papal Messages for the World Days of Peace, the Sick, Migrants and Refugees, and Care for Creation. How can we help your local church with its communications office to spread these messages effectively?

The Dicastery also promotes dialogue and collaboration. For example, the Conference on Natural Resources and Violence in Africa took place in Accra in March 2024, thanks to the leadership of SECAM. Representing different parts of the continent, Bishops and others addressed many challenges and obstacles which extractive industries pose to integral human development. Out of this exercise, the Dicastery will publish Pastoral Orientations which should be helpful throughout Africa and in other continents, too.

In conclusion, the following three questions may be helpful for reflection:

- What are the main obstacles to integral human development in the territory of your Diocese and your Conference?
- What pastoral actions do you offer to accompany God's people in facing these obstacles? Are there sufferings which only direct aid or charity seem able to address?
- Does your local Church succeed in communicating the Church's social teaching as it applies within your territory?

As you pose such questions, the Dicastery for Integral Human Development stands ready to accompany your Church in bringing Christ's hope, reconciliation and peace to all your people. May God abundantly bless this 20th Plenary Assembly of SECAM now getting underway.