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300 Church Communications Experts Meet in Rome

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, archbishop of New York, and Joaquín Navarro Valls were among those giving addresses at a conference held at the University of the Holy Cross at the end of April.

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From April 28 to 30, a conference was held in Rome on *Church*

Communications: Creative Strategies for Promoting Cultural Change. Those taking part included diocesan spokespersons, communications people from various Catholic institutions, and other professionals working in the field.

The 9th edition of the communications conference was attended by more than 300 people from all over the world. It was organized by the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, an academic center begun under the impetus of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo.

Those giving addresses included Cardinal Timothy Dolan, archbishop of New York, who said that “*we have moved beyond a time when the bishops were the best spokesmen for the Church. Today the Church needs competent lay people to represent it.*”

Interspersing his address with humorous stories, Cardinal Dolan

stressed seven key points for effective communication: always telling the truth; being pro-Church; providing information quickly in order to prevent mistaken interpretations; knowing what the Magisterium teaches in order to speak clearly; always speaking about Christ; and knowing one's audience.

Cardinal Philippe Barbarin, archbishop of Lyon, gave an address on *The Family as a Communications Opportunity*. Referring to laws that harm the institution of marriage, he said that “*there are some truths that cannot be decided by a parliamentary majority. A new civilization cannot be built on such laws. Since they are not grounded in human nature, these changes won't last in history.*”

He also made known that Pope Francis had spoken to him about the upcoming Synod on the family. In

convoking it, *“I have sensed God’s hand,”* the Pope told him.

Helen Alvaré, professor of law at George Mason University, spoke about the defense of the human being’s identity. *“Today, in the Western world, when these topics are discussed the concepts of soul, human nature and human identity have been replaced by the idea of sexual identity.”*

Austen Ivereigh, from Catholic Voices, spoke about *“Misunderstandings and Provocations: Prudence and Public Argument.”* *“The important thing is to give witness, rather than trying to win debates,”* he said. Moreover, Pope Francis *“has restored relevance to ordinary people.”*

Those taking part in the conference attended the Pope’s Wednesday audience and then met with Fr. Lombardi at the Press Office of the

Holy See. The Vatican spokesman pointed to the communication challenges presented by this pontificate and said that “*the Holy Father’s spontaneity breaks down all barriers. His personal style is simple and down to earth, while also being effective and filled with very expressive gestures.*”

The conference ended with a moving address by Joaquín Navarro Valls, who spoke about *Holiness and Communications: the Figure of John Paul II*. The former Vatican spokesman had many personal anecdotes about how the Pope from Poland had attained sanctity by doing three things: praying, smiling and working: “*When did I first realize I was working for a saint? I remember the moment very well: the first time I saw him praying. He had as great a need to pray as he did to breathe. Although he never wasted a minute,*

he was never in a hurry. He always spread joy around him.”

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