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To the Délégation Catholique pour la Coopération of the Conference of Bishops of France: “You are at the service of genuine cooperation between local Churches and between peoples, opposing poverty and working for a more just and fraternal world”

The *Délégation Catholique pour la Coopération* of the Conference of Bishops of France, composed of 29 members, was received this morning in audience by the Holy Father in the Hall of the Popes of the Apostolic Palace on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation.

Francis welcomed them and asked them to greet on his behalf all the volunteers in missions in over fifty countries, as well as all those who, today as before, have benefited from their presence and their experience.

“As Blessed Paul VI wrote in the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, ‘development ... cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man. ... An ever more effective world solidarity should allow all peoples to become the artisans of their destiny’. (Nos. 14 and 65). These convictions led the Church in France to create, fifty years ago, the *Délégation Catholique pour la Coopération*, faithful to the great missionary impulse to which she has offered her generous contribution throughout the centuries. ... In this way you serve an authentic cooperation between local churches and between peoples, opposing poverty and working for a more just and fraternal world”.

“The word solidarity is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few’. (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 188). It is precisely in this dynamic that the *Délégation Catholique pour la Coopération* has chosen to situate its action, forming a real partnership with the Churches and local actors in the countries where volunteers are sent, and working in cooperation with the civil authorities and with all people of goodwill. It also contributes to a true ecological conversion that recognises the eminent dignity of each person, their own value, their creativity and their ability to seek and promote the common good” (cf. *Laudato Si’* 216-122).

Francis encouraged all the members of the *Délégation Catholique pour la Coopération* to “promote a culture of mercy based on the rediscovery of encounter with others, a culture in which no one looks at another with indifference or turns away from the suffering of our brothers and sisters”. (Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et*

misera, 20). Do not be afraid to walk the paths of fraternity and to build bridges between people and between peoples, in a world where so many walls are still being raised for fear of others. Through your initiatives, plans and action you make visible a *poor Church with and for the poor*, an outgoing Church that makes herself the neighbour of people in conditions of suffering, insecurity, marginalisation and exclusion. I encourage you to be at the service of a Church that allows each one to recognise the amazing closeness of God, His tenderness and His love, and to receive the strength He gives us in Jesus Christ, His living Word, so that we can use our talents for the good of all, and for the protection of our common home”.

“As I ask the Lord to help you serve the *culture of encounter within the single human family*, I impart my apostolic blessing to you and to all the members of the *Délégation Catholique pour la Coopération*”, concluded the bishop of Rome.
