



Pope Francis celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal at the Circus Maximus on the vigil of Pentecost, June 3, 2017. (Vatican Media / National Catholic Register)  
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## Vatican Creates New Office to Serve Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement

The new body aims to realize Pope Francis' desire to promote greater unity throughout the movement and enhance its key role in the Church's evangelical and ecumenical outreach.

Solène Tadie

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis has wanted the creation of a single service dedicated to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal organizations since 2015 — a vision that is now becoming a reality thanks to the creation of CHARIS (Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service), which will be officially instituted Dec. 8.

This new body within the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life will replace the two existing services known as the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Service and the Catholic Fraternity.

For the 50th anniversary of the Catholic Charismatic Movement in June 2017, Pope Francis already asked the two bodies to join together to organize the celebration at the Circus Maximus in Rome. On this occasion, the Pope quoted the late Belgian Cardinal Leo Suenens, the strongest episcopal promoter of the movement in its early days, who called it “a current of grace, a renewing breath of the Spirit for all the members of the Church.”

The international service will be made of 18 members, as well as a moderator and an ecclesiastical assistant — Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher to the Papal Household and a long time supporter of the charismatic movement. The service’s officials will fully assume their functions June 9, 2019, the Solemnity of Pentecost.

“Creating unity in a service supposes creating synergy, but still more supposes generating communion, fraternity and cooperation,” Cardinal Kevin Farrell, the prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, told the Register.

According to the cardinal, this papal desire to serve the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement in a more efficient way can be seen, among other things, as a willingness to help “deepen and promote the grace of baptism in the Holy Spirit throughout the Church, to promote the exercise of charisms not only in Catholic Charismatic Renewal but also in the whole Church and to encourage commitment to evangelization, particularly through the New Evangelization and the evangelization of culture.”

As a simple service, CHARIS does not intend to play any leading role toward the various charismatic institutions, which will all stay under the jurisdiction of their own ecclesiastic authority.

“I hope CHARIS can offer a valid service for the multifaceted and various expressions of Catholic Charismatic Renewal that the Holy Spirit has already

inspired, and for those that are still to come, for the good of all the faithful,” Cardinal Farrell said.

### The Ecumenical Dimension

The unity that Pope Francis is seeking through this new body is also meant to promote a greater communion within Christianity in general, as the canonical status of the service claims.

Indeed, as Paolo Maino, the president of the Italian community Via Pacis and member of CHARIS for Europe, points out, “The ecumenical dimension is part of the Charismatic Renewal DNA.”

Maino hopes CHARIS can be an instrument of mediation and even a way of reconciliation with some entities that used to remain on the sidelines of the Charismatic Renewal in the past, and thus to alleviate some accumulated tensions. “Now every entity of the Charismatic Renewal can sit at a table with the same dignity and say to each other: ‘We all work for the same Father; we all work for Jesus Christ; we share the same goal.’”

A similar idea was expressed by the South African-born Auxiliary Bishop Peter Smith of the Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon, and the CHARIS representative for North America and the Caribbean, who emphasized the increasingly ecumenical dimension of the movement. Indeed, if the dialogue between various Christian denominations’ charismatics was quite sporadic at the beginning of the movement, they now tend to see each other “more and more like brothers and sisters” he said.

Recalling a meeting he had with Pope Francis two years ago, Bishop Smith revealed the image the Pope chose to illustrate the best way to begin a relational ecumenism: First of all, the Holy Father said, “Go get an ice cream and go for a walk.” It was an image that implicitly evokes the necessity for all Christians to share cordially everything they can, even if it is only the start of a relationship.

Moreover, Bishop Smith praised the great “re-evangelizing” power of the movement. Through its presence in more than 200 countries, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is indeed an emblematic case of the globalization of religion.

The international movement was born in the United States in 1967, after a Bible study group received, at Duquesne University, the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Since then, the movement has never stopped growing all over the world, and it now includes an estimated 122 million people.

One of the strengths of the movement lies in the fact it began in the West and moved quickly elsewhere, according to Bishop Smith. It now has a very strong and increasing presence in the Third World, thanks to some missionaries who experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit in the United States and then returned to their countries.

### Long-Standing Papal Engagement

Pope Francis' commitment to advancing the charismatic movement is not unique. Indeed, all the popes since St. Paul VI have received Charismatic Renewal groups on the day of Pentecost.

The president's Fondacio movement, François Prouteau, who will represent charismatic associations with Holy See recognition within CHARIS, said the new initiative represents a concrete response to the popes' prayers since the Second Vatican Council for the gift of "a new Pentecost" — a vital Breath that would provide the Church with new impetus and dynamics, just as it did in every earlier period of Church history.

Stressing that the mission assigned by the supreme pontiff to every member of the service is "first and foremost communion," Prouteau wishes the latter will continue to "feed in them the hope ... that he generated with the creation of CHARIS."

"I think CHARIS has tremendous potential for more widely diffusing the culture of Pentecost throughout the Church," agreed Mary Healy, a professor of sacred Scripture at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit and the chair of the Doctrinal Commission of International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services in Rome. "Many Catholics have no idea how vast and diverse the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is. It encompasses prayer groups, lay communities, religious orders, schools of evangelization, healing and deliverance ministries and a wide variety of other entities."

Among the various specific benefits of the new body, Healy noted “the fact that CHARIS will be a ‘public juridical person’ under canon law means that the renewal will have a higher profile than in the past.

“It will be in a better position to serve the local Church, and especially to bring the dynamism and creativity of the Charismatic Renewal to evangelization.”

*Register correspondent Solène Tadie writes from Rome.*