

Press release - November 23, 2015

Bishops of various Churches at the service of the human family

The Ecumenical Conference of Bishops, friends of the Focolare Movement, will be held in Istanbul from 25 to 30 November 2015.

The 34th Conference of Bishops of various Churches, promoted by the Focolare Movement, will start on November 25. It will be held on the island of Heybeliada (Halki), in the sea of Marmara, near Istanbul. The 150 participants, from 9 different countries, will be hosted in the Monastery on this island, which was once the seat of the prestigious Greek-Orthodox theological Academy of Halki.

His Holiness Bartholomew I awaits to meet this group of bishops. During a recent interview, at the time when he received a doctoral degree h.c. in the Culture of Unity by the Sophia University Institute (Loppiano-Italy), the Patriarch said: *“At Halki we will together remember Chiara and pray for the repose of her soul. We will be able to express our commitment to work for the unity of Churches. We, the Church of Constantinople are pleased to welcome these cardinals and bishops, and we are ready to exchange our experiences and give one another the kiss of peace between the East and the West”.*

“Together for our common home” will be the theme of this conference, which will focus on unity, as a service to the human family, through a diversity of gifts. The main speakers will be Patriarch Bartholomew I and Maria Voce, while Cardinal Francis Kriengsak, Archbishop of Bangkok will be the moderator of the conference.

Various bishops from different Churches will share their reflections; among them, the Anglican Bishop Robin Smith; Åke Bonnier, Lutheran Bishop of the Swedish Church; the Catholic Bishop Brendan Leahy, Bishop Sahak Mashalyan of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Metropolitan Elpidophoros of Halki. Jesús Morán, the co-president of the Focolare Movement will offer his reflection on *“The Charism of Unity and the challenges of today’s humanity”*. Gerhard Pross, an Evangelical from YMCA, Germany will speak about *“Achievements and experiences on the road to unity”* in the name of *“Together for Europe”*, the ecumenical network of movements and communities.

Cardinal Kurt Koch, who will lead a Holy See delegation to Istanbul for St. Andrew’s feast, will also speak during the Conference. His talk will be about *“Pope Francis and the cause of Christian Unity”*.

In a church of Armenian Apostolic tradition of ancient Chalcedon, the seat of the Chalcedonian Ecumenical Council of 451, the bishops will once again formulate a pact of reciprocal love, thus renewing the mutual relationship of charity that goes beyond all divisions and answers Jesus’s invitation: *“Love one another as I have loved you”* (Jn 15:12). In this particular context, this invitation implies the reciprocal promise *“to love the Church of the other as one’s own”*.

The bishops are invited by Patriarch Bartholomew to participate in the celebrations at the Phanar on the 29 and 30 November on the occasion of the feast of St. Andrew, Patron of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Meetings for bishops of various Churches, promoted by the Focolare Movement are held annually. These meetings have been taking place since 1982, and they owe their beginning to a suggestion made by John Paul II to a group of Catholic bishops, friends of the Focolare Movement when he invited them to share their experience of *“effective and affective”* communion even with bishops of other churches.

Promoted by Klaus Hemmerle, who was then bishop of Aachen, Germany, and after his death by Miloslav Vlk, Cardinal of Prague, these meetings aim at offering vital spaces of communion and fraternal sharing in the light of the spirituality of unity. The venue for these meetings changes; they are held in places that are meaningful to the various Christian denominations. In 2016 the meeting will be held in Ottmaring (Augsburg – Germany).

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