



Thomas Tayebwa, deputy speaker of the Ugandan parliament, with his wife and child, presents a gift to Pope Francis during a meeting with members of the International Catholic Legislators Network at the Vatican Aug. 26, 2023. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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Pope Francis prayed that God would raise up a new generation of "well-educated and faithful Catholics leaders committed to promoting the church's social and ethical teachings" through public service, especially in politics.

Such leaders, he told members of the International Catholic Legislators Network, can contribute to building God's kingdom by placing human life and dignity at the center of their concern and ensuring care for the environment and the world's poorest people.

The pope met at the Vatican Aug. 26 with the legislators who were holding their annual meeting in Frascati, south of Rome, and focusing on what they see as "dehumanizing trends" in politics, economics and technology.

A key feature of the trends, which have a "negative impact upon both human and natural ecology alike," the pope said, is a "subtle seduction of the human spirit, lulling people -- and especially the young -- into misusing their freedom."

"We see this when men and women are encouraged to exercise control over, instead of responsible custodianship of material or economic 'objects,' the natural resources of our common home or even one another," the pope said.

Seeing everything and even other people as an object to be used for one's personal benefit, he said, "ultimately impacts most negatively on the poorest and most vulnerable in society."

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Even the connections people find on social media can be dehumanizing, he said, when they are used to spread "fake news" or to promote hatred and division.

"This misuse of virtual encounter can only be overcome by the culture of authentic encounter, which involves a radical call to respect and to listen to one another, including those with whom we may strongly disagree," Francis told the legislators.

On the other hand, he said, international networks like the Catholic legislators' group can show a better way not only by connecting people, but also by uniting them in a common project.

Such a network mirrors the church itself, he said, because it is a community "called to live in both communion and mission."

"Those 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' forces of the Christian life, sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit, inwardly bind people together in fraternal unity and direct them outward on the shared mission of joyfully proclaiming the Gospel," Francis told the group.