Vatican

Pope Francis accepts a gift during an audience with almost 200 new bishops participating in a

Pope Francis accepts a gift during an audience with almost 200 new bishops participating in a formation course, at the Vatican Sept. 19, 2022. The course for new bishops was sponsored by the dicasteries for Bishops, for Evangelization and for Eastern Churches. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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Close to 200 bishops at the beginning of their ministries in dioceses and eparchies around the world met Pope Francis Sept. 19 at the end of a week of conferences.

Because the COVID-19 pandemic had forced the suspension of the annual formation course for new bishops, the 2022 courses were held in multiple sessions with the first groups of bishops -- more than 150 of them -- meeting Francis in early September, and bishops from mission territories meeting him Sept. 17.

The Dicastery for Bishops, the Dicastery for Evangelization and the Dicastery for Eastern Churches organized the courses.

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The themes for the 2022 sessions included: the meaning of "a synodal church"; crisis management with special attention to handling situations and allegations of abuse; the church after the pandemic; a review of what canon law says about administering a diocese; communication and use of the media, ministry to families with special attention to the pope's exhortation "Amoris Laetitia"; and promoting care for all people and for the environment with special attention to "Laudato Si'" and "Fratelli Tutti."

While the course offers practical information to the bishops and a chance to pray and meet with their peers from around the world and with top Vatican officials, it is especially a chance to respond to Francis' desire that bishops have an opportunity for "an intense spiritual reading of the call to the episcopate, first and foremost as a path of grace and sanctification, for the pastor and, through him, for his people," said a statement from the Dicastery for Bishops.

"No one can carry out a pastoral ministry in the church without a profound experience of being saved and of knowing how, beginning with him, such mercy is truly offered, constantly and without discrimination, to every man and woman," it said.