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Pope Francis sits in front of a crowd, holding a piece of paper and speaking into a microphone

Pope Francis meets with communications representatives of dioceses, religious congregations, parishes and other Catholic groups in France at the Vatican Jan. 12, 2024. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



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Pope Francis declined to read his prepared remarks during an audience with Catholic communicators from France, saying he has bronchitis and "can't speak well."

"I would like to read the whole speech, but I have a problem; I have a bit of bronchitis, and I can't speak well," the pope told communications representatives of dioceses, religious congregations, parishes and other Catholic groups in France during a meeting at the Vatican Jan. 12.

Instead, he asked if he could give the group copies of his speech since "I have such a hard time talking."

Francis had seven meetings with individuals and groups prior to his audience with the communications representatives. He read the entirety of his speeches in two other meetings with large groups and even added to his prepared remarks to them.

Due to a bronchial infection, the pope had canceled a planned trip to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Dec. 1-3 and had aides read his speeches for him on several occasions in the first weeks of December.

Yet Francis read his homilies and prayers without clear signs of difficulty during his liturgies for Christmas and New Year's. The Vatican announced Jan. 9 that the pope will celebrate four public liturgies in the rest of January and February, including the canonization of an Argentine religious sister.

Though not reading from his speech, the pope thanked the communications representatives for their work since "it's not easy to communicate."

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"The first thing a person does is communicate," he said. "From Adam, when he saw Eve, he communicated. To communicate is the most human thing that exists."

In the prepared text, Francis had written that communication in the Catholic Church should not be about marketing or making propaganda but sharing communion with Jesus Christ.

Communications, he wrote, "is a great mission in a world so hyperconnected and bombarded by news."

"Today, the challenge of good communication is more complex than ever," he wrote, and there is a risk of approaching communications with a "worldly mentality" obsessed with control, power and success.

For those in church, he stressed communicating is not about marketing, making propaganda or "hiding behind slogans or catchphrases."

"It is to share a Christian reading of events; it is not to surrender to the culture of aggression and disparagement," he wrote. "It is to build a network of sharing the good, the true and the beautiful made up of sincere relationships."