

Pope Leo XIV, Beginning of the New Pastoral Year of the Diocese of Rome.

Address delivered on Friday 18 September 2026 at the Basilica of St John Lateran.

Dear brothers and sisters,

I would like to begin again with you on Easter morning, in a garden and at an empty tomb. Mary Magdalene is there at dawn, whilst it is still dark, and the darkness in which she finds herself is not merely that of the night which has not yet ended. It is the darkness of one who has lost someone, of one who seeks and does not find, of one who bows down and weeps. The Gospel, however, does not leave her in mourning. A man, whom she mistakes for the gardener, approaches her and asks two questions: ‘Why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?’ (Jn 20:15).

I would like these two questions, dear friends, to inspire the journey ahead of the diocese of Rome. Indeed, I believe that we can hear them addressed today to our Church and to the whole city: “Why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?” They concern the anxious search for hope that you perceive in the parishes, in gatherings and in the fabric of daily life, when you have listened to one another and to the people. Mary Magdalene is awake before dawn and has already run to the tomb, for within her there is life, there is anticipation! So too, in Rome, there are many people who start afresh every morning, but also parish communities, associations, movements, groups and ecclesial organisations that work generously in evangelization, charity, in serving liturgical prayer. Certainly, alongside this richness you have acknowledged certain struggles with honesty. It is the bewilderment of those who can no longer find where they can meet the Lord. An experience we share with many brothers and sisters, but one that we too sometimes go through. At times, the number of initiatives, activities and meetings multiplies, and we lose sight of the centre, the Gospel meaning of what we do.

And here, in the Gospel, a single word causes Mary Magdalene to turn: her name, “Mary!” (Jn 20:16). This is how we encounter Jesus Christ: by hearing Him call us by name, in the many ways in which this can happen. This is where every pastoral initiative must begin: not so much by asking “what” to do, but rather “whom” and “how” to encounter.¹ In our communities, we can remain anonymous, invisible and

¹ In pastoral practice, communion requires that attention be given to the building of authentic relationships, not just to the organisation of activities. This involves healing relational wounds, working to overcome divisions, and committing to avoid any form of exclusion or invisibility. In this sense, authentic ecclesial renewal begins with the renewal of relationships both between individuals and among different entities. (See *Communion*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/theme/>)

misunderstood, or we can be seen, known and called by name. And those who truly encounter Christ, like Mary of Magdala, feel their hearts filled, and so they cannot stand still; they run and go forth to proclaim the Good News. “I have seen the Lord!” (v. 18), the woman tells the disciples. Not a memory, not a private matter, but a profound joy that gives rise to community.

For this reason, brothers and sisters, I am not delivering a new pastoral programme to you today. We are not starting from scratch, and nothing of what we have experienced should be consigned to the archives. Our work on “spiritual maladies” has taught us to recognize what, in our ecclesial life, needs to be healed, corrected or transformed.² The Synodal Journey has taught us how to listen and discern together, as co-responsible for the one mission. Instead, I would like to propose that we develop a third dimension: that of *pastoral evaluation*.³

To evaluate, in the light of the Holy Spirit, means to pause, to revisit what has happened, to recognize what has borne fruit, to understand what has not worked, and to seek the reasons for this together. It means, in a word, to seek the truth.⁴ I invite you to carry out this evaluation by involving the whole community and, as far as possible, by also listening to people who do not attend and who see things, so to speak, “from the outside”.⁵

To help you carry out this pastoral evaluation, I would like to highlight a few points of focus, which I distinguish from one another but which constitute a single dynamic.

... This requires a method that meets people where they are, while promoting a Church that truly lives communion, where all the baptized feel invited and welcome to participate. (See *Mission*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/theme/>)

² Compared to other dioceses, the Church in Malta already displays significant elements of a synodal attitude, even if some aspects of it are limited or underdeveloped. Therefore, a realistic recognition is needed that there is room for further renewal so that these values can be lived out more fully, coherently and authentically in the current cultural context. (*The Church in Malta Today*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/theme/>)

³ Pastoral systems require a continuous process of evaluation and reform, since their effectiveness depends on how well they are understood, relevant and inculturated. In a context where social and cultural changes are unfolding at a rapid pace, there is a need for structures to be regularly reviewed and updated. (*The Church in Malta Today*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/theme/>)

In this light, the Church in Malta is called to undertake a serious evaluation of how it is living communion, participation and mission, so that its structures and initiatives are updated and adapted to the culture and society of today, and capable of adapting to the culture and society of tomorrow. The Incarnation of the Son of God in the concrete historical and cultural context remains a model for this work: just as Christ entered the culture of his time and continues to enter the culture of every time and place, the Church is called to live and fulfil her mission in an inculturated manner in the current and future contexts. (*The Church in Malta Today*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/theme/>)

⁴ This type of participation is not based simply on the collection of opinions or votes, but on a shared search for God’s will through prayer, reflection and openness to the Holy Spirit. This leads to each member not only to make his voice heard, but to be filled with zeal for the Church’s mission. (*Participation*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/theme/>)

⁵ Each Church entity should engage in a systematic process of evaluation of its identity, its structures of discernment, leadership and execution, as well as its initiatives and operations. (See *Evaluation* <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/action/>) See also *Tool kits on planning and auto evaluation*.

The *first point: encountering Christ and helping others to encounter Him*. The Church does not exist for her own sake, but to lead every person to an encounter with the Lord; and so it is not enough to ask whether an activity is well organized, whether it is well attended, or whether it has been running for many years; we must ask whether it truly leads to Christ, whether it brings the Gospel into contact with the real lives of the people.⁶

The *second point: generating communities*. From the Pasch of Christ, new, free and reconciled communities are born. Let us have the courage to focus on what is essential, to make room for genuine relationships, within which people feel part of a community: they feel welcomed, accompanied, valued and jointly responsible.⁷ Let us commit ourselves to offering young people our time and a listening ear, both within and beyond our initiatives.⁸

The *third point: living in and serving the city*. Rome is not the indifferent backdrop to our communities: it is the locus of our mission.⁹ The community brought into being by the Risen One cannot remain closed in on itself, but must share in people's hopes, vulnerabilities and questions; and it must learn to recognize, in what happens in the city's various neighbourhoods, the questions to which the Gospel can provide answers, if it is welcomed anew.

To these three points for evaluation, a *fourth* can be added, which traverses them all: the *formation of the People of God*. Do our activities encourage growth in faith? Do they form missionary disciples? Do they help to develop ecclesial responsibility? Do they foster a mature faith, capable of translating into concrete choices of life and service?¹⁰

⁶ This evaluation should ensure that it is assessed to what extent: the initiatives and operations of the entity remain authentic to the mission of the Church today, reflecting and conveying the Catholic ethos, being inspired by God and keeping God at their centre; (Evaluation, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/action/>)

⁷ The way the entity works promotes and offers a concrete experience of communion, participation and co-responsibility between all categories of Church members; (Evaluation, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/action/>)

⁸ Each entity should ensure that, as far as possible and relevant, no category of the People of God – in particular young people and foreigners – feels unwelcome or excluded from the initiatives and life of the community. (Integration, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/action/>)

⁹ ...the existing operating models and structures remain sustainable and adapted to today's culture and circumstances. (Evaluation, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/action/>)

¹⁰ The members of the Church, in particular pastoral workers, must engage in a serious and continuous process of theological, pastoral and spiritual formation, in order to:

- better understand their beliefs and the beauty of God.
- internalize the synodal attitudes of communion, participation and mission.
- be able to carry out their mission in a more professional, correct and efficient manner.

This formation must be understood as an essential and continuous dimension of pastoral work. (Formation, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/action/>)

- Continue the process of establishing an Office for Volunteers, with the aim of strengthening participation and communion within the Church...

The heart of the method that I am proposing to you is, however, a very simple question: “*why?*”. It is a matter of pausing together and asking ourselves, for everything we do: why do we do it? What Gospel-inspired intention drives us? What real need are we seeking to meet? In what way does this choice correspond to the mission of the Church? Then comes the second step: why do we achieve these results and not others? Why do some initiatives foster journeys of faith whilst others remain isolated? Why do some people participate whilst others remain on the sidelines? From the encounter between the reasons behind our choices and the reasons for their effects, authentic discernment arises, enabling us to recognize what should be retained, valued, corrected, abandoned or initiated.¹¹

So that this does not all remain merely a good intention, the journey will have its own “rhythm”, and I thank the Cardinal Vicar and the other collaborators for having set out the stages that will be presented to you.¹²

I therefore ask you to give yourselves the time to walk together – not just for a year, but on a journey – so that this may be a genuine discernment and not merely another initiative added to the rest. The Bishop is not asking you to plan new activities: he is proposing a shared method of listening, discernment, evaluation and conversion.¹³ The content and priorities remain the responsibility of your communities,¹⁴ within the five areas of catechesis and Christian initiation, young people, the family, charity and vocations, because the aim is to share a pastoral style, not to standardize experiences. And in this, the Prefectures are called

• The process of establishing the Commission for the Promotion of Integral Human Development continues, with a mandate which includes fostering and supporting the active participation of the laity in the secular sphere, in accordance with the vision expressed in Lumen Gentium 31. (*Diocesan Offices and Entities*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/action/offices-entities/>)

¹¹ See *Toolkit on planning*

¹² See *Timeline*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/timeline/>

¹³ In this context, the plan aims to strengthen and renew the way in which the Church lives out its identity and mission more authentically, how it identifies and prioritizes areas of service, how it plans and organizes pastoral work, and how it effectively carries out its mission. This also involves a review of certain existing operational models, the strengthening of relationships, and the active recognition of the Holy Spirit's action throughout the whole people of God, according to their various vocations. Synodality – understood as communion, participation and mission – is not simply a project, initiative or structure, but a fundamental attitude that must be internalized in the lives of individuals and communities. This requires a continuous process of conversion, formation and maturity.... Therefore, this pastoral plan does not foresee the introduction of a large number of new initiatives or visibly extensive changes, but aims to bring about a qualitative renewal in the way the Church lives and exercises her mission. The change expected is primarily at the level of ecclesial culture and pastoral practice. This priority should not detract from the value and commitment already present in the various areas of the Archdiocese's pastoral work, but should serve to strengthen, coordinate and make more complementary existing initiatives, so that they are more authentically Christian, relevant, effective, and applicable in the current context and adaptable to future contexts. (*Introduction*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/about/>)

¹⁴ In light of the synodal process, it must be recognized that there is no uniform implementation strategy that applies to everyone. Accordingly, each entity must formulate a plan that addresses the needs, the ministry entrusted to it and its concrete circumstances. Therefore, each entity must include these attitudes in its pastoral plan to implement these priorities, both in its internal life, as well as in the ministry it carries out. The pastoral plan of each entity must also include other matters specific to the pastoral assigned to it. (*Pastoral Priorities*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/action/>)

increasingly to become places of encounter, dialogue and shared pastoral planning.¹⁵

Dear brothers and sisters, it is true: a method, by itself, has never converted anyone. So, to ensure that what I have proposed to you does not remain abstract, I would also like to remind you of a particular person. Indeed, I have joyfully approved the decision to take the necessary steps to initiate the diocesan inquiry into the life, virtues and reputation for holiness of Don Luigi Di Liegro, a priest of this Church, who died on 12 October 1997. The gift he offers to our journey does not lie primarily in the works he carried out: Don Luigi, before building anything, wanted to “see”. In 1969, he commissioned a study on the religiosity of the people of Rome, because he had learnt that there can be no embodiment of the message without listening to reality. In his final address, a few weeks before his death, Don Luigi said to his staff: “Discernment is this question: Lord, where are you?”.¹⁶

Dear friends, this makes us think about Mary Magdalene’s question at the tomb of Jesus. It is the question that we set out from again today. Which signs of the Kingdom and which appeals of the Holy Spirit emerge today from the life of Rome, and what form does the Church need to take to recognize them and to serve them? Keeping this question alive within us will help us to be a Church in solidarity with the destiny of this city, in touch with its sufferings, its hopes and its transformations.¹⁷

I would now like to say a few words about the ordained ministry in Rome. First, however, I wish to say “thank you”, and not merely as a formality. Thank you to the Cardinal Vicar, the auxiliary Bishops, the Prefects and all those who serve in the offices of the Vicariate. Thank you to the parish priests and parish vicars; to the

¹⁵ Diocesan offices should, where possible, involve more members from ecclesial communities and Church entities, particularly in the planning and implementation of pastoral initiatives.... Ongoing formal and informal consultation processes are established to enable the rapid and meaningful gathering of feedback from members of the Church. (*Diocesan Offices and Entities*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/action/offices-entities/>)

Regular meetings of the Bishops and the Episcopal Vicar of the Clergy with members of the clergy are continued, in order to strengthen communion and encourage spaces of listening, dialogue and discernment. (*Clergy and Religious*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/action/clergy-religious/>)

Visits to parishes by the secretariat for parishes together with other diocesan offices should be increased, with the aim of obtaining a more realistic picture of current pastoral work and administrative procedures and so that, together with the parish leadership, the next steps can be identified and implemented. (*Parishes and Communities*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/action/parishes-and-communities/>)

¹⁶ Listening to the various processes of discernment and studies that the Archdiocese has undertaken in recent years. (*The Theme*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/theme/>)

¹⁷ ...this evaluation process should not be static or limited to an analysis of a situation, but should lead to a continuous, concrete and organic renewal of the way communion, participation and mission are lived, and should propose more sustainable and effective models for the future of the entity. (*Evaluation*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/action/>)

elderly and infirm priests; to the chaplains in hospitals, prisons, schools and universities; to the priests who have come from other Churches and other countries, who serve in this city as if it were their own. Thank you to the permanent deacons and their families. Thank you to the men and women religious; to those who, in silence, support Rome through their intercession; and to those who encounter it every day in schools, hospitals, shelters and the suburbs. Thank you to the catechists, educators and those working in charitable ministries. We know this: good deeds make no noise; the Lord knows them, and today I too wish to acknowledge them. Thank you!

I also know that pastoral service today is more demanding than it was in the past. I urge you not to bear these burdens alone. And I say to you quite clearly that the art of pastoral evaluation does not ask you to do more: on the contrary, it gives you permission to do less and do it better. If pastoral evaluation were to become yet another burden on your shoulders, we would have betrayed its very purpose.¹⁸ I would therefore like to offer you some reflections on the kind of priests Rome needs. A priest should be a man who listens before replying, who discerns before deciding. A person who remains in the presence of the Lord, for he cannot lead others to an encounter that he is not himself experiencing. The question “why?” is first and foremost a personal one for him: why am I a priest? Does my daily life still correspond to the reason why the Lord called me by name? The priest does not concentrate all responsibility upon himself. He recognizes charisms, forms consciences, and enables the lay faithful to share responsibility: not out of a lack of strength, but out of fidelity to the nature of the Church. A community in which everything depends on the parish priest is a fragile community, and presiding does not mean doing everything. It means fostering communion, drawing on the energies of others, connecting people and situations, and safeguarding unity. Ultimately, the priest becomes part of, and longs to belong to, a community capable of understanding its own neighbourhood, of sharing in its sufferings and hopes, and of taking responsibility for the lives of everyone, even those who do not cross the threshold of the church.

This is the form that charity takes in pastoral leadership, and it is what prevents a parish from retreating into self-preservation.

¹⁸ A model of collaborative pastoral care between parishes, especially those in the vicinity (pastoral unity), is to be systematically promoted, in order to encourage and strengthen synodal attitudes, primarily communion and collaboration. This should also be carried out through the strengthening of the relationships between the parish priest and the lay members of the team who assist in the pastoral life and management of the parishes, and of the relationships between parishes that form part of the same pastoral unit. All this becomes urgent, in light of the lack of resources and priests. (*Parish and Communities*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/action/parishes-and-communities/>)

No one is called to live through all this alone. The presbytery is not merely the sum of priests who meet for organizational reasons: it is a fraternity, and it is the first place in which to assess whether what we do truly fosters communion. I hope that the Prefectures will be, before anything else, places of genuine priestly fraternity, where one can speak openly of one's struggles without feeling ashamed, rather than merely instruments of coordination.¹⁹ Alongside you, the deacons remind the Church as a whole that she exists to serve; and the men and women religious, through the selfless dedication of their lives, remind Rome that no amount of efficiency can save humanity and that primacy belongs to God.

A special thought goes to our seminarians. Dear young people, you are preparing to become priests for this diocese. I invite you to take part, even now, in this journey of self-examination, learning to make it a way of life throughout your years of formation. And allow yourselves to be formed both by books – which are necessary for encountering good teachers – and by the faces of the poor, the sick and the people of our parishes. To you and to your formators I express my gratitude and my trust. Young people do not commit themselves to a role, but follow men and women who appear content with who they are.

I know that this journey of discernment will require patience, and perhaps even the courage to let go of something we are attached to. But it is the same courage shown by Mary of Magdala, who had to let go of her desire to hold on to the Lord in order to run, instead, and proclaim Him. From this pastoral discernment, I hope, will emerge a phase of sharing renewed experiences, followed by the building of a shared journey that will prepare us, together, for the Jubilee of Redemption in 2033.²⁰

Dear brothers and sisters of Rome, do not be afraid to let yourselves be called by name once more! The living Lord allows Himself to be encountered by those who, like Mary at the dawn of Easter, still have the courage to seek him, even in tears, even in the darkness. May the Mother of God, *Salus Populi Romani*, who was the first to believe and who brought Christ into the world, accompany you. And may my blessing be upon all of you, your communities and this city.

¹⁹ Fraternal relations among diocesan clergy and religious clergy are deepened through joint spiritual initiatives, shared moments of prayer, and opportunities for communication that cultivate fraternity and mutual support. (*Clergy and Religious*, <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/action/clergy-religious/>)

²⁰ The strengthening of the synodal attitude should lead to a renewed in the way in which the Church in Malta lives and carries out its ministry, and at the same time develop a more synodal environment in preparation for the existence of a Diocesan Synod, where this process will reach its fullness. (*Introduction* <https://pastoralplan.church.mt/about/>)

Available from:

<https://www.vatican.va/content/leoxiv/en/speeches/2026/september/documents/20260918-apertura-anno-pastorale.html>
