

Church together (Faire Église ensemble)
Pastoral letter on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the creation of the Diocese of
Luxembourg

Dear brothers and sisters,

At the beginning of the season of Advent, we look joyfully towards the feast of Christmas, while seeing the diocesan jubilee on the horizon, which will be celebrated in 2020. In the course of this jubilee year we are going to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the creation of the diocese of Luxembourg by Pope Pius IX.

The beginning of this evolution leads us to the aftermath of the French Revolution, 200 years ago. It was then, contrary to preceding centuries, that the Luxembourgish Catholics were assembled in 1840 for the first time under the aegis of an apostolic vicariate, transformed in 1870 into a diocese and raised in 1988 to the rank of an Archdiocese, after having been governed by the dioceses of Metz or even Namur. Given all this, we have become - all together - a special church.

That's why next year's anniversary celebrations will be under the theme " Church Together".

Over the past 150 years our "Church Together" has been marked by the witness of individual faith as well as by the life of communities and institutions. Many impulses have been launched by ecclesial or Church organizations, by pastoral zeal or simply our way of being Christian. It goes without saying that this evolution has known ups and downs, heroic feats and failures, harmonious periods and times of confrontation between Church and society. We see that the Church has had a significant impact on the spiritual, intellectual and cultural life of the country. It has been a force of power that has had great influence, an influence that we will no longer see in the future. Should we regret all this?

"When I am weak, then I am strong," writes Saint Paul (2 Cor 12,10). In fact, we are only truly strong when we engage with conviction as a pilgrim Church in the great story of God and humanity, a story which the Bible tells us.

Throughout the past, we have formed a community of destiny with people from the same sociological group in the same country. The sociological milieu was favorable to this Church. Today it is no longer the same. And moreover, in the first 100 years of existence of our diocese, the number of residents was equivalent to the number of faithful; this is no longer true today.

Christians have become a minority. In addition, we live in a world that is changing rapidly and radically, even dramatically, thanks to pluralism, individualism and the digitalization of society. But this should not destabilize us and prevent us from confessing our faith with a happy heart. Often so-called minorities have brought new energy to society. Christ himself encourages us in this sense when he said, "Do not be afraid little flock!" (Lk 12,32). This is how we become "salt of the earth" and "Light of the world" (Mt 5,13) through a Church that is able to radiate God's love, both inside and out. It is in this way that our "Church Together" can really be realized.

Let us enter our diocesan jubilee year with confidence and gratitude. I thank wholeheartedly those who are involved in projects or who have contributed to the general organization of this jubilee year. A big thank you goes also to the members of the working group '150 Joer Diözes'. But while getting involved with the celebration, let us not forget all those who are on the margins of society. This is why I would particularly like to recommend to you two social projects that are close to my heart: the first concerns the welcome of two refugee families from the island of Lesbos, supported by "Reech eng Hand" and "Caritas", as well as the construction of a new Foyer at the "Tricente-Heisdorf, a project long awaited by many disabled people looking for a place.

The jubilee invites us to draw courage and hope for the future. "Church together" invites us to widen our gaze towards a Church which does not exist for itself, but which is called to sow the seeds of faith in the fields of the future, sharing the joys, the hopes, the sorrows and the fears of the men and women of our time. Couldn't this seed become fruitful? Through our presence, we can foster social, cultural and intellectual development through our rites, pilgrimages and all the other religious traditions that form part of our country's identity. It is also a real chance to see young people in search of spiritual values and to offer them faith.

Shouldn't the church community become a laboratory of the future starting from the questions of men and women, confronting them with the eternally young message of the Gospel? This authoritative message can provide important pointers for today and tomorrow. Indeed, we must always ask ourselves the following questions: "What is the centre of our faith and of our way of doing Church together? What do we keep and what do we mourn? Pope Francis invites us to let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit, to develop a "Sensus fidei" and to initiate new paths.

In his first pastoral letter, Bishop Adames, the first bishop of Luxembourg, wrote that not only is the Blessed Virgin Patron of the city and the country, but also the patron of the diocese. Let's invoke her especially in 2020, so that she guides us through her intercession and maternal protection towards the future.

Dear brothers and sisters: we were Church together, we are Church together and we will be Church together!

Nobody knows the future, but we are called to build it together. The future is not just the time we have left to live, but the time when He comes to meet us and open up the future. Let us place our trust in HIM who entered our world. Let us thank God for the past and the future with the words of Almighty God: "As YOU have always been, YOU will be for all eternity".

Luxembourg, on the Feast of Christ the King, 24 November 2019.

*Jean-Claude Cardinal Hollerich
Archbishop of Luxembourg*

***** UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION *****