

To His Eminence Mgr
Angelo Cardinal BAGNASCO
*President of the Council of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of
Europe*

As you all gather for the Plenary Assembly of this Council, which is scheduled to take place in Prague, I am pleased to extend my cordial greetings to the Presidents of European Catholic Bishops' Conferences, assuring them of my spiritual closeness. I wish to express my appreciation for the theme that you have chosen: "The Church in Europe after the Pandemic. Perspectives for Creation and the Community", and I hope your meeting will provide a significant contribution, especially to the Church communities of the European continent.

The experience of this pandemic has left a deep mark in all of us, because it dramatically affected one of the structural requirements of our existence - relations among people and in society - thus upsetting customs and relationships, and changing the conditions of our social and economic life. The very life of the Church has been significantly impacted; we were forced to refashion our religious practice, and many pastoral activities have not adjusted to this new situation yet.

The death of so many elderly people, the tragedy of families taken aback by intense and daunting suffering, the plight of children and young people locked up in their homes, and the suspension of religious rites and Christian formation initiatives. All this has led many priests and religious to look for courageous ways to provide their pastoral service, testifying to their paternal and tender proximity to the people. Faced with the explosion of new

forms of poverty, this work of creative charity must continue, while showing an increasingly attentive and generous closeness to the weakest.

Christian communities are called to engage in a spiritual interpretation of what we have experienced, so they can learn what life can teach and discern

perspectives for the future. We need to have the same attitude as the scribe who brought out new and old things from his treasure (cf. *Mt* 13:52).

I pray that, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary and the patron saints Benedict, Cyril, and Methodius - the Pastors of the Church that is in Europe - you may inspire the certainty of faith in all faithful, whereby nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, no matter what (cf. *Rm* 8:38-39).

While I ask you to pray for me, I send my Apostolic Blessing to you, Your Eminence, as well as to the other brother bishops and their Church communities.

Rome, St. John in the Lateran, 4 September 2020

Francis