



Pope Francis is shown at a 2022 audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican marking the 100th anniversary of the birth of the late Father Luigi Giussani, founder of the Communion and Liberation movement. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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In a world suffering from an "epidemic of enmity," Christians can offer healing by recognizing each person as a child of God and reaching out in friendship, said a top Vatican official, writing on behalf of Pope Francis.

The pope's hope for the Meeting in Rimini, an annual event sponsored by the Communion and Liberation movement, is that each participant would learn more about "approaching others in the way of Jesus, who always stretches out his hand, always seeks to lift up, to act so that people heal, are happy and encounter God," said the message signed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state.

The Vatican released the message Aug. 18, two days before the Aug. 20-25 event in Rimini, Italy. Hundreds of thousands of people, mostly university students, participate in the meeting, which offers Mass, conferences and workshops, concerts and theatrical performances.

The theme for the 2023 gathering is "Human Existence is an Inexhaustible Friendship," a quote from Communion and Liberation founder Father Luigi Giussani about how faith in Jesus, who called his followers "friends," dissolves solitude and empowers friendship with others.

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Parolin told organizers that the theme is "bold because it clearly runs countercurrent at a time marked by individualism and indifference."

"War and divisions are sowing rancor and fear in people's hearts, and those who are different from me are often perceived as rivals," the cardinal wrote.

"Communication, which is global and pervasive, turns this widespread attitude into a mentality in which differences seem to be symptoms of hostility and one sees a kind of epidemic of enmity."

Quoting Pope Francis, the cardinal said the answer is found in faith and in believing God "sends us his son, he gives him to us, he hands him over, he shares him so that we can learn the way of fraternity, of self-giving. In a definitive way, he opens a new horizon; he is a new word which sheds light on so many situations of exclusion, disintegration, loneliness and isolation. He is a word which breaks the silence of loneliness."

"An attitude of openness to others as brothers or sisters is one of the distinctive traits of the pontificate of Pope Francis, of his witness and his magisterium," Parolin said.

In a world where tensions and divisions seem to be increasing, he said, "speeches are not enough."

Quoting Pope Francis again, he told participants that "we need concrete gestures and shared choices aimed at building a culture of peace where each one of us lives, reconciling with family members, friends and neighbors, praying for those who hurt us, recognizing and helping those in need, speaking words of peace at school, university or in society, 'anointing' with closeness those who feel alone."