

Peter Turkson: Pope Francis sets new tone for Curia

Jerry Filteau | Apr. 17, 2013
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By his sheer "simplicity of life," Pope Francis has set a new tone for the Roman Curia, African Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, told *NCR* April 10 in an interview in Washington.

The new pope's personal example and clear insistence that the church needs to focus on "the periphery of society" -- the poor, the vulnerable, the marginalized -- "would mean that we [in the Curia, the church's central offices] need to reconsider our lifestyle," Turkson said.

Turkson -- who wore a simple, dark gray suit with a Roman collar to an April 10-11 conference at The Catholic University of America -- said most cardinals in the Roman Curia would not have to change their everyday business attire, because most of them already wear just a plain black cassock to work.

But he suggested that Francis' clear preference for simplicity in dress and lifestyle would almost certainly affect the style of the Roman Curia as well.

"It is not he who has to adjust to the Curia," he said, but "the Curia has to adjust to his leadership" and act in ways that support the new pope's style of ministry and leadership.

NCR interviewed Turkson briefly during a break in an April 9-10 conference at The Catholic University of America on the impact of Pope John XXIII's 1963 encyclical on peace and social justice, *Pacem in Terris* ("Peace on Earth"), 50 years after its publication.

Turkson said that it is still too early to tell how some of Francis' earliest decisions -- such as to continue residing at the Domus Sanctae Marthae, a Vatican guesthouse for visiting church prelates from around the world, instead of moving into the traditional quarters in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace -- would play out in the longer run.

But he said many such decisions show that the new pope is clearly the same "man of the people" that he was in Buenos Aires, Argentina, when as a cardinal he lived in a small apartment and regularly rode on city buses and subway cars.

He said the pope's choice of Francis as his papal name has signaled his desire to continue a lifestyle of poverty, simplicity and friendship with creation and the environment.

Vatican officials at all levels are committed to supporting the pope's ministry in the church, he said, and "we will modify our own lifestyle" as needed to "support his exercise of leadership, his vision." on how the church should address such issues as poverty and respect for creation and the environment.

To a suggestion that Francis' early emphasis on the poor and marginalized could elevate the Vatican justice and peace agency to greater prominence in coming years, Turkson said he saw no major shift in the standing of

various Vatican offices.

Turkson described the Catholic University conference marking the 50th anniversary of *Pacem in Terris* as an "exciting" review of that document and its impact on church and world affairs over the past half-century.

He noted in passing that his Vatican office had planned to hold a similar conference this March marking the 50th anniversary of *Pacem in Terris*, but when Pope Benedict XVI announced his resignation at the end of that month, the justice and peace council postponed its conference, rescheduling it for this coming October.

Turkson said the Catholic University conference was distinctive for its attention to specific U.S. war and peace issues related to *Pacem in Terris*, while the upcoming Rome conference would probably be more general, addressing the church's response to a wide range of global concerns.

One of the things the Vatican is seeking to address in light of *Pacem in Terris*, he said, is the question of how "political leadership" around the world should respond to the issues raised by John XXIII's encyclical half a century ago.

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