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Church's mission is to 'manifest the deeds of Jesus,' says cardinal

by David Seden by Catholic News Service

Irving, Texas — The mission of the Catholic church will continue to be centered on Christ, and Catholics must open up their hearts, receive a "spiritual pacemaker" from the Holy Spirit and be more like the "good Samaritan" to carry out God's will, Honduran Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga told attendees at a ministry conference Friday.

Rodriguez, the archbishop of Tegucigalpa, was the keynote speaker for the seventh annual University of Dallas Ministry Council, co-sponsored by the Dallas and Fort Worth dioceses and the University of Dallas in Irving.

He is the chairman of the Council of Cardinals that is advising Pope Francis on the reform of the Roman Curia. The international group has been informally dubbed the "Group of Eight" or "G-8."

Addressing more than 3,000 people who attended his talk, Rodriguez discussed the importance of the Second Vatican Council as a guide for the future; Pope Francis' impact not only the church, but on secular society as well; the church's hierarchy and the importance of the laity; the church's mission to the poor and the marginalized; and the economic inequities to global citizens because of the concentration of wealth among a few.

At a news conference, the cardinal said Pope Francis continues to show what he would like for the world to see of the Catholic church by being candid and humble and continuing to acknowledge the need for improvements in the church while denouncing economic and social inequities and calling for policies to improve human dignity.

He said his role in the G-8 is like that of an orchestra conductor. He also said in the coming years, the

laity's stature among Vatican offices could rise in importance to the level afforded that of bishops, clergy and religious.

The group of cardinals from six continents will meet once more in December and again in February to continue advising the pope on numerous matters, particularly reform the Roman Curia, the offices at the Vatican, and the Vatican's finances, among other areas.

In his keynote address earlier in the day, Rodriguez continually referenced Vatican II as not only an important period in the life of the church, but whose work continues to impact and inspire the church of today.

In reference to Pope Francis, he said the pope who has asked for a "poor church" continues to inspire millions around the world, particularly because of his humble nature that he hopes his priests will follow.

He said the pope is pushing that ideal of Vatican II to emphasize that a hierarchy in the church is about the people of God and that clergy are the only ones to administer the sacraments, but that they work with the laity to carry out Christ's mission of service.

"The hierarchy has no purpose in itself and for itself, but only in reference and subordination to the community," he said. "Only from the perspective from someone crucified by the powers of this world is it possible to explain the authority of the church.

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"The hierarchy is a ministry, and a service and this is one of the ideas of Pope Francis that is spreading all around the world," he said. "We are here to serve. Authority and hierarchy in the church is a service that requires lowering ourselves to the condition of servants."

Rodriguez talked about the growth of the Catholic church in Africa, Asia and Latin America and said the reality of church's continual shifting away from a Eurocentric and Italian concentration. He also noted that the new evangelization allows the church to define itself again.

"We once more become the church as proclaimer, servant and Samaritan," he said. "The church receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God. If the church has a mission at all, it is to manifest the deeds of Jesus. The church has never been her own goal. Salvation comes from Jesus, not the church."

He said the church also has to lead the way when it comes to righting injustices and inequality.

"We need to build up a new evangelization ... to build up a culture of the good Samaritan -- making our own culture of the good Samaritan before the neighbor in need, feeling the pain of the oppressed, getting close to them and freeing them. Without this commitment, all religiousness is not true."

And, he said, Catholics need to be more joyful, like St. Paul, in proclaiming the Gospel.

"The mission of the church is the mission of Jesus," he said. "All of us need to have a heart test because many times we are ill of cardiac insufficiency or missionary insufficiency.

"What happens to one who has cardiac insufficiency? He gets a little device, a pacemaker," he said. "We have to ask the Holy Spirit to give us a spiritual pacemaker so that our hearts will beat like St. Paul and go

forth and evangelize. Woe on me if I don't preach the Gospel."

[David Seden is executive editor of *The Texas Catholic* and *Revista Catolica*, the English- and Spanish-language newspapers of the Dallas diocese.]

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