Press Release

***"Let’s work all together for a recovery that leaves no one behind"***

Joint meeting of the CCEE-COMECE Presidencies

The annual CCEE-COMECE Presidencies meeting was held on Wednesday, 3 June 2020 with a special focus on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the day-to-day life in the Church and European societies, as well as on the Catholic Church's contribution to *"a just recovery that leaves no-one behind".*

At the centre of the debate was the situation of the Church in Europe, together with future prospects in the critical context of the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-19 virus.

The CCEE and COMECE Presidencies analysed the effects of the pandemic on our civil and ecclesial communities and identified possibilities for cooperation for the future Church life in Europe.

Renewing the Catholic Church's closeness to all those struggling against the pandemic - the victims, their families and all health workers, volunteers and the faithful who have been and are in the front line, caring for those affected and bringing them relief - the prelates expressed their concern *"about the economic crisis and the consequent loss of a large number of jobs",* and the hope that in Europe *"we will all work together for a recovery that leaves no one behind"*.

In this time of crisis, which showed the great limits of individualism, the two Presidencies stressed the central role played by the family, *"the true cell of solidarity and sharing, but also a place to pray together. Investing in the family* - they continued - *is the first step towards a just social, economic and ecclesial recovery".*

Thanking the many priests for their crucial and generous service during this period, some also sacrificing their own lives, the participants of the meeting analysed the role played by social media in prayer and *streaming* celebrations.

These new forms of religious practice, relationships, presence and sharing of faith invite us not only to evaluate the possibility of giving a new meaning to faith and the Church, but also to work to make many faithful rediscover the element of full sacramentality of religious celebrations in places of worship, which the use of new technologies cannot ensure.

The two Presidencies also dwelt on the strong limitation imposed on freedom of religion in the context of the closure of places of worship and the prohibition of liturgies, calling for the re-establishment of normal State-Church relations based on dialogue and respect for fundamental rights.

Because of the precautionary social-distancing measures, the meeting was held via video conference. The meeting was attended by Presidents Card. Angelo Bagnasco (CCEE) and Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ (COMECE), by all the members of the two presidencies - Card. Vincent Nichols (Westminster) and Bishop Stanisław Gądecki (Poznan) for CCEE and the bishops Mariano Crociata (Latina), Noel Treanor (Down and Connor), Jan Vokal (Hradec Králové) and Franz-Josef Overbeck (Essen) for COMECE – and by the Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union, H.E. Mgr Alain Lebeaupin.

*Saint Gallen, 4 June 2020*