

PRESS RELEASE

Re-writing the *Acts of the Apostles*

"We can save ourselves only if we stick together"

The 2020 annual meeting of the group of '*Friends*' of *Together for Europe*¹ was held online.

This year's annual meeting of the '*Friends*' of *Together for Europe* was held on November 14, 2020. Due to the pandemic, it was held online and about 300 persons from almost all countries of Europe took part, ranging from Portugal to Ukraine and Russia, as well as from Northern Ireland to Greece. 14 of the 40 Movements that are highly involved in the group of *Friends* presented a variegated mix of experiences in Eastern and Western Europe by means of videos, photos and written contributions.

During the morning session, a German participant affirmed: "We find ourselves in today's Areopagus from where we can encourage people". All the Movements offer a visible contribution toward a more united humanity through three praxes: "pray together, live together and be committed together for the others". There was an active participation through chats and in one of these the St Egidio Community affirmed: "We can save ourselves only if we stick together".

How are our charisms shining at this time of coronavirus? This question was put by Gerhard Pross, a moderator of *TfE* during the afternoon session of the meeting. This entails **listening** to what God is telling us today. Through the pandemic He is sounding an alarm bell. Through **prayer**, the Movements put themselves at His service and, in a **culture of alliance** they deepen their relationship with God and between themselves, spiritually as well as materially. In a **culture of the encounter** they learn anew how to dialogue, without losing their own identity, and, among other things, through the **solidarity with the poor**, they bear visible witness to their love for God and for humanity. The *St Egidio Community*, the *Schoenstatt Movement*, the still young Movement *Efisia* that was

¹ *Together for Europe* is a network of about 300 Christian Movements and Communities. They aim to contribute toward unity in Eastern and Western Europe, and together they also see to the needs of other Continents.

born in France, a member of the YMCA Esslingen representing the Leadership Group and the *Focolare Movement* shared their experiences of how their charisms have responded in solidarity and in a creative way to the challenges brought about by the pandemic. Some of the participants have expressed what they have experienced with such phrases as: “Covid strengthened our unity”; “It is as if we are today re-writing the *Acts of the Apostles*”; “The new form of Church is a lived-out friendship”.

At one point, the participants were divided into more than 40 groups, and this gave them the possibility of sharing even very personal experiences. Through this exercise, the participants became more aware of the importance, now more than ever, of the relationships between them and with all the others. At the end of the afternoon session a participant from Portugal affirmed: “Now is the time of the Christians in Europe”, and on behalf of the Movements in Portugal, invited the *Friends* for next year’s meeting, which is scheduled for 4-6 November 2021 in the city of Porto.

The 2020 meeting came to an end with a solemn prayer. Albeit online, the participants, who came practically from all over Europe, have experienced the presence of God, and together they prayed for strength and trust so as to be ever more signs of hope and help for humanity.