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Ufficio Nazionale
per i beni culturali ecclesiastici
e l'edilizia di culto

Office of Communication and the Press

International Conference “Doesn’t God Dwell Here Anymore?”

PRESS RELEASE

The international conference "Doesn't God Dwell Here Anymore?" took place at the Pontifical Gregorian University (Rome, 29-30 November 2018), promoted by the Pontifical Council for Culture, the Italian Episcopal Conference (National Office for Ecclesiastical Cultural Heritage and Buildings of Worship) and the Pontifical Gregorian University (Faculty of History and Cultural Heritage of the Church).

On the first day, the focus was on the issue of the decommissioning and reuse of churches, a growing phenomenon in many western countries. The morning reports highlighted the problem from various perspectives including the sociological (L. Diotallevi), canonical (P. Malecha), architectural (T. Coomans) and art historian, conservative and museological (M. de Beauchesne-Cassenet). In the afternoon session, behind closed doors, reports from the delegates of the national episcopal conferences of Europe, North America and Australia offered a comprehensive overview of the variety of situations encountered in the various countries. Changing demographic and social situations and religious practice mean there is an excess number of churches in some places, with the consequent need for a different use. It is the opinion of the conference that this situation may be an opportunity for a different valorisation, always in the ecclesial context, of a cultural heritage that the Church does not want to renounce. The message of the Holy Father Pope Francis, read by Cardinal Ravasi at the beginning of the conference, also looks in this direction.

The second morning provided the opportunity to address the issue, partly related to that of the previous day, of the management of cultural heritage, including in a long-term pastoral program. After a general introduction to the issue (V. Pennasso), they spoke about some of the many experiences identified as virtuous: two dioceses in Italy (A. Nante, L. Palmeri), one involved in a project across all the dioceses of the historic region, one in Catalonia (JM Riba Farrés), one relating to the experiences of dialogue of the Church with contemporary artists and other religious groups in Germany (A. Gerhards), and finally one in Portugal aimed at the formation of Christian communities in the knowledge and protection of religious cultural heritage (S. Saldanha). Other national experiences were heard in the afternoon.

At the beginning of the second afternoon session, again reserved for the national delegates of the episcopal conferences, a document entitled *The Decommissioning and Ecclesial Re-use of Churches* was read and approved. These guidelines, consisting of five chapters and final recommendations, are to be published in the coming weeks by the Pontifical Council for Culture.

Pontifical Council for Culture

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