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Cardinal Wuerl: Evangelization should be relevant, rooted in tradition

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

Synod of Bishops 2012

Catholic efforts to reach out to lapsed members must show them the relevance of faith today, but "must do so without losing its rootedness in the great living faith tradition of the church," Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl of Washington told Pope Benedict XVI and bishops from around the world gathered at the Vatican.

Wuerl, appointed by the pope as relator of the world Synod of Bishops on the new evangelization, introduced the synod's work Oct. 8 with a global overview of the challenge of evangelization today, and laid out the values that he said must be the foundation of the church's outreach.

Speaking in Latin, the cardinal addressed the pope, synod members, experts and observers for more than 45 minutes.

The cardinal said a "tsunami of secularism" has washed across the world, leaving in its wake a tendency to deny God's existence, or to deny that God's existence is relevant to human thinking and action.

Yet, without God "the very understanding of what it means to be human is altered," he said.

A key task of the new evangelization is to help people see that human dignity and human rights flow from the fact that human beings are created in God's image, he said.

The new evangelization, initiated by Blessed John Paul II and enthusiastically embraced by his successor, is a project aimed at reviving Christian faith in increasingly secular societies.

"Whatever we hope to achieve in this synod and whatever pastoral goals we set for re-proposing Christ to

this age, we must do so firmly rooted in the biblical vision of man created in the image and likeness of God, as part of a creation that reflects God's wisdom and presents a natural, moral order for man's activities," Wuerl said.

The cardinal told the synod that too many Catholics do not know the church's basic prayers or teachings, don't understand why it's important to go to Mass, and rarely go to confession.

The church must reach out to them, he said, sharing the faith and educating them with the contents of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Wuerl told the synod members that Christians are not called to scold others, but to share the good news of salvation in Christ, lived out in his body, the church.

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"The new evangelization must speak about God's universal salvific will and, at the same time, recognize that Jesus has provided a clear and unique path to redemption and salvation," the cardinal said. "The church is not one among many ways to reach God, all of them equally valid."

The teaching of the church, he said, is what verifies the truth of what people preach as they try to share the Gospel with others, and the church is the means through which God distributes his grace, particularly through the sacraments.

Wuerl told synod members that as they spend the next three weeks looking at almost every area of church life and at a variety of opportunities and barriers to new evangelization, their task would be to respond with "boldness or courage, connectedness to the church, a sense of urgency and joy."

At a news conference following his speech, Wuerl was asked if the synod would examine and acknowledge ways, such as the clerical sex abuse crisis, in which the church has alienated Catholics.

"The church is always called to reflect on herself," the cardinal said. "Every member of the church is called to ask, 'Am I living out the faith to the fullest?'"

The synod members must ask themselves: "How well are we proclaiming Christ?" he said. "It's not a matter of words; it's also a matter of actions, it's a matter of how we respond to others, it's also a matter of our prayer life."

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