



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE
COUNCIL OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCES OF EUROPE (CCEE)**

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 3 October 2014*

Dear Brother Bishops,

I affectionately greet all of you on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences and I thank Cardinal Péter Erdő for the words with which he introduced this meeting.

As Pastors close to your community and attentive to the needs of the people, you know well the complexity of the situation and the pressing challenges to which the mission of the Church is subjected, also in Europe. As I wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, we are called to be a Church which “goes forth”, moving from the centre to the peripheries to go towards all, without fear and without diffidence, with apostolic courage (n. 20). How many brothers and sisters, how many situations, how many contexts, even the most difficult, are in need of the light of the Gospel!

I would like to thank you, dear brothers, for the commitment with which you have welcomed this text. I know that this Document is increasingly the object of deep pastoral reflection and the starting point for paths of faith and evangelization in many parishes, communities and groups. This too is a sign of communion and the unity of the Church.

The theme of your Plenary: “Family and the Future of Europe” presents an important occasion to reflect together on how to value the family as a precious resource for pastoral renewal. I feel it is important for Pastors and families to work together in a spirit of humility and sincere dialogue so that the respective parish communities may become a “family of families”. In this context

interesting experiences have blossomed, which call for proper attention in view of furthering fruitful cooperation in your respective local Churches. Engaged couples who seriously live marriage preparation; married couples who welcome foster or adopted children; groups of families who in parishes or in movements help each other on the path of life and faith. There is no lack of experience of different types of pastoral care of the family and of political and social commitment in supporting families, both those who live traditional married lives and those marked by problems or by breakup. It is important to take these important experiences in the various contexts and in the life of the men and women of today, as a propitious time to exercise careful discernment in order to “network” them, thus involving other diocesan communities.

The cooperation between Pastors and families also extends to the field of education. Indeed, the family, which already fulfills its role with regard to its members, is a school of humanity, brotherhood, love, communion which forms mature and responsible citizens. Open cooperation between the clergy and families will favour the maturation of a spirit of justice, of solidarity, of peace and the courage of one’s convictions. This will come about by supporting parents in their responsibility to educate their children, thus protecting their inalienable right to provide their children with the education they deem most suitable. Parents, in fact, remain the first and foremost educators of their children, thus they have the right to educate them according to their moral and religious convictions. In this way, you will be able to outline common and coordinated pastoral directives necessary to promote and effectively support Catholic schools.

Dear brothers, I encourage you to maintain your commitment to promote the communion of the various Churches in Europe, facilitating appropriate cooperation for fruitful evangelization. I also invite you to be a “prophetic voice” within society, above all where the process of secularization, taking place on the continent of Europe, tends to render speaking of God increasingly marginal. May the heavenly intercession of the Virgin Mary and Saints and Patron Saints of Europe sustain you in this task. I ask you to please pray for me and I bless you from my heart.