



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRIESTS AND CATECHISTS
OF THE NEOCATECHUMENAL WAY**

Saturday, 21 September 2002

1. Dear Catechists and Priests of the Neocatechumenal Way, I am happy to receive you as you come here today to meet the Pope. With affection, I greet and welcome each of you and through you, I greet the entire Neocatechumenal Way, an ecclesial reality that has spread to many countries and is appreciated by many Pastors. I thank Mr Kiko Argüello, the co-founder of the Way with Miss Carmen Hernández, for his cordial address. With his address, he expressed your faithful attachment to the See of Peter and witnessed to your common love for the Church.

2. How can we fail to thank the Lord for the fruit the Neocatechumenal Way has born in the more than 30 years since it came into being? In a secularized society like ours, where religious indifference is spreading and many live as though God did not exist, there are multitudes who need to rediscover the sacraments of Christian initiation, especially Baptism.

The Way is certainly one of the providential answers to this urgent need. Let us look at your communities: how many have rediscovered the beauty and greatness of the baptismal vocation they have received! How much generosity and zeal they have for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, especially to those who are the most distant! How many vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life have arisen thanks to this itinerary of Christian formation!

3. I have a vivid memory of our last meeting in January 1997, immediately after your gathering on Mount Sinai to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Neocatechumenal Way. On that occasion I told you that drafting the Statutes of the Way was *"a very important step that [would] lead to its formal juridical recognition by the Church, and [give] you a further guarantee of the authenticity of your charism"* (Address to Neocatechumenal Way, 24 January 1997, n. 4; ORE, 5 February 1997, p. 9).

Our meeting today expresses your joy over the recent approval of the Statutes of the Neocatechumenal Way by the Holy See. I am glad that this process, which began more than five years ago, has been brought to completion through an intense effort of consultation, reflection and dialogue. I want now to mention in a special way Cardinal James Francis Stafford, to whom I express my gratitude for the commitment and care with which the Pontifical Council for the Laity accompanied the international leadership team of the Way in this process.

4. I would like to emphasize the importance of the recently approved Statutes for the present and future life of the Neocatechumenal Way. Indeed, above all, this norm stresses once again the ecclesial character of the Neocatechumenal Way which, as I said a few years ago, is "an effective means of Catholic formation for society and for the present time" (Papal Letter *Ogni qualvolta* to Bishop Paul Joseph Cordes, Vice-President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity [today Archbishop and President of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum"], 30 August 1990; *ORE*, 7/14 August 2002, p. 4).

The Statutes of the Neocatechumenal Way also describe the essential aspects of this itinerary, offered to the faithful in their parish communities who want to revive their faith, and to adults who are preparing to receive the sacrament of Baptism. Above all, however, the Statutes establish the fundamental tasks of the various persons responsible for providing this itinerary of formation in the Neocatechumenal communities: the priests, the catechists, the families on mission and the teams responsible at every level. Thus the Statutes must be for the Neocatechumenal Way a "clear and sure rule of life" (*Letter to Cardinal James F. Stafford*, 5 April 2001, n. 2; *ORE*, 2 May 2001, p. 5), a fundamental point of reference so that this process of formation, that aims to bring the faithful to a mature faith, may be realized in a way that is in accord with the teaching and discipline of the Church.

5. The approval of the Statutes marks the beginning of a new phase in the life of the Way. The Church now expects of you an even greater and more generous dedication to the new evangelization and to the service of the local Churches and parishes. Therefore, priests and catechists of the Way, you are responsible for ensuring that the Statutes are faithfully put into practice in all their aspects so that they become true leaven for a new missionary zeal.

The Statutes are likewise an important help to all the Pastors of the Church, particularly the diocesan Bishops who are entrusted with the pastoral care and especially, the Christian initiation of the people in their diocese "In their fatherly and careful accompaniment of the Neocatechumenal communities" (*Decree of the Pontifical Council for the Laity*, 29 June 2002; *ORE*, 31 July 2002, p. 11), the diocesan Ordinaries will be able to find in the Statutes the basic principles for realizing the Neocatechumenal Way in fidelity to its original plan.

I particularly desire to address a word to you priests, who are dedicated to the service of the Neocatechumenal communities. Never forget that as ministers of Christ you have an irreplaceable

role of sanctification, teaching and pastoral guidance for those who follow the itinerary of the Way. With love and generosity, serve the communities entrusted to you!

6. Dear brothers and sisters, with the approval of the Statutes of the Neocatechumenal Way, we have happily succeeded in defining the essential ecclesial formula of the Way. Let us all thank the Lord for this.

It is now the task of the competent offices of the Holy See to examine the Catechetical Directory and the catechetical and liturgical practices of the Way. I am sure that its members willingly and generously support the directives they will receive from these authoritative sources.

I shall continue eagerly to follow your work in the Church and in my prayers I entrust you to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Star of the New Evangelization, and to you I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.