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Pope Francis sits in front of a row of women dressed in blue and reaches out to touch a red, y

Pope Francis greets representatives of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations during an audience with the group in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican May 13, 2023, before it opened its general assembly in Assisi May 14-20. In his talk, the pope said, "There is an urgent need to find peace in the world, a peace that begins, above all, within the heart." (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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Vatican City — May 15, 2023
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Peace is urgently needed in today's world, and women should be more greatly appreciated, Pope Francis told hundreds of Catholic women.

"In addition to peace, the anthropological identity of women is also in danger as they are used as tools, as the subject of political disputes and cultural ideologies that ignore the beauty with which they were created," he said.

The pope made his remarks during an audience in the Paul VI hall May 13 with the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations, which was holding its general assembly in Assisi May 14-20. The assembly's theme was "Women of WUCWO:

Artisans of human fraternity for world peace."

In his talk, the pope said, "Nowadays there is an urgent need to find peace in the world, a peace that begins, above all, within the heart, an ailing heart, lacerated by the division of hatred and rancor."

Women, too, should receive "greater appreciation of their capacity for relationship and giving," he said, and men must "better understand the richness of the reciprocity they receive from women, in order to recover those anthropological elements that characterize human identity and, with it, that of women and their role in the family and society, where they never cease to be a beating heart."

He encouraged the assembly's delegates "to renew your missionary impulse" and "look to the future with eyes and hearts open to the world, to listen to the lament of so many women in the world who suffer injustice, abandonment, discrimination, poverty or inhuman treatment since childhood in some cases."

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The organization's new "World Women's Observatory," he said, will provide ways "to identify the needs and thus be able to be 'Samaritans,' fellow travelers, who instill hope and serenity in hearts, helping and enabling others to help alleviate the many corporal and spiritual needs of humanity."

He said women have a "gift" and "task" of making lonely people and places feel less lonely.

"Humanity without women is alone. A culture without women is lonely," the pope said. "Where there is no woman, there is loneliness, arid loneliness that breeds sadness and all manner of harm to humanity."

"Mary teaches us to generate life and to protect it always, relating with others with tenderness and compassion," he said.

Look to Mary, he said, to see where she drew the strength to be an authentic witness of the joy of the Gospel.

"Dear sisters, the secret of all discipleship and readiness for mission lies in cultivating this union, a union from within, with the 'sweet host of the soul' that

accompanies us always: the love of God and staying joined to him," he said.