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## Russia. Msgr. Pezzi (Moscow): “The way forward is to be builders of bridges and relationships”

To be men and women who are "not afraid to create new friendships, to build bridges, and to open their doors to others." This is the "mandate" that Pope Francis has left to young Catholics from the Russian Federation. Speaking to SIR, **Monsignor Paolo Pezzi**, Archbishop of Moscow and President of the Russian Bishops' Conference, gave an overview of the Pope's online meeting with young Russian Catholics which took place on Friday August 25th. The young people, who came from all over Russia, from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok, gathered in St Petersburg from August 24 to 27 to take part in the Russian leg of the World Youth Day in Lisbon. Some had travelled up to 9,000 kilometres to reach St Petersburg. The word "friendship" closed the meeting. "The ability to forge friendships is what today's world has lost most," said Msgr. Pezzi in his concluding homily. "This world has either forgotten or considered it superfluous to establish a friendship with God, with Christ. Consequently, friendly relations between people are considered unnecessary. We are now facing the consequences: we expected peace - and there is war; we expected love - and there is hatred; we expected goodness - and now evil is spreading, even multiplying". As Peter said to Jesus: "You alone have words that give light, flavour and meaning to our lives." "So, dear young man, may this answer also be yours. Do not be afraid of friendship with Christ!" **Monsignor Pezzi, what feedback have you received from the young people these past few days?** Their meeting with Pope Francis was fantastic. The Pope was generous in his willingness to meet with us. We were impressed by the attentiveness with which he listened to us and his desire to be there for us. His words were very meaningful indeed. For many of them it was perhaps the first time that they had had the opportunity to see the Pope and to meet with him, albeit remotely. The young people immediately realised that the Pope was addressing them directly and that he had taken an hour and a half to be with them. They were very impressed. I would venture to say that perhaps the most important message is the one contained in the third point, that of dialogue between generations, which the Pope repeated in his final greeting, inviting us to remain faithful to the legacy we have received. **Will it be possible for these young people to become leaven and salt for the Russian Church and Russian society?** Looking at the last few days, I can say with certainty that these young people are already salt and leaven for the Church and society in Russia. In my final homily I reminded them that, by virtue of their friendship with Christ, each one of them must consider it a mission to experience and communicate this friendship. **Do you think there is a desire in their hearts to overcome feelings of revenge and hatred in order to rebuild relations between peoples in the future?** One thing is especially evident and clear. These young people, especially the younger generation, have a strong propensity towards forgiveness, an ability to build relationships with their fellow others, forging new friendships, along with the disposition to make a fresh start. **In your opinion, what will be the outcome of these meetings in everyday life?** It's hard to say at the moment. I look forward to witnessing them. **In the light of the current difficulties, that leave no light in sight, what is the course of action for a future of peace for all?** The way ahead is the one indicated to us by the Pope, namely to be builders of bridges and relationships. This means being people who do not erect barriers or walls, but who open new doors, who build bridges and seek opportunities for dialogue. Above all, it means not being afraid to create new friendships, because only such friendships can tear down barriers and fears.

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