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Vatican News



Pope Francis listens to a question during a meeting with families outside the parking garages of a condominium on the outskirts of Rome where he led his "School of Prayer" initiative June 6, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Pope Francis led his "School of Prayer" outside on a concrete driveway leading to a series of parking garages under a 30-family condominium on the outskirts of Rome.

"The church begins to take shape in the community, seeking together, listening to the word of God, speaking well of each other," he told about 60 residents of the apartment building: children, teenagers, adults and older people. A group of women from Senegal, an Orthodox man and the district president were also present, Vatican News reported.

"What matters is respect for others, and with that respect you go forward and build up the church," making sure to include and accompany children and the elderly, he said during the visit June 6, a portion of which was released in video.

"A parish where children are not listened to and where the old are blocked out is not a true Christian community," he said.

The pope's late afternoon visit to the families was not announced in advance by the Vatican and came as a big surprise to the residents, whose local parish is the Church of St. Brigid of Sweden in Rome's Palmarola neighborhood.

One woman rushed down the stairs fixing her hair, others were wearing house slippers, according to Vatican News.

The pope's white Fiat pulled onto the sloping driveway, which had a large metal gate that was eventually closed shut. He greeted the families and children from his wheelchair, and an aide handed out candy.

One woman told her small squirming toddler, "Look, look! Did you know that is Jesus' friend?"

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Brown plastic chairs had been set up for the residents and an upholstered wooden armchair for the pope in the driveway which was enclosed by a large wall of cut rock and brick with pockets of vegetation sprouting out of the seams.

The visit was the third appointment of his "School of Prayer," a series of visits he has been making during the Year of Prayer in preparation for the Holy Year 2025. The visits are coordinated by the section of the Dicastery for Evangelization that is organizing the Holy Year.

The pope asked the residents if they had "any reflections or something nice" to share.

One woman said how much she has appreciated his words, initiatives and presence. "From World Children's Day, your speeches, what we get is a father who leads a large community in small things, in true things."

"Seeing you here in front of a brick wall is the most moving thing," she said. "It makes us feel that you are part of our community. … This is the church of Christ; it is the church that is stripped down to be a human church, so thank you."

According to Vatican News, the pope spoke about the family, its challenges, its beauty and potential for the church and society, in a brief informal catechesis and in a 45-minute Q&A session.

"Let's defend the family, which is essential for raising children," he said, acknowledging the difficulties or "storms" families will face. ''If parents argue, it's normal, but they should make peace before the end of the day" and show that they do love each other.

Families should always use the three words that are essential for making a relationship work: "Sorry, please and thank you," he said.

"The children are watching us," he said. Parents who are separated should not bad-mouth each other and should teach their children about respect.

Always talk to your children, the pope told them. "Education happens through dialogue" and make sure they "understand that they can talk about everything."

"Life's lessons are learned at home," he said, "not from others who may teach who knows what."