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Francis: Bishops, lay people 'all on the same level'

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Vatican City — Making remarks to a new Vatican council to review the central church's economic and administrative structures Friday, Pope Francis stressed that the council's eight cardinals and seven lay members should work together as equals.

The seven lay members, Francis said, "represent various parts of the world and contribute with their experience to the good of the church and its particular mission."

"The laity are full members of the new council: not members of the second class, no!" Francis said. "All on the same level."

"The work of the council is of great weight and great importance and offers a fundamental contribution to the service performed by the Roman Curia and by the various administrations of the Holy See," the pontiff continued, according to a Vatican release of his text to the group.

Francis was speaking Friday to his new Council of the Economy, a group the pope announced in February as part of a new centralization of economic authority at the Vatican. The group is part of the Secretariat of the Economy, Francis' new central authority for the Vatican's economic and administrative activity, which is being led by Cardinal George Pell.

The economic council, coordinated by German Cardinal Reinhard Marx, was meeting for the first time Friday at the Vatican. Francis gave short remarks just before noon.

Among other prelates serving on the council are Galveston-Houston Cardinal Daniel DiNardo. Its seven lay members are all men and include a former finance minister of Singapore, a former CEO of the investment management company Invesco, and a Canadian who is a former vice president of Imperial Oil

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