

“Ad limina” visits

After the intermission coinciding with the celebrations of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, the *ad limina* visits of bishops were regularly resumed at the beginning of 2001. The Pontifical Council for the Laity received the following delegations: *the bishops of Hungary, the bishops of Yugoslavia, the bishops of Slovenia, the bishops of Panama, the bishops of Korea, the bishops of Paraguay, the bishops of Bangladesh, the bishops of Guatemala, the bishops of Benin, the bishops of Cuba, the bishops of Uruguay, the bishops of Haiti, the bishops of Nicaragua, the bishops of Myanmar, the bishops of Malaysia, and the bishops of Costa Rica.*

Apart from receiving useful information about the situation of the local Churches and especially about the activities of the laity in the aforesaid countries, the authorities of the Pontifical Council had interesting exchanges with the bishops on the question of the mission of the laity in the Church and in the world, on the Christian's identity that stems from Baptism and on the urgent need to rediscover the significance of the sacraments of Christian initiation in the secularized societies of our time.

Particular emphasis was placed on the priority question of the formation of the laity. Speaking, for example, of the work of catechists, which is becoming of vital importance in some Churches, the bishops stressed the need for catechists to be given adequate spiritual, theological and pastoral formation. Such formation ought to be provided by qualified Institutes, and be inspired by the guidelines of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

The question of how the various lay associations and communities should be welcomed, encouraged and absorbed into the local Churches and parishes was also discussed with the bishops. Without waiving the principle that the diocese should remain the essential point of reference for the laity, the ecclesial movements and associations must be seen as a genuine gift of the Holy Spirit to the contemporary Church and their pedagogical and missionary resources properly exploited.

Other questions addressed were the promotion of women in the Church, the need for the laity's more coherent and incisive presence in social, political and cultural life, the conditions for the involvement of laypeople in pastoral work and their participation in pastoral councils and national councils of the laity.

Particular attention was also focused on the youth apostolate with special reference to the celebrations of World Youth Day as particularly favourable events for evangelization. World Youth Days have indeed become, for the young people who participate in them, an occasion for a profound experience of the catholicity of the Church and for a privileged encounter with the Successor of Peter. The need was also stressed to follow them up in an appropriate way in the individual dioceses.