

PRESS RELEASE – 25 September 2021

POPE FRANCIS TO THE BISHOPS OF VARIOUS CHURCHES WHO ARE FRIENDS OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT: UNITY IS GOD'S "DREAM"

It was a decisive call to "dare to be one" in the current state of fragmentation that the world is experiencing; and to continue on the path of friendship that has already begun. The Pope's words to the delegation of Bishops of various Christian Churches.

"In the face of the 'shadows of a closed world', where so many dreams of unity are being shattered, where 'a project for all is lacking and globalisation is drifting without a common course', where the scourge of the pandemic risks exacerbating inequalities, the Spirit calls us to have the boldness of being one, as the title of your meeting says. Dare to be one."

Those were Pope Francis' [words](#) as he concluded the conference "Dare to be One. The gift of unity in a divided world" (23-24 September) of Bishops who are Friends of the Focolare belonging to various Churches. This morning he received them in audience at the Sala dei Papi in the Vatican: 10 were there in person, while 180 bishops from 70 Churches followed the audience via web connection.

He encouraged them to live unity, the heart of Chiara Lubich's charism, a charism that "grew by attracting men and women of every language and nation with the power of God's love, which creates unity without annulling diversity, on the contrary enhancing and harmonising it".

He went on to explain that the unity that Jesus Christ has given us "is not unanimity, it is not getting along at all costs. ... It obeys a fundamental criterion, which is respect for the person, respect for the face of the other, especially the poor, the small, the excluded". Lastly, the important call to continue the ecumenical journey already begun, which must be, as Pope Francis said, "always open, never exclusive" and he concluded with a note of affection: "Keep smiling, which is part of your charism".

In attendance, along with the delegation of bishops, were Cardinal Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, Margaret Karram and Jesús Morán, president and co-president of the Focolare Movement respectively.

Bishop Brendan Leahy, Catholic Bishop of Limerick (Ireland) and coordinator of the Bishops Friends of the Focolare Movement, presented the two days of the conference to the Pope, describing them as "extraordinary". **Bishop Christian Krause** (Germany), former President of the Lutheran World Federation, spoke to the Holy Father about the Bishops' commitment to "widen the circle of these meetings between Bishops of different Churches" in order to help heal the wounds of a divided world, and of young people who are afraid to face the future. He also spoke of the wish to hold similar meetings on the African continent and beyond.

Metropolitan Chrysostomos, of the Orthodox Church of Kyrenia (Cyprus), strongly emphasised the experience of unity lived during the days of the conference: "(...) We found that we were 'one' as in the first Christian Church, with gospel love among us. We shared experiences, admitting our mistakes; we shared concerns and together we wanted to embrace Jesus on the cross, the solution to all kinds of disunity; we prayed to go beyond these divisions. We want to help bring the light of Christ so that people will not be deprived of hope".

The conference: "Dare" to be one

The two-day meeting of the Bishops Friends of the Focolare from various Churches was exceptional in several respects. First of all, its strong ecumenical character, and then *leitmotif* of unity. At a times like these, when states and international organisations are struggling to find shared goals, even in such significant areas as public health or peace, the bishops "dared" to believe in and seek new ways of communion-fellowship among different Christian communities, at the service of society. Jesús Morán called unity an "urgent ethical imperative" and added: "(...) the unity of all Christians could be a decisive contribution to the transformation of the world". Margaret Karram expressed the Movement's support in helping to widen the network of fraternity that has grown up among the Bishops worldwide, to "renew the life of our Churches in the one Church of Christ...!". And she concluded the conference with a spontaneous prayer: "We are here, a small group of lay people and Bishops, from various Churches and various continents, all passionately dedicated and on the way to unity. We want to promise You that we will go forward together, that we want to be Your instruments, to bring Your concrete love into our Churches".

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