The Holy See

APOSTOLIC LETTER
ISSUED «MOTU PROPRIO»

BY THE SUPREME PONTIFF
FRANCIS

SANCTUARIUM IN ECCLESIA

transferring competences for Shrines to the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization

1. The Shrine has “enormous symbolic value”[1] in the Church, and becoming a pilgrim is a genuine profession of faith. In fact, the contemplation of sacred images is evidence of the hope of feeling more strongly the closeness of God that opens the heart to the confidence of being heard and answered in one’s deepest desires.[2] Popular piety, which is a “true expression of the spontaneous missionary activity of the People of God”,[3] finds in the Shrine a privileged place to express the fine tradition of prayer, devotion and trust in God’s mercy inculturated in the life of every people.

Indeed, since the first centuries, pilgrimage was seen primarily as going to the places where Jesus Christ had lived, proclaimed the mystery of the Father’s love and, above all, to that place where there was a tangible sign of his Resurrection: the empty tomb. Subsequently, pilgrims made their way to the sites where, according to different traditions, the tombs of the Apostles were. Finally, over the centuries, pilgrimages were also extended to those places, now the majority, where popular piety has experienced first-hand the mysterious presence of the Mother of God, the Saints and the Blessed.[4]

2. To this day, Shrines in every part of the world are a distinctive sign of the simple and humble faith of believers who find in these holy places the dimension that upholds their existence as believers. Here, in a profound way, they experience the closeness of God, the tenderness of the

Virgin Mary and the company of the Saints: an experience of true spirituality that can not be underestimated, at the risk of mortifying the action of the Holy Spirit and the life of grace. Many Shrines have even been perceived as forming part of the life of people, families and communities, as having shaped the identity of entire generations, and as influencing the history of some nations.

The great stream of pilgrims, the humble and simple prayer of the People of God alternating with liturgical celebrations, the fulfilment of so many graces that many believers affirm they have received, and the natural beauty of these places enable us to see how Shrines, in their various forms, represent an irreplaceable opportunity for evangelization in our time.

3. These places, despite the crisis of faith that is affecting the contemporary world, are still perceived as sacred spaces to which pilgrims go to find a moment of rest, silence and contemplation in today's often hectic life. A hidden desire gives rise, in many people, to nostalgia for God; and Shrines can be a true refuge for rediscovering oneself and to find anew the necessary strength for conversion. Furthermore, in the Shrine, the faithful can receive support for their usual routine in the parish and in the Christian community. This osmosis between the pilgrimage to the Shrine and everyday life is a great help to pastoral ministry, because it permits the rekindling of the commitment to evangelization through a testimony of greater conviction. Therefore, walking towards the Shrine and participating in the spirituality that these places express is indeed an act of evangelization, which deserves to be appreciated for its profound pastoral value.[5]

4. By its very nature, then, the Shrine is a holy place where the proclamation of the Word of God, the celebration of the Sacraments, in particular, of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, and the witness of charity express the Church's great commitment to evangelization; and therefore it represents a genuine place of evangelization where, from the first proclamation up to the celebration of the sacred mysteries, it makes manifest the powerful action which God's mercy works in people's lives.

Through the spirituality proper to each Shrine, pilgrims are guided by the "pedagogy of evangelization"[6] to a more responsible involvement both in their Christian formation and in the necessary witness of charity that flows from it. The Shrine also greatly contributes to the catechetical commitment of the Christian community;[7] indeed, transmitting the message that gave rise to its foundation in harmony with the times, it enriches the lives of believers, offering them justification for a more mature and informed commitment to the faith (cf. *1 Thess* 1:3). All in all, in the Shrine, the doors are wide open to the sick, the disabled, and above all, to the poor, the marginalized, refugees and migrants.

5. In light of these considerations it is clear that Shrines are called to play a role in the new evangelization of today's society and that the Church, in pastoral terms, is called to consider the importance of the heartfelt motivation expressed through pilgrimages to Shrines and places of

devotion.

Therefore, in seeking to expand the pastoral work being performed in the Shrines of the Church, I have decided to transfer to the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization the competences that, pursuant to Art. 97 §1 of the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, were heretofore assigned to the Congregation for the Clergy, and also those provided for in art. 151 of the same Constitution concerning journeys made for reasons of piety, without prejudice, however, to the task of the legitimate ecclesial authorities and those which, by virtue of special laws, belong to other entities with regard to specific Shrines.

Therefore, I establish that in the future the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization shall have competence to:

a) establish international Shrines and approve their respective Statutes, in accordance with cann. 1232-1233 of the Code of Canon Law;

b) study and implement measures to strengthen the evangelizing role of Shrines and to promote popular religiosity therein;

c) promote an organic pastoral ministry of Shrines as the driving force of the new evangelization;

d) promote national and international meetings so as to encourage joint participation in the renewal of the pastoral ministry of popular piety and of pilgrimage to places of worship;

e) promote the specific formation of workers in Shrines and places of piety and devotion;

f) ensure that pilgrims be offered, along their journey, a consistent and sustained spiritual and ecclesial service that allows a truly personal experience;

g) enhance the cultural and artistic value of Shrines in keeping with the *via pulchritudinis* as a particular mode of evangelization of the Church.

I decree that what has been set out in this Apostolic Letter issued *Motu Proprio* be observed in all its parts, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even if worthy of special mention, and that it be promulgated by its publication in *L'Osservatore Romano*, entering into force 15 days after promulgation, and thereafter published in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*.

Given in Vatican City on 11 February 2017, Liturgical Commemoration of Our Lady of Lourdes, Fourth Year of my Pontificate.

Francis

[1] Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy. Principles and Guidelines* (2002), 263.

[2] Cf. Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, *Aparecida Document*, 29 June 2007, 259.

[3] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 122.

[4] Cf. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, *The Pilgrimage in the Great Jubilee* (25 April 1998), n. 33.

[5] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 124, 126.

[6] Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 48.

[7] Cf. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, *The Shrine, Memory, Presence and Prophecy of the Living God* (8 May 1999), 10.

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