
Message of Presidents of EU Bishops' Conferences: "Build a universal fraternity that leaves no one out"

"A message of hope and a call to solidarity to the European Institutions and the Member States in this crisis that has overwhelmed us", write the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union in a Message to the European Institutions titled "Regaining hope and solidarity", published in view of the upcoming EU Council meeting. For the first time the Presidents of EU bishops jointly exhort "to build universal fraternity that leaves no one out" thereby overcoming "the major challenges of our present time, including the COVID-19 pandemic." The Statement – whose signatories include Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti, President of Italian bishops – is the fruit of a meeting that for the first time the Bishops-Presidents had last September 30 under the aegis of COMECE. **"The pandemic that has afflicted us in these last months has shaken many of our previous securities** and has revealed our vulnerability and our interconnectedness. The elderly and the poor all over the world have suffered the worst. To this crisis that surprised us and caught us unprepared, European countries at first responded with fear, closing national and external borders, some even refusing to share very much needed medical supplies between them." The bishops make known that they followed European political developments with concern, worried that "the European Union itself, as an economic, political, social, and cultural project, was at risk. We realized then, as Pope Francis said, that we are in the same boat and that we can only save ourselves by staying together." This was finally acknowledged also by Member States and "with renewed determination the European Union began to respond in a united manner to this dramatic situation." In their message the Presidents of all Bishops' Conferences of the European Union say they hope that the COVID-19 recovery instrument and the reinforced EU budget for 2021-2027, which have been agreed in the meeting of the European Council of July and which are currently negotiated between the Council and the European Parliament, will "reflect that spirit." "The future of the European Union does not depend only on economy and finances but also on a common spirit and a new mindset. *This crisis is a spiritual opportunity for conversion. We must not simply devote all our efforts to returning to the 'old normal' but take advantage of this crisis to bring about a radical change for the better.*"

? For the first time ever, the Presidents of all Bishops' Conferences of the European Union address a message to the EU and the national governments. In this difficult moment, let's regain [#hope](#) and [#solidarity](#) so as to foster universal [#fraternity](#).

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The Bishops-Presidents place emphasis on the migration issue, notably the emergency of refugees "who are living in inhuman conditions in the camps and are seriously threatened by the virus." "Europe cannot and must not turn its back", the bishops write pointing out that "solidarity towards refugees means not only funding, but also opening up the borders of the European Union proportionally, by each Member State." In this respect, "the Pact on Migration and Asylum presented by the European Commission can be regarded as a step to establish a common and just European policy on migration and asylum, which must be carefully evaluated." In their message, the bishops recommend that "safe and legal paths for migrants and humanitarian corridors for refugees be facilitated, by which they can come to Europe safely and be welcomed, protected, promoted and integrated." **The message comes at a time when European governments are enacting measures to curb the pandemic**, with differing lockdowns and restrictive measures on business. In this respect, the Presidents of EU Episcopal Conferences urge "to find the best way to reconcile respect for necessary measures and freedom of religion and worship." They explain: "A crucial element for

the Church in many Member States during the pandemic is the respect for the freedom of religion of believers, in particular the freedom to gather together to exercise their freedom of worship, in full respect of sanitary requirements. This is even more evident if we consider that charitable works are born and are also rooted in a lived faith.” The Presidents of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union declare their “good will to maintain the dialogue between States and ecclesiastical authorities.” *“The Church – they write - is by your side in our common effort to construct a better future for our continent and the world.”*

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