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European bishops: 'Immense joy' for Pope Francis

Joshua J. McElwee | Mar. 15, 2013 NCR Today
Pope Francis

The Council of European Bishops' Conferences, which represents the 33 bishops' conferences on the continent, has said it welcomes Jorge Mario Bergoglio's election as Pope Francis with "immense joy" and feels a "pressing need" for the promotion of unity among Christians, especially on environmental issues.

Francis is the first non-European pope in 1,200 years and the first pope from the southern hemisphere.

The comments from the European bishops' council were made in a letter sent to the new pontiff Thursday. The letter is signed by the council's leadership, including Esztergom-Budapest Cardinal Péter Erd?, who was cited in some speculation as a potential competitor for the papacy following Pope Benedict XVI's resignation.

Following is the full letter.

> Holy Father,
>
> We welcome the news of your election as successor of Saint Peter with immense joy.
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> The European bishops see in your election a sign of hope and encouragement, a stimulus for us not to be concerned just about the specific problems of the Old Continent, but to measure the tasks of the Churches entrusted to our pastoral care in the perspective of the universal Church.
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> In the light of the vocation of the whole Church, we are thus able to see more concretely our roles, too, dictated, for example, by a specific form of secularisation present in public structures, as well as in daily life; tasks which equally emerge from the demographic and migratory situation, which constitutes a challenge for families and invites us to practical dialogue with Islam and Judaism.
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> Besides the continual urgency to proclaim the Lord Jesus, in our continent we feel the pressing need to promote the unity of Christians, particularly collaboration over moral issues and social doctrine, in safeguarding creation and global responsibility for the environment with the continent's Orthodox Churches.
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> The variety of languages and national cultures in Europe underlines our commitment to reconciliation among peoples, and the need for pastoral collaboration for the new evangelisation.
>
> We implore the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary for the pontificate of Your Holiness and we support your apostolic ministry with our prayers.
>
> With filial devotion,
>
> Card. Péter Erd?, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest and CCEE President

Card. Angelo Bagnasco, Archbishop of Genoa, CCEE Vice-president

Archbishop Józef Michalik of Przemy?l, CCEE Vice-president

Msgr. Duarte da Cunha, CCEE General Secretary

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