



THE CATHOLIC CHURCH  
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## REGAINING HOPE AND SOLIDARITY

Message of the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union  
to the European Institutions and the Member States

The Catholic Church in the European Union, represented by the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences of the Member States, wishes to address **a message of hope and a call to solidarity** to the European Institutions and the Member States in this crisis that has overwhelmed us. A message in which we restate our commitment to the construction of Europe that has brought peace and prosperity to our continent, and to its founding values of solidarity, freedom, inviolability of the human dignity, democracy, rule of law, equality and defence and promotion of human rights. The Founding Fathers of the European Union were convinced that Europe will be forged in crisis. In our Christian faith in the Risen Lord we are hopeful that God can turn everything that happens to good, even things that we do not understand and that seem bad, and this faith is the ultimate foundation of our hope and universal brotherhood. As the Catholic Church in the European Union, together with other sister Churches and ecclesial communities, we proclaim and bear witness to this faith and together with members of other religious traditions and people of good will we strive to build a universal fraternity that leaves no one out. Faith calls us to go out of ourselves and see in the other, especially in those who suffer and stand on the margins of our streets, a brother and sister and also to be willing to give our lives for them.

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. Many of us were 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. With renewed determination the European Union began to respond in a united manner to this dramatic situation. It demonstrated its capacity to rediscover the spirit of the Founding Fathers. 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 hopefully 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. It forces to rethink and to restructure the present model of globalisation guaranteeing respect for the environment, openness to life, concern for the

family, social equality, the dignity of workers and the rights of future generations. Pope Francis with his Encyclical *Laudato si'* has provided a compass for shaping a new civilization. In his new Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, signed a few weeks ago on the tomb of Saint Francis of Assisi, he calls the whole of humanity to universal brotherhood and social friendship, not forgetting those on the margins, wounded and suffering. The Principles of Catholic Social Teaching as human dignity and solidarity, like also the preferential option for the poor and sustainability, can be guiding principles to build up a different model of economy and society after the pandemic.

**Solidarity** is a fundamental principle of the Social Doctrine of the Church and is at the heart of European integration process. Beyond internal transfers of resources for the sake of cohesion policies, solidarity is to be understood in terms of "doing together" and as "being open to integrate everyone", especially those on the margins. In this context it is to be mentioned that the COVID-19 vaccine, when it becomes available, must be accessible to all, especially to the poor. Robert Schuman explained that nations, far from being self-sufficient, should be mutually supportive and that solidarity is the conviction that the real interest of each is to recognize and accept in practice the interdependence of all. For him, a united Europe prefigures the universal solidarity of the whole world without distinction or exclusion. That is why the Schuman Declaration pointed to Europe's special responsibility for the development of Africa. In the same line, we call now for more humanitarian aid and development cooperation, and for military spending to be redirected towards health and social services.

European solidarity should extend urgently to refugees who are living in inhuman conditions in the camps and are seriously threatened by the virus. Solidarity towards refugees means not only funding, but also opening up the borders of the European Union proportionally, by each Member State. 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. The Church has already expressed its opinion on reception, distinguishing between different types of migration (whether regular or irregular), between those fleeing war and persecution and those emigrating for economic or environmental reasons, and the need to keep in mind security issues. We think, however, that there are certain principles, values and international legal obligations that always have to be respected, regardless of the conditions of the persons involved, principles of action and values that are the basis of Europe's identity and have their origin in its Christian roots. We also 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. In this sense, it is appropriate to collaborate with Church institutions and private associations already working in this field. Europe cannot and must not turn its back on persons coming from war zones or places where they are discriminated against or cannot lead a dignified life.

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. We declare our good will to maintain the dialogue between States and ecclesiastical authorities to find the best way to reconcile respect for necessary measures and freedom of religion and worship.

It has been often said that the world will be different after this crisis. It depends on us if it will be better or worse, if we come out of this crisis strengthened in solidarity or not. During these months of pandemic, we have witnessed so many signs that open us up to hope, from the work of the health care personnel, to the work of those who care for the elderly, to the gestures of compassion and

creativity made by parishes and ecclesial communities. Many, in these difficult months, have had to make considerable sacrifices, giving up meeting their loved ones and being close to them in moments of loneliness and suffering and sometimes even of death. In his *Urbi et Orbi* message on Easter Sunday, Pope Francis addressed Europe in particular, remembering that “*after the Second World War this continent was able to rise again and to overcome the rivalries of the past, thanks to a concrete project of solidarity*”. For the Pope it is more urgent than ever “*that these rivalries do not regain force, but that all recognize themselves as part of a single family and support one another. The European Union is presently facing an epochal challenge, on which will depend not only its future but that of the whole world.*”

We assure all who lead and work in the European Institutions and Member States, that the Church is by your side in our common effort to construct a better future for our continent and the world. All initiatives that promote the authentic values of Europe will be supported by us. **We are hopeful that from this crisis we can come out stronger**, wiser, more united, exercising more solidarity, caring more for our common home, being a continent that pushes the whole world forward towards greater fraternity, justice, peace and equality. We offer our prayers for all and we give you wholeheartedly our blessing. May the Lord accompany us on our pilgrimage towards a better world!

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