



## The Holy See

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### **MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS**

**FRIENDS OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT** Your Eminences, Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, 1. I am pleased to extend an affectionate and fraternal greeting to you on the occasion of the spiritual conference which has brought you here from various parts of the world to deepen the bond of ecclesial communion between yourselves and with the Successor of Peter, and to reflect, by sharing your respective pastoral experiences, on some specific aspects of the spirituality of the Focolare Movement of Unity. Your annual meeting gives me the welcome opportunity to assure each of the participants of my spiritual closeness and my remembrance in prayer, so that Christ himself - who, as the Letter to the Hebrews stresses, is "the great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb 13:20) - may assist these days of intense work with his grace and accompany you in your daily episcopal ministry. 2. This conference is part of the journey of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. We are now well into the second year of immediate preparation for the Jubilee, in which the Church is called to reflect in particular on the Holy Spirit and his sanctifying presence within the community of Christ's disciples. As I recalled in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, the same Spirit who inspires the various charisms and ministries in the Church sustains with his divine strength the close connection between her various members and enlivens the communion of the entire Body of Christ. "The unity of the Body of Christ is founded on the activity of the Spirit, guaranteed by the apostolic ministry and sustained by mutual love (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-8)" (n. 47). The in-depth reflections of your meeting, further enriched by a broad exchange of pastoral experiences, are a valuable opportunity for a more intense and vital understanding of the meaning of effective and affective collegiality and ecclesial communion as it is concretely lived in the apostolic service entrusted to you. 3. The theme chosen for this year's conference - "*Towards the unity of nations and the unity of peoples*" - follows the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which paid great attention to the universal mission of the Church, open to the vast horizons of the modern world, for which it is called to be "a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all men" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 1). The very diversity of the areas you come from and where you are called to serve the Gospel clearly emphasizes the "catholicity" of the Church, which, formed of people of various nationalities, constitutes the one People of God, redeemed by Christ and enlivened by the Spirit. On the way towards the full Christian unity for which, guided by Providence, history is striving despite numerous tensions and difficulties, the successors of the Apostles are called to make their own particular contribution through the threefold office of teaching, governing and sanctifying the portion of Christ's flock entrusted to them. 4. Venerable and dear Brothers, may the Virgin Mary's motherly intercession guide and support you in your service of leadership. As is clearly illustrated by the icon of Mary in the Upper Room with Peter and the other Apostles gathered together as they await the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:12-14), the apostolic mission and the mission of the Mother of God are intimately linked and complementary. Indeed, the ideal of holiness at which the entire mission of the Church aims is already preformed and prefigured in Mary. Therefore in addition to her "Petrine aspect", the Church also

has an irreplaceable "Marian aspect": the former expresses the apostolic and pastoral mission entrusted to her by Christ, the latter, her holiness and total submission to the divine plan of salvation. "This link between the two aspects of the Church, the Marian and the Petrine, is profound and complementary" (*Speech to the Roman Curia*, 22 December 1987; *Insegnamenti X/3* [1987], p. 1484). I hope your Christian communities will faithfully reflect this twofold aspect of the Church, the "Marian" and the "Petrine", and I entrust the spiritual fruits of your convention to the motherly protection of the Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles and Mother of Unity, as I affectionately impart my Blessing to each of you. *From the Vatican, 14 February, the feast of Sts Cyril and Methodius, patrons of Europe, in the year 1998, the 20th of the Pontificate. IOANNES PAULUS PP. II* © Copyright 1998 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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