

Pope says bishops obliged to guide, not suffocate new lay movements

VATICAN CITY - While bishops have an obligation to guide new lay movements and associations, they must take care not to suffocate them, Pope Benedict XVI said.

Bishops are called to discern and guide the movements, not to “dominate their gifts, but rather to be on guard against the danger of suffocating them,” the pope told a seminar for bishops sponsored by the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

Meeting the bishops at the end of their May 15-17 meeting, the pope said the new lay groups that flourished immediately after the Second Vatican Council are important gifts to the church inspired by the Holy Spirit.

They were born in a period “full of enthusiastic promises, but also marked by difficult trials” for the church, Pope Benedict said.

“Prejudices, resistance and tensions” often accompanied the formation of the groups, most of which were not born as a parish or diocesan initiative, but from the prayers and dreams of their founders, he said.

While hesitation to accept the movements mostly has disappeared, the pope said many of them still need assistance and guidance to reach the maturity that would allow them to preserve their own identity while fitting better into the structure and pastoral outreach of the wider church.

The movements, he said, “are not a problem or another risk that is added to our already serious duties. No, they are a gift of the Lord, a precious resource for enriching the whole Christian community with their charisms.”