

Vatican: No report on cardinals' group; pope's latest interview 'accurate'

Joshua J. McElwee | John L. Allen Jr. | Oct. 2, 2013

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Pope Francis' first meeting with eight cardinals advising him on reforming the church saw the group take up a wide range of themes, including reform of the Vatican bureaucracy and the role of the laity, the Vatican said Wednesday.

The group also talked about preparing a study to improve the church's pastoral work with families, said Vatican spokesman Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi.

The spokesman made available some details of the group's meetings at a press briefing Wednesday. But Lombardi said observers should not expect too much more information about the sessions, saying they are a "council for the pope's governance."

The meetings are not meant to generate documents for review by the faithful, Lombardi said. The pope will communicate any decisions made as a result of the cardinals' advice personally, he said.

"We have to liberate ourselves from the expectation of [having] documents or decisions from this council," Lombardi said. "The fruits are in good decisions of the pope, borne in knowledge of the needs of the universal church, from the cardinals and from others the pope may consult."

The cardinals' group, known officially as the Council of Cardinals, is meeting at the Vatican for the first time Tuesday through Thursday. The meeting, the first of its kind, has generated speculation over what kind of things might be on the cardinals' agenda or what kind of reforms might be expected to result.

On Monday, [the Vatican announced](#) [1] the pope had formalized the structure of the cardinals' group in a formal letter Saturday, asking them to help reform the Vatican's bureaucracy and "help me with governance of the universal church."

Beyond the cardinals' meetings, focus at the press briefing Wednesday was also on the pope's latest interview, published Tuesday by the Italian daily *La Repubblica*.

In [the wide-ranging interview](#) [2], conducted by Eugenio Scalfari, the paper's atheist editor, the pope touches on several sensitive topics, calling the papal court the "leprosy of the papacy" and saying its governance is too "Vatican-centric."

Responding to reporters' questions Wednesday, Lombardi said the pope "does not dispute" what was written. If the pope wanted to dispute the accuracy of the interview, he would, Lombardi said.

The spokesman also said the pope feels free to express himself in different ways, trusting the public to understand there are differences when he is speaking in different venues, from homilies to interviews to official

teachings.

"I think the pope's charisma is obvious, as is his desire to communicate directly with people," Lombardi said.

"This is a very clear message of the pope's interest in dialogue without prejudice," Lombardi continued.

The spokesman said the cardinals' meetings began Tuesday morning with the pope and cardinals conducting a short review on the structure of the church since the Second Vatican Council, held in Rome from 1962-65.

Other topics discussed, according to Lombardi: communion, participation and collegiality in the church; the preferential option for the poor; and the different responsibilities of all members of the church.

The reform of the Synod of Bishops was also a "major theme" of the first day of the meeting, Lombardi said. The Synod of Bishops is an advisory body of bishops from around the world, set up after the Second Vatican Council and meant to advise the pope in his governing of the church.

The pope has said several times he would like to reform the body, which has a permanent secretariat at the Vatican but is not part of the central bureaucracy.

[Speaking to the secretariat in June](#) [3], the pope said he and his advisory cardinals need to "find a path for coordination between synodality and the bishop of Rome."

Lombardi said another theme being taken up by the cardinals group is the reform of the Vatican bureaucracy. Included in that discussion, he said, is the relationship of the Vatican's various offices with the pope and the role of the Vatican's secretary of state, who in the last few decades has traditionally acted as a sort of prime minister for the pontiff.

There are "ample suggestions" for ideas of reform, Lombardi said, adding that people should not expect conclusions on any of the matters to come quickly.

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