



SPIRITUALITY - Thousands of young people from European countries convened in Strasbourg, France, to attend the 36th meeting of the Taize Community (Dec 28-Jan.1) held annually across different European cities. The youths - 30 thousand according to Taize organizers - shared moments of reflection and prayer, hosted by families in Alsace (France) and its neighbouring Baden region (Germany): a land torn by wars that made countless victims, which today has become an important sign of hope for the construction of the European family and a crossroads of dialogue, whose populations have multifaceted cultural origins thereby heralding the spirit of reconciliation in the heart of Europe. Messages were sent by political and religious leaders to participants in the event organized by the Taize Community on the invitation of Catholic dioceses and Protestant churches on the opposite banks on the Rhine, which brought together several thousands of youths for the new step of the "pilgrimage of faith on earth" initiated by brother Roger at the end of the 1970s.

A sign for the entire continent. "Because it is taking place simultaneously in two countries, your meeting is a sign. Europe, which has gone through and is still going through difficult times, needs your commitment, your faith and your courage", wrote Pope Francis in his message to the youths. The Holy Father then referred to the theme of the Taize meeting in Strasbourg: "To seek visible communion among all who love Christ, the project that you have set for yourselves for the meetings in Taizé throughout the year 2014". "You are aware that the division among Christians is an obstacle to the accomplishment of the mission entrusted to the Church and that the credibility of the Christian proclamation would be much greater if Christians went beyond their divisions", the Pope underlined. Francis said to the youths: "The Pope counts on you so that, by means of your faith and your witness, the spirit of peace and reconciliation of the Gospel may shine forth among your contemporaries". The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople stated in his message to participants: "Coming together involves a twofold movement. It is a matter of giving and receiving, taking the initiative with respect to others and accepting that our neighbour can communicate something new to us. Some are more willing to share. Others are able to welcome with genuine joy. The link between these two actions must be fed by thanksgiving. To say thank you is not a simple greeting that one learns in youth and is

then repeated without any awareness of the depth and theological richness of the word. Saying thank you should be the characteristic of Christians".

A heartfelt appeal to Europe. Upon the aftermath of the meeting in Strasbourg Frère Alois, prior of the Taize Community, sent a heartfelt appeal to Europe. "We live in Europe as if it were a perfectly normal thing. But in reality, Europe is a miracle based on reconciliation". Highlighting the importance of forgiveness between peoples from different Countries and mindful of the forthcoming European elections of May 25, he said: "It must continue. Today, Western and Eastern Europe are still separate, even though the walls have been torn down, the consciences are still divided". Frère Alois recalled that Sunday 29 December a delegation of young pilgrims visited the European parliament. "Europe cannot be built without the meeting with people". He added: "Churches play an important role to this regard as they promote the process for the building of European consciences, especially among young people. Since we are united beyond national borders we can create occasions for encounter". The prior of Taize highlighted the living conditions of young people: "Today we see a lack of hope in the future and a lack of faith in God". How can this situation that is affecting an entire generation of young Europeans be addressed? "We should reflect on these questions also inside the Church: if we are not ready to open our doors to the youths just the way they are, we will never be able to find a place for them inside the Church", frère Alois replied.

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