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# **BOLLETTINO**

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## **Audience with members of the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe**

This morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of its founding.

The following is the Pope's address to the participants in the audience:

### **Address of the Holy Father**

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank the president for his greeting and his introduction. This is a jubilee meeting: you are celebrating your 25th anniversary, and it is good to celebrate and give thanks. Unfortunately, at the moment in Europe, and I would say especially the families in Europe, are living a time that is tragic for many and dramatic for everyone on account of the war in Ukraine. I echo your statement: "Mothers and fathers, regardless of nationality, do not want war. Family is the school of peace" (FAFC Presidency Council, 6 May 2022). Families and networks of families have been and are in the first line in the reception of refugees, especially in Lithuania, Poland and Hungary.

In your daily work for families, you carry out a dual service: you take their voice to the European institutions and you work to form networks of families throughout Europe. This mission is fully consonant with the synodal journey we are experiencing, to ensure that the Church increasingly becomes a family of families.

I thank you for the seminar you have organized in collaboration with the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, centred on bearing witness to the beauty of the family. A few days ahead of the World Meeting of Families, it draws attention to the declining birthrate in Europe and above all in Italy. This demographic winter is serious; please, beware! It is very grave. There is a very close link between this generative poverty and the sense of the beauty of the family: "The witness of the social dignity of marriage shall become persuasive precisely in this way, the way of a testimony which attracts" (*General Audience*, 29 April 2015).

Renewing my exhortation five years ago (1 June 2017), I encourage you to continue your work to promote birth and the consolidation of *family networks*. It is a valuable service, because there is a need for places, meetings and communities in which couples and families feel they are welcomed and accompanied, never alone. It is urgent that the local Churches, in Europe and elsewhere, open themselves to laypeople and families who accompany families.

We are living – this is clear – not only in an epoch of change, but a change of epoch. Your work is carried out in this change, that may at times provoke the risk of discouragement. But, with the grace of God, we are called to work with hope and trust, in effective communion with the Church. In this regard, recent examples are the Memorandum of understanding signed last year by your Federation with the Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe and for cooperation with the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union, whose offices in Brussels house your general secretariat.

The challenges are major, and they are all interconnected. For example, “we can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity” (Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 159), and this solidarity presupposes a balance; but it is precisely that balance that is missing today in our Europe. A Europe that is aging, that is not generative is a Europe that cannot afford to talk about sustainability, and increasingly struggles to maintain solidarity. For this reason, you often emphasize that family policies must not be considered as instruments of power of States, but must be based primarily on the interest of the families themselves. States have the task of eliminating obstacles to the generativity of families, and of acknowledging that families constitute a common good to be rewarded, with the natural positive consequences for all.

Furthermore, as your recent Board Resolution recalls, “the fact of having children should never be considered as a lack of responsibility towards the Creation or its natural resources. The concept of “environmental footprint” cannot be applied to children, since they are an indispensable resource for the future. Instead, consumerism and individualism should be addressed, looking at families as the best example of the optimization of resources” (FAFCE, *Families for Sustainable and Integral Development*, 26 October 2021).

Let us also talk about the scourge of pornography, which is now widespread everywhere on the internet: it must be denounced as a permanent attack on the dignity of men and women. It is not solely a question of protecting children – an urgent task for the authorities and for us all – but also of declaring pornography to be a threat to public health. “We would be seriously deluding ourselves were we to think that a society where an abnormal consumption of internet sex is rampant among adults would be capable of effectively protecting minors” (*Address to participants in the Congress on “Child Dignity in the Digital World”, 6 October 2017*). Networks of families, in cooperation with schools and local communities, are fundamental for preventing and for countering this scourge, healing the wounds of those who find themselves in the downward spiral of dependency.

The dignity of men and women is also threatened by the inhuman and increasingly widespread practice of surrogacy, in which women, almost always poor, are exploited and children are treated as goods.

Your Federation also has its own responsibility in bearing witness to *unity* and working for a *peace* that is the great peace, at this historical moment in which, unfortunately, there are many threats and it is necessary to focus on what unites, not what divides. In this regard, I am grateful that over the last five years your Federation has welcomed ten new family organizations and four new European countries, including Ukraine, into its fold.

Finally – and this is perhaps the challenge that is behind all the others – the pandemic has shed light on another, more hidden pandemic, of which little is said: the pandemic of *loneliness*. Whereas many families have rediscovered themselves as domestic Churches, it is also true that too many families have had the experience of loneliness, and their relationship with the Sacraments has often become merely virtual. Networks of families are an antidote to loneliness. Indeed, by their very nature they are required to leave no-one behind, in communion with the pastors and the local Churches.

“The mutual love between man and woman is a reflection of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves the human being, destined to be fruitful and to be fulfilled in the common work of the social order and the

care of creation" (*Address to the participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*, 29 April 2022). The family based on marriage is, therefore, at the centre. It is the first cell of our communities and should be recognized as such, in its *generative function*, unique and inalienable. Not because it is an ideal and perfect entity, nor because it is an ideological model, but because it represents the natural space for the first relationships and of generation: "When a family is welcoming and reaches out to others, especially the poor and the neglected, it is a symbol, witness and participant in the Church's motherhood" (Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, 324).

Dear brothers and sisters, go forth in your service! Ensure that the organization is all for service, as "lightweight" as possible and ready to respond to the demands of the Gospel. May the Lord bless you and Our Lady keep you. I bless you from my heart, and ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you!

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