



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE BISHOPS WHO ARE FRIENDS OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT

*Hall of Popes
Saturday, 25 September 2021*

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear brothers and sisters

I greet you all with affection, and I thank you for requesting this meeting, even though most of you are participating from afar. But we are close, indeed united in the one Body and the one Spirit!

I greet Cardinal Francis Xavier Kovithavanij, who was unable to attend due to illness: let us pray for his rapid recovery! And I thank the bishops who presented their experience of these meetings, which began 40 years ago; a path of friendship that has strong roots, solid roots. I would like to reflect briefly on this with you.

The *Opera di Maria*, (Work of Mary) or Focolare Movement, has always cultivated, through the charism received from its founder Chiara Lubich, the sense and service of unity: unity in the Church, unity among all believers, and unity throughout the world, “in concentric circles”. This makes us think of the definition of the Church given by the Second Vatican Council: “a sacrament or ... a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 1). In the midst of the lacerations and destructions of war, the Spirit placed in Chiara’s young heart a seed of fraternity, a seed of communion. A seed that developed and grew from that group of friends in Trento, attracting men and women of every language and nation with the power of God’s love, which creates unity without annulling diversity, indeed, enhancing and harmonising it. The words of Basil (of Caesarea), on the Spirit, come to

mind: “*Ipse unitas est, ipse est harmonia*”.

The “kinship” — so to speak — between this charism and the ministry of bishops is evident. We bishops are at the service of the People of God, so that it may be built up in the unity of faith, hope and charity. The Holy Spirit imprints the will of the Lord Jesus in the heart of bishops: that all Christians may be one, for the praise and glory of the Triune God and that the world may believe in Jesus Christ (cf. *Jn* 17:21). The Pope and Bishops, we are at the service not of an external unity, of a “uniformity”: no, but of the *mystery of communion* that is the Church *in Christ and in the Holy Spirit*, the Church as a living Body, as a people journeying in history, and at the same time beyond history. A people sent into the world to bear witness to Christ, so that he, *Lumen Gentium*, Light of the Nations, may draw everyone to him, with the gentle and merciful power of his Paschal Mystery.

Dear brothers and sisters, this, we can say, is God’s “dream”. It is his plan to reconcile and harmonise everything and everyone in Christ (cf. *Eph* 1:10; *Col* 1:20). This is also the “dream” of *fraternity*, to which I dedicated the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. In the face of “dark clouds over a closed world”, where many dreams of unity are shattered, where “a plan for everyone” is lacking and globalisation is drifting “without a shared roadmap”, where the scourge of the pandemic risks exacerbating inequalities, the Spirit calls us to have the boldness — the *parrhesia* — to be one, as the title of your meeting says: Dare to be one. Starting from the awareness that unity is a *gift* — that is the other part of the title.

The saints, above all, bear witness to the courage of unity: a few days ago we celebrated Saint Cornelius, Pope, and Saint Cyprian, Bishop. We owe to the latter the wonderful definition of the Church as “a people gathered together by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (*De Orat. Dom.* 23: *PL* 4, 553). But let us also think of so many witnesses of our times, pastors and lay people, who have had the “boldness of unity”, paying in person a price that was at times very high. Because the unity that Jesus Christ gave us and continues to give 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 little ones, the excluded.

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you again for this meeting. Above all, I thank you for the commitment with which you have pursued this path of friendship: remember, always open, never exclusive — in order to grow in the service of communion. Keep smiling, which is part of your charism. I pray for you and for your communities. May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady protect you. And please do not forget to pray for me.

May the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit bless us all. Amen.

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