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Audience with new recruits to the Pontifical Swiss Guard

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the new recruits to the Pontifical Swiss Guard – accompanied by their parents – who will participate in the swearing-in ceremony this afternoon in the San Damaso Courtyard.

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear officials and members of the Swiss Guard!

Dear brothers and sisters!

Your annual feast day, with the swearing-in of recruits, is a good occasion to meet you and to welcome the parents and relatives who join you in these very meaningful moments. I welcome you all! I greet and thank Colonel Christoph Graf, the chaplain, the officials, as well as the new Vice-Commander – welcome! – the NCOs, and all the members of the Corps. I address a special thought to you new recruits who, by your oath, will be introduced into the great family of the Swiss Guard. You have thus undertaken to devote some years of your life to a task that is both fascinating and rich in responsibility, at the heart of the universal Church.

The places where you will be required to carry out your service are steeped in a history marked by the heroic self-sacrifice of many servants of the Apostolic See, including many Swiss nationals. Since the establishment of the Swiss Guard, many young men have carried out the unique function assigned to it, which still continues to this day. Through generous and faithful commitment, over the course of the centuries some were not spared the most difficult trials, even shedding their blood to defend the Pope and to enable him to fulfil his mission in full independence. With this supreme devotion, they have fulfilled what is laid down in the Regulations still in force: the security of the person of the Pope and of his residence.

Dear recruits, you have chosen to dedicate yourselves to an exquisitely ecclesial task; I urge you to experience it as a Christian and communal witness. Indeed, your activity is not carried out individually, but as a community: it is not for nothing that you are the Swiss Guard “Corps”. May you be able to put this community dimension into practice every day, both during the hours – not always easy – of service, and in the daily life of the barracks, which includes moments of recreation, conviviality, encounter, and prayer. Living out the service in a communal sense is also a challenge, as it means bringing together individuals with different personalities, temperaments and sensibilities, who find themselves travelling a stretch of the road together. However, the ideal of serving the Church, in the person of the Successor of Peter, is a force that engages and helps us to face the inevitable moments of difficulty.

Dear Swiss Guards, I encourage you always to accord due importance to formation. The efforts devoted to it are indispensable for acquiring adequate qualifications and professional competence. But first and foremost, your stay in Rome should be valued in order to grow as Christians. I am thinking of the spiritual life, which allows us to discover God’s plan for each of us. At the same time, I urge you to cultivate mutual relationships, both in carrying out the tasks entrusted to you and in your free time, so that they may be in the style of brothers who profess to be Christians. Sincere and fraternal dialogue can sometimes be tiring and it can also be demanding, but it is important for developing one’s personality.

I take advantage of the opportunity to thank the entire Pontifical Swiss Guard Corps for their timely and valuable collaboration every day, to which I am a direct witness. The Holy See counts on you! Vatican City is proud of your presence in her territory!

Now I would like to pause in a moment of pain and sadness. And I would like for your colleague Silvan Wolf to be here. Unfortunately, he passed away; a good young man, joyful, cheerful. An accident tore him away from us. In silence, let us remember Silvan and pray for him.

I entrust you, your families, your friends and those who have come to Rome for the swearing-in ceremony, to the intercession of the Virgin Mother of God, the patrons Saint Martin and Saint Sebastian, and the guardian of the Swiss Federation, Saint Nicholas of Flüe, and I impart my heartfelt blessing. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.