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## **FOURTH EUROPEAN MEETING ON YOUTH MINISTRY**

*“A young Church witnessing  
to the joy of the Gospel”*

### **INTRODUCTION**

*Rome, 11 - 13 December 2014*

It gives me much joy to warmly welcome you all to the Fourth European Meeting on Youth Ministry organised by the Pontifical Council for the Laity in collaboration with the Council of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Europe. His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco is vice-president of the CCEE and I am very happy to greet him here.

To the bishops present here, I wish to convey my cordial greetings. They are entrusted with the pastoral care of the younger generations in various countries of Europe. I greet the priests, religious and lay people who work in youth ministry by accompanying young people as educators and guides. In this fourth European Meeting, a young delegate from each country was invited, and also representatives from several associations, movements and new communities. There are about 130 participants from over 30 countries. Warm greetings to all of you.

The first of these Meetings was held twenty years ago in Rome. Subsequent meetings took place in Loreto in 1995 and Paderborn in 1998, and now we find ourselves again in the Eternal City. The meeting in Germany took place during the period of preparation for the Jubilee Year World Youth Day, and the theme on that occasion was “*Who are the Christians of the year 2000?*” During that gathering, and also whenever the Successors of Peter were in conversation with the younger generations, we were given several elements to help build up an identity description of Christians, and particularly of young people, in the third millennium. More recently, during the pontificate of Pope Francis, the Church is experiencing a time of special grace, a *kairós*. The Pope’s apostolic exhortation *Evangelií Gaudium* is without doubt a handbook for the laity of today. It is a point of reference that challenges the faithful in their individual lives and circumstances and transmits a new direction for all the people of God. The Holy Father is urging the Church to undertake a new phase in evangelisation, one that demonstrates renewed impetus and the joy of the Gospel. He wrote, “How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelization full of fervour, joy, generosity, courage, boundless

love and attraction! Yet I realize that no words of encouragement will be enough unless the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in our hearts”.<sup>1</sup>

How can this fire be lit in the hearts of Europeans, children of a continent pervaded by fatigue and pessimism? How can hope in the future of Europe be regained if not through the younger generations?<sup>2</sup> As the Holy Father said during World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro in 2013, “Young people are the window through which the future enters the world. [...] Our generation will show that it can rise to the promise found in each young person when we know how to give them space”.<sup>3</sup> When speaking to young people during the prayer vigil at Copacabana, the Pope said, “Today too, as always, the Lord needs you, young people, for his Church. My friends, the Lord needs you! Today too, he is calling each of you to follow him in his Church and to be missionaries”.<sup>4</sup> In the Pope’s address to the volunteers at the Rio WYD he compared their mission to that of John the Baptist. They too are called to prepare the way of the Lord so that their contemporaries can meet the Lord. This will be possible only if they courageously follow the way of love shown to them by God. The Pope said, “God calls you to make definitive choices, and he has a plan for each of you: to discover that plan and to respond to your vocation is to move toward personal fulfilment. God calls each of us to be holy in living our lives, but he has a particular path for each one of us”.<sup>5</sup>

All of us here who work in the field of youth ministry should help the younger generations to respond courageously to the Lord’s call. Our young people “are part of a wounded humanity in which all of the educational institutions, especially the most important one, the family, are experiencing grave difficulties”.<sup>6</sup> They “experience serious identity problems and have difficulty making proper choices”. They need to be accompanied with respect, dedication and patience along the difficult roads of our times.<sup>7</sup>

Yesterday, when most of the delegates arrived, we celebrated the feast of Our Lady of Loreto, an important Marian devotion in our continent and in the world. May the Mother of the Lord, our Mother too, be with us during this Meeting and intercede for us. We ask the Lord to renew us in our mission so that young people may never feel alone on the streets of Europe, but that they may have clear points of reference and hope in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 261.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. POPE FRANCIS, Address to the Council of Europe, 25 November 2014.

<sup>3</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Address at the Welcome Ceremony in the garden of Guanabara House at WYD in Rio de Janeiro, 22 July 2013.

<sup>4</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Address at the Prayer Vigil at WYD in Rio de Janeiro, 27 July 2013.

<sup>5</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Address to the volunteers at WYD in Rio de Janeiro, 28 July 2013.

<sup>6</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Address to the participants at the Third World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, 22 November 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *ibid.*