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LETTER TO THE CHURCHES IN EUROPE

THIRD EUROPEAN ECUMENICAL ASSEMBLY, 2007:

**“The Light of Christ shines upon all.
Hope for Renewal and Unity in Europe”**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,
dear Friends,

Through this letter we wish to announce the setting out of the process leading to the Third European Ecumenical Assembly (EEA3) which will culminate at Sibiu, Romania, from 4 to 8 September 2007.

The EEA3 follows, in a new way, the path of the European Ecumenical Assemblies which took place in Basel, Switzerland (1989) and Graz, Austria (1997). We are aware that the ecumenical journey, despite all the difficulties we know of, is a calling and a duty from which there can be no turning back.

We are grateful for the invitation from the Churches in Romania to hold the peak event, the *Third European Ecumenical Assembly* (EEA3), in Sibiu, which will be the European Capital of Culture in 2007. It will be particularly meaningful and enriching to hold the event in a country with an Orthodox majority.

**“The Light of Christ shines upon all.
Hope for Renewal and Unity in Europe”**

is the theme chosen for the Assembly by the CCEE/CEC Joint Committee. The theme both focuses on Christ (John 8.12) and refers to the symbol of the light, which is particularly meaningful in both Eastern and Western Christian traditions. The sub-theme aims to emphasise the role Christianity can play in today's Europe.

The aims of this Assembly are:

1. To recover a new light for the journey to reconciliation among Christians. The Assembly shall be a place:
 - (a) To celebrate and witness together the following of Jesus Christ and the communion which already exists among Christians in Europe;
 - (b) To deepen our knowledge and esteem for our different religious traditions;
 - (c) To reinforce and expand our European ecumenical network.
2. To rediscover the gift of light that Christ is for Europe today. The Assembly will tackle the great challenges set out by the European culture marked by secularisation and by a need for spirituality, by religious pluralism, by the process of European unification, and by the responsibilities of our continent in the context of the world as a whole.

A joint CCEE/CEC Group met in August 2004 at Cartigny, Switzerland, to prepare up a first proposal for the EEA3. This proposal was then considered at the end of September/early October 2004 by both the CEC Central Committee and the CCEE Plenary Assembly. In the last few months reflection on the matter has matured, following a visit to the city of Sibiu (December 2004) and the meeting of the CCEE/CEC Joint Committee (Chartres, France, February 2005) that worked on the proposal for the EEA3. The Joint Planning Committee for EEA3 met recently for the first time (17-20 March 2005) in Terni, Italy, and drew up in detail proposals for the entire Assembly process.

We foresee an Assembly process in four stages:

1. **The first stage** will take place in Rome, 24-27 January 2006, with a meeting between 110 delegates of Churches, Catholic Bishops' Conferences, Ecumenical bodies or movements, and Church communities.
2. **The second stage** will include national and/or regional meetings to be held in the second half of 2006 or at the beginning of 2007. The organisation of such meetings shall be entrusted to the delegates of the Churches and Bishops' Conferences of the country or region which host the meeting.
3. **The third stage** will take place at Wittenberg-Lutherstadt, Germany, in January 2007, with another meeting between the delegates of Churches, Catholic Bishops' Conferences, Ecumenical bodies or movements, and Church communities.
4. **Finally**, the Third European Ecumenical Assembly itself will take place in Sibiu, Romania (4 to 8 September 2007) with an assembly of approximately 3,000 delegates of the Churches and the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Europe. Simultaneously, several meetings between Christian faithful will be organised in all European cities wherever possible, including video-audio connections with Sibiu.

This proposal will be reported to the next CCEE Plenary Assembly and to the next CEC Central Committee, so that they may offer further helpful indications.

We believe that the involvement of the Churches and the European Catholic Bishops' Conferences can be summed up in the following points:

1. To identify a delegate from the Churches and Catholic Bishops' Conferences entrusted with the role of following the entire assembly process beginning with the first stage in Rome (24-27 January 2006). Great care must be taken over this choice since the national delegate will be a key person all through the whole process, in particular in relation to the national and regional meetings (second stage).
2. To support the implementation of national and regional ecumenical meetings.
3. To establish the delegation that will participate in the work of the Sibiu Assembly. In due course, the Churches and Catholic Bishops' Conferences will receive all the necessary information about the number of delegates required and some selection criteria so that the delegation can be as representative as possible of the Christian people of each nation.
4. To ensure that, in addition to financial support from relevant budgets, in 2007 the Churches and Catholic Bishops' Conferences bring to the Assembly in Sibiu the ecumenical activities in which they are already involved. The EEA3 does not seek to impose a programme of its own upon work that is already being undertaken by the Churches, but rather to provide a means for that on-going work to be shared, celebrated and enriched.
5. To arrange forms of financial support to the EEA3. We would like to promote a collection during the ecumenical meetings which will be held during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity of 2006 or 2007. The collection is aimed at setting up a special fund to cover the expenses of delegates from Churches or Bishops' Conferences who are unable to afford them as well as to promote a concrete gesture of solidarity in Romania.
6. Finally, to launch a great network of prayer for the Assembly and the ecumenical journey in Europe involving the whole people of God: communities, parishes, congregations, sanctuaries, monasteries, institutes of consecrated life, religious communities and various associations and movements.

We are aware that time is short, but the need for reconciliation is ever more urgent at this historical moment. Please remember the Assembly process in your prayers, that the Lord may bless this project.

With our fraternal greetings

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