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Pope Francis created a new commission that will confront the challenges the world is facing in battling the coronavirus pandemic and what it will inevitably face in its aftermath, the Vatican announced.

In a statement published April 15, the Vatican said the goal of the commission, which will be led by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, is "to express the church's concern and love for the entire human family in the face of the of COVID-19 pandemic."

The dicastery will work with other Vatican offices to coordinate the work, which includes "an analysis and a reflection on the socioeconomic and culture challenges of the future and proposed guidelines to address them," the Vatican said.

The commission is divided into five working groups focused on a specific aspect of the pandemic and has met twice with the pope to discuss ways it can help local churches, especially in poor areas, Cardinal Peter Turkson, prefect of the dicastery, said in an interview with Vatican News published shortly after the announcement.

"The pope is convinced that we are living through an epochal change and he is reflecting on what will follow the crisis, on the economic and social consequences of the pandemic, on what we will have to face and, above all, on how the church can offer itself as a safe point of reference to the world lost in the face of an unexpected event," Turkson said.

The commission's first working group, which is dedicated to "listening and supporting local churches," will work in cooperation with Caritas Internationalis, as well as the office of the papal almoner, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Vatican pharmacy.

Turkson told Vatican News that the first group already has "set up mechanisms to listen to the local churches to identify real needs and assist in the development of effective and adequate responses," including coordinating with apostolic nuncios and bishops' conferences.

"A broad outlook is needed. Nobody must be forgotten — prisoners, vulnerable groups. We need to share good practices," the cardinal said.

The second group will dedicate itself to research and the study of the pandemic and to reflecting on society and the world post-coronavirus in coordination with the Pontifical Academy for Life, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences.

This group, Turkson said, "has the task of night watch, like the sentry, to perceive the dawn. To do this it is necessary to connect the best minds in the areas of ecology, economy, health and public security. We need the concreteness of science, and we need prophecy and creativity."

Other working groups will focus on communication, relations with other countries to assist and share valuable research information and financing the commission's relief efforts.

Turkson highlighted the need for the commission and the importance of looking to the future "so as not to be unprepared."

"The health crisis has already triggered an economic one," he said. "The risk is that a social crisis will be provoked if this economic crisis is not dealt with immediately. One crisis risks being followed by others, in a cycle in which we will be forced to learn slowly and painfully to take care of our common home."

Unity, he added, is essential in confronting the pandemic, so the current crisis "is not the time for indifference, selfishness or division."

He also called for the loosening of international sanctions, the reduction or forgiveness of the foreign debts of poor countries, and the end of conflict and arms trafficking. Instead, countries should use their wealth "to heal people and save lives."

"We are rediscovering how much the destiny of each of us is linked to that of others," Turkson said. "We are rediscovering the value of the things that matter and the worthlessness of so many things that we once considered important."

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