

Press Release – July 2, 2016

Unity is possible

In Munich, Christian Movements and Communities of the ecumenical network *Together for Europe* give testimony that unity is possible. Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew I send messages. A Europe open to the whole world.

«Dear friends in Together for Europe, coming from many Movements and Groups that belong to different Churches and Communities, I know that you are gathered in Munich. You are right; it is time to get together to face today's problems with a true European spirit». Pope Francis says these words at the beginning of his video message to those gathered at Karlsplatz (Stachus) in Munich for the *Together for Europe* event. After speaking about the challenges Europe has to face, Pope Bergoglio encourages the participants *«to promote the testimony of a civil society where people work together to foster encounter and solidarity with the weak and the disadvantaged, to build bridges, to overcome open or latent conflicts».* He concludes: *“Maintain the freshness of your charisms; continue to be “Together” and extend this further! Let your homes, communities and cities be workshops of communion, friendship and fraternity, that bring people together and are open to the whole world”.*

Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is also present through his video message in which, among other things, he says: *«Even when temptation suggests that we need not be together, Christians, especially, are called to demonstrate the fundamental principle of the Church, which is communion (koinonia). It is only when we share the gifts so generously and freely bestowed on us by God, that we can fully experience them ourselves”.*

Today's outdoor rally *“500 years of division are enough - unity is possible!”*, concludes the 4th edition of *Together for Europe*. This recalls the 500 years of separation between the Catholic Church and the Churches of the protestant Reformation. In her speech about unity, Maria Voce, president of the Focolare Movement says: *«It is through our commitment that we can offer the newness of the Gospel. Before his death Jesus prayed: ‘Father, may they all be one’. He showed that we are all brothers and sisters, that one ‘single human family’ is possible, that unity is possible, that unity is our destiny. We commit ourselves here, today, to be catalysts of this change, catalysts for a new vision of Europe, so as to speed up the journey towards unity by starting a profound dialogue with and for all men and women on earth».*

Gerhard Pross (CVJM Esslingen) tackles the theme *“Unity in reconciled diversity”* while Andrea Riccardi (St. Egidio Community) speaks about *“No more walls!”*. Cardinal Kurt Koch (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Unity among Christians), Bishop Frank Otfried July (the Lutheran World Federation), the Metropolitan Serafim Joanta (the Romanian-Orthodox Metropolitan of Germany and Central Europe) and the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches go up together on stage and speak about *“Reconciliation opens us to the future – 500 years of division are enough”*. An interview about *“Mission and the future”* leads to a very interesting dialogue between the Evangelical Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm and Cardinal Reinhard Marx. The concluding message, read by members of the steering committee and distributed to thousands of people, does not only declare that *“being together in Europe is stronger than fear and selfishness”*, but also expresses the commitment of those who adhere to *Together for Europe* to *“pursue the path of reconciliation”*, to *“live unity in diversity”*, to *“meet people of different beliefs and faiths with respect, seeking dialogue with them”*, and to promote *“humanity and peace”* in the world.

1700 leaders and members from more than 300 Communities and Movements of *Together for Europe* took part in the Congress held at Circus-Krone-Bau on the two days before the rally. In his opening address Martin Wagner (CVJM Munich) said: *“Reconciliation will be our keyword. We have already experienced it and it will be our future. We want to share unity and work together for it, but above all, we, as Christians, want to give our support towards the challenges that Europe faces today”.*

The 36 forums and round table conferences held during the Congress focused on integration and reconciliation, solidarity with the weakest, sustainability and environmental protection, ecumenism, Christians and Muslims in dialogue, marriage and family, economy. Experiences, ideas, projects and witnesses of faith

were also shared. Many participated in the forum *“the price and prize of unity”* where Cardinal Walter Kasper remarked that *“the effort to achieve authentic reconciliation is one of the main obstacles encountered by the Ecumenical Movement. Without forgiveness we cannot proceed with our journey together”*.

The need to know one another, to encounter each other and to work together was highlighted during the conference *“Christians and Muslims in dialogue”*. Pasquale Ferrara, the new Italian Ambassador to Algiers commented: *“Dialogue is not achieved by cultures or religions but by people”*. Climatic changes and ecological challenges were discussed in the forum *“Towards sustainability in Europe”*. Cardinal Peter Turkson, the environmental engineer Daniele Renzi and other experts led this discussion. During the conference *“What soul for Europe?”* Jesús Morán, the co-president of the Focolare Movement emphasized the fact that *“Europe can and must, now more than ever, offer the world the prospect of forming a culture of unity in diversity at all levels, from a personal level in everyday life to an institutional one”*.

Documents and photos are available on www.together4europe.org/live

It was sunset when the concluding message of *Together for Europe 2016* was read on stage at Karlsplatz. The programme continued with a rock concert animated by musical bands and the creative enthusiasm of youth.

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