



A breath of hope for peace in the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean Encounters - Mosaic of Hope were held from September 17 to 24, 2023, in Marseilles. They brought together seventy young people of different faiths from all five shores of the Mediterranean (North Africa, Middle East, Black and Aegean Seas, Balkans, and Latin Europe) and from twenty-five countries. They were joined on September 20 by an equal number of bishops from around the Mediterranean for two days of joint work before the arrival of Pope Francis. The Pope came to Marseilles to conclude the Encounters in the presence of numerous religious, political, economic and associative leaders from the Mediterranean region: he prayed at Notre-Dame de la Garde, paid his respects in front of the stele erected in commemoration of those lost at sea with representatives of other faiths and religions, he met with socially vulnerable people and celebrated a Mass at the Stade Vélodrome.

The Mediterranean Encounters were also the occasion for: an intercultural festival of solidarity, attended by some 150 civil society partners and associations; a session with about fifty theologians from the Mediterranean region - Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Jews and Muslims; an assembly of school principals from the Mediterranean rim; and a meeting of rectors of Mediterranean Marian shrines, "shared sacred sites" and places of hospitality among believers from different religions.

These Encounters are a continuation of those organized by the Italian Bishops' Conference in Bari in 2020 and in Florence in 2022. The process is in keeping with the spirit of the Mediterranean travels of Pope Francis, who, from Lampedusa (2013) to Marseilles (2023), has been calling for us to make this sea a message of hope for all. *"The Mediterranean has a special vocation: it is a sea of metissage; culturally it has always been open to encounters, dialogue and reciprocal inculturation."*(1) Marseille was the third stop on this Mediterranean itinerary of Encounters.

As part of this multifaceted and historic event, the Archdiocese of Marseille initiated the bishops' Assembly and Pope Francis' pilgrimage, while the Mar Yam Association led the organization of the youth session and the intercultural and solidary Festival.

These events were prepared by several teams, in partnership with local authorities (City of Marseilles, Métropolis of Aix-Marseille-Provence and France's Southern Region) and numerous local socio-economic, cultural and religious partners. These preparations, done with the partners from the Archdiocese of Marseilles and the Mar Yam Association, aimed at mobilizing the region in its diversity to welcome representatives from all five shores of the Mediterranean and to

¹ Pope Francis, Bari Speech, February 2020.



generate a burst of consciousness to face together the challenges of this area while promoting the historical, cultural, philosophical and spiritual resources available to build peace.

The method chosen for the Mediterranean Encounters consisted in trusting in the experience of each member, steeped in their own culture, and in the plurality of life stories. Within the Assembly of bishops and young people, each member was invited to share their stories, sometimes revealing delicate, complex, even dangerous situations. Each member was invited to trust in their own personal experience - their own history and that of their people - and in the stories of others.

The Festival included visits to places of worship of all faiths and religions, round tables and debates, concerts and plays, soccer tournaments and folk dances, a large Village of associations and a solidarity banquet, all offered opportunities to create spaces for encounters between people and communities who, although living in the same area, do not necessarily know each other: one way for every participant to tell their own story and to listen to others, who are so close and yet so unknown.

Every personal and collective story takes part in the symphony of the whole. By narrating them, they become a message that unfolds step by step, and that we learn to listen to, to receive and to share. This pedagogy of gradual and delicate unveiling is the very dynamism of the Mediterranean Encounters. In the process, the treasures held by each and every one emerge. When exchanges take this particular form where one sincerely listens to the other, lets oneself be touched by their words, and vice versa, the term dialogue is appropriate.

The Mediterranean Encounters strive to promote, according to the Pope François' own expression, this culture of dialogue (2). According to the Jewish, Christian and Muslim spiritual traditions, which share Abraham as their common point of reference, fraternal dialogue is rooted in divine hospitality and in the perception of God as engaging in a loving dialogue with all of humanity. The very gesture of God revealing himself gives dialogue its meaning: God is dialogue, and dialogue is the privileged place where God shows his face, establishing a new order of relationships, especially between men and women, between cultures, between believers and religions, and with all forms of poverty (Gal. 3:26).

In addition to dialogue, the other proposed attitude was that of hope, which does not consist in the projection of desires, however legitimate they may be, but in the welcoming of the best that is given today, received as the sign, already present, of the victory of life over death, of friendship over hatred. Hope is founded on reality as already experienced and on the promise of a fraternal closeness between neighboring peoples is possible, necessary and beautiful, enabling us to approach the most complex realities lucidly, and enables us even to hope against all hope. It invites docility to reality and resistance to contrary winds, indignation when facing the unacceptable and the courage of a prophetic attitude.

While accompanying these Mediterranean Encounters, the Archdiocese of Marseille and the Mar Yam Association have matured a message and a vision, which they want to welcome and to pass on in three points: 1) Marseille, crossroads of the peoples of the Mediterranean; 2) the

² Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Common Coexistence, His Holiness Pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, Abu Dhabi, February 4, 2019.



Mediterranean, between shadows and lights; 3) the engagement of Mediterranean peoples and communities.



1- Marseilles, crossroads of Mediterranean peoples

"Marseilles is a message"

With its coastline and port open to the Mediterranean, Marseille has a singular history. In 600 B.C., Greek sailors from Phocaea in Asia Minor, a distant shore reached the bay of Lacydon by coastal shipping. They had not come to colonize, populate or colonize the land: they were looking for a favorable location to develop a trading counter. The inhabitants of this wind-sheltered cove were Ligurians of the Segobriges tribe. Love got in the way: Gyptis, daughter of the Ligurian king, chose Protis, one of the Greek sailors, as her husband. The encounter was a fruitful one: the land was offered, the sailor settled down, the counter developed and two cultures met and married. Thus was Massalia born. Under the influence of Roman culture and peace, Massalia flourished and became Massilia, then finally Marseilles.

The history of Marseilles is punctuated by these maritime exchanges and migrations. Men and women arriving from other shores: Armenia, Italy, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Lebanon, and many others. Rarely by choice, and even very often washed ashore after being forced to flee or leave other shores, all saw in Marseilles a synonym of hope and the possibility of a new beginning. Originally from the Mediterranean basin, they found there a familiar land, sharing the same sea, a sunny climate, a flavorful cuisine, the scents of spices... Together, they contributed to the creation of a mosaic of which diversity is the cause of beauty.

In the city of Marseilles, we know that today's identity is woven from the threads of yesterday's metissage. We know from experience that identity cannot blossom without the presence of others, that happiness lies in openness to others, and that a shared encounter "at face level" brings joy. Denying that otherness is constitutive of one's identity breeds conflicts. There is no need to imagine that this path is simple and natural. Finding one's place in this vast mosaic, without erasing the uniqueness of each person, requires a delicate decentering. Listening to the other's story becomes the essence of dialogue, the key to cultivating relationships and to finding points of communion. And if Marseillais are said to dress in pride, it's not out of arrogance, but out of a joyful and unfettered appreciation of the millennia-old sedimentation of migrations that have gradually built the identity of the city and its inhabitants. The voice of the people of Marseilles carries with it all the accents of the world, bearing the cultures, languages and histories of the entire Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean, this astonishing Sea, being equally too wide to blur and too narrow to separate, has a vocation.

Throughout the ages, the peoples of the Mediterranean have appreciated themselves as close neighbors. Their exchanges have made the Mediterranean a cradle of civilizations. Around



this sea, a mosaic of peoples has thus been formed, where everyone is necessary and essential to the whole. The Mediterranean thus seems like a place at the center of a village. It has created bonds between peoples at times through conflicts, at other times by fostering dialogue, creating bridges between East and West, North and South.

"The mare nostrum is a place of encounters: between the Abrahamic religions, between Greek, Latin and Arabic thought, between science, philosophy and law, and between many other realities. It has spread throughout the world the high value of the human being, endowed with freedom, open to truth and in search of salvation, who sees the world as a marvel to be discovered and a garden to inhabit, under the sign of a God who makes a covenant with mankind," recalled Pope Francis (3). Let us remember that this sea has been greatly instrumental in the dissemination of major philosophical and religious currents.

Another tradition, complementing that of Gyptis and Protis, recalls it. In the first century AD, a boat without oars or sails ran aground on the coast not far from Marseilles. On board were Martha, Lazarus and Mary, known as the "friends of Jesus", with their companions, Marie-Salomé, Marie-Jacobé, Sarah as well as Maximin. Like so many castaways of yesterday and today, they set foot on this land and entrusted the Good News to its Good News to its inhabitants through their friendship and encounters. Even today, every February 2, on the Old Port and at the Abbey of Saint-Victor, founded in the 5th century by Saint John Cassian, Marseilles commemorates this privileged connection with the East via the Mediterranean Sea, as a *"mysterious, enlarged Lake of Tiberius,"* in the words of Giorgio La Pira (4). This space cannot be reduced to becoming a theater of conflicts, but must rediscover its vocation as a "laboratory of peace," a bridge between East and West, a vector of friendship and peace. Against the division of antagonisms, it offers the "conviviality of differences."

Despite its rich history, the Mediterranean today appears as a vulnerable, fragile, threatened, divided and ultimately precarious region on the great map of globalization. The memory of this closeness and friendship between peoples, marked by mutual respect, has all too often been broken, leaving deep and painful scars, unfortunately often exploited to divide peoples. Mirror of the world, the Mediterranean harbors a vocation to fraternity, to become a space where nations and different communities meet on the basis of a shared humanity. If challenges and tragedies are many, hope can be all the stronger to overcome them. These Mediterranean Encounters demonstrated that an encounter in diversity is not only achievable, but that it is also a source of richness, bringing about peace and prosperity.

During the Mediterranean Encounters, young people and bishops from all over the Mediterranean were accompanied to discover Marseilles as a "Mediterranean microcosm" and a "message-city," where North and South, East and West meet, by many non-profit, economic, political, cultural and religious representatives. These encounters enabled them to perceive better the reality of the difficulties facing the Mediterranean, but also the historical, cultural and spiritual resources on which it can draw to overcome them.

³ Pope Francis, *Closing address to the Mediterranean Encounters at the Palais du Pharo, Marseilles, September 23, 2023.*

⁴ Giorgio La Pira, *Opening speech at the 1st Mediterranean Colloquium, October 3, 1958.*



Through the Festival, envisaged as a tool for culture and solidarity, a wide public, of diverse life paths, was able to take advantage of the Mediterranean Encounters, each in their own way: concerts of Byzantine, Hebrew, Armenian or Arabic music with Les Rossignols pour la paix, Araxe or Les amis de Saint Victor; an evening of exchanges among believers of different religions; lectures on Marseille (Judith Aziza, PhD in history) or the Mediterranean (Marek Halter, writer) at the Théâtre de l'Odéon with the support of the City of Marseille; a morning session on the legacy of Mary Magdalene and the pilgrimage path the Southern Region set up dedicated to her; a morning of discussion and reflection on the theme of "Work, training and migration in the Mediterranean," in partnership with the City of Marseilles, etc.



2 - The Mediterranean, between shadows and light

Gathered around Pope Francis who, since his visit to Lampedusa ten years ago, keeps denouncing "the globalization of indifference" in the face of the tragedies taking place in the Mediterranean, the participants of the Mediterranean Encounters witnessed his first gesture in Marseilles: his prayer at the stele erected on the hill of Notre-Dame de la Garde in commemoration of the sailors and migrants who died at sea. Following his example, the participants were attentive to the dramas that punctuate the history of the Mediterranean. In addition, the Assembly of young people and bishops revealed an extraordinary potential on which we must dare to lean in order to build the future and open paths of hope.

Migrations, climate, exodus of Eastern Christians

The tragedy of migrants is the most glaring. Over the years, men, women, children have died at sea by the hundreds, and this tragedy is getting worse: according to the UN, more than 2,300 migrants have already lost their lives at sea between January and September 2023. In reality, *"the largest cemetery is located in the north of Africa"*, adds the pope, who denounces the cynicism of smugglers and the scandalous enrichment of mafias, who all profit from this human trafficking. *"It's terrible. That's why I'm going to Marseilles,"* he explained to justify his travel (5). At times, public opinion is moved, as when the body of the little boy Aylan, a Syrian child, was found on a beach in Turkey in 2015, but it remains silent faced with the actions of governments which prohibit boats from rescuing shipwrecked people, fearing increasing migration flows. Challenged by the scale of migration, the culture of hospitality and solidarity specific to those bordering the Mediterranean is threatened. The sea, source of life, promise of the future, has today become the scene of the greatest tragedies.

Another major challenge now arousing public opinion is climate change. In Greece and Portugal, thousands of hectares have gone up in smoke and entire forests have been razed to the ground; in Libya, unprecedented flooding has led to the loss of thousands of lives; in major cities,

⁵ Pope Francis, Speech near the stele erected in commemoration of sailors and migrants who died at sea. Marseille, September 22, 2022; Press Conference of the Holy Father during the return flight from his apostolic journey to Portugal on the occasion of the 37th World Youth Day, August 6, 2023.



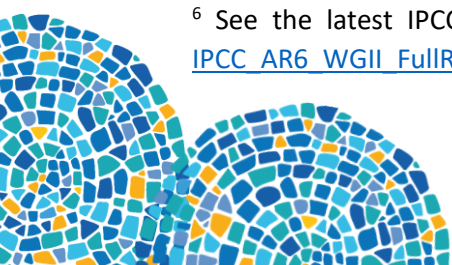
summers are now stifling. Water scarcity is hampering crop irrigation and forcing winegrowers to migrate north. For several years now, IPCC experts have been warning about the severity of various phenomena; the COP 21 in Paris had made commitments now difficult to be met; many people are fighting against the exploitation of fossil fuels, inventing alternative models, calling for a soberer lifestyle, but struggling to overcome the selfishness and indifference of the wealthy. The Mediterranean Sea has been considered a "hot spot" by the IPCC for several years (6) consequently its marine ecosystems are suffering, with the disappearance of some fifty species (corals, sea fans, sea urchins, mollusks, bivalves, posidonia, etc.). On land too, fauna, flora and humans are under threat.

These encounters provided an opportunity to hear once again the cry of the Eastern Christian communities, who feel abandoned, isolated and threatened in their age-old traditions. The successive wars in Iraq, Syria and Ukraine have seriously weakened these communities whose roots go back to the earliest days of the Church. The fragility of the nation-states of the Ottoman Empire and too much foreign interference in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon have contributed to a veritable collapse of the Christian population: in Syria, their proportion from 6% to 2%, while neighboring Iraq is in a similar situation, with deep wounds resulting from the years under the Islamic caliphate (Daech). These Islamist movements have contributed to the breakdown of an age-old relationship between Muslims and Christians. Humanity thus risks losing the inestimable wealth of these Eastern Christian communities, whose history, language, art, songs and traditions are a treasure for all. In the Maghreb too, the existence of Christian communities is very fragile, not least because freedom of conscience and religion is far from guaranteed everywhere. They must remain discrete, living the hidden spirituality exemplified by Charles de Foucauld.

In the Balkans, dialogue between Catholic and Orthodox Christians is often complex and difficult whereas faced with the wave of secularization now sweeping these countries, religious and pastoral collaboration would be a sign to offer. When meeting is already difficult, how can we show that uniting is possible? The free and committed proclamation of one's faith and hope on our shores appears precarious and fragile. Past and present conflicts leave deep scars in people's memories. During our meetings, young people from Bosnia and Croatia spoke of the fragility of living together after the wars of the late 20th century. Peace in the Mediterranean Basin requires our becoming aware of these common and persistent wounds to begin the path toward reconciliation.

The voice of otherness carried by these Mediterranean Encounters, especially in Marseille, is a rich murmur to be heard and listened to. The group of young people, representing the social, cultural and religious diversity of the Mediterranean, experienced a deep and joyful fraternity throughout the week of the Rencontres, bearing witness to the capacity of listening to each other's stories, wounds and hopes in order to build a common future together. As part of the festival, they were able to take part, along with hundreds of other Marseillais, in opportunities such as visiting churches, temples, mosques and synagogues, discovering the rich heritage of

⁶ See the latest IPCC report, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, online: [IPCC AR6 WGII FullReport.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wgii/fullreport/).



Eastern Christianity, going out to sea with associations that rescue migrants in the Mediterranean and listening to the testimonies of rescuers and survivors, getting a real feel for the issues involving the preservation of the flora and fauna thanks to experts presentations, or taking a meditative walk on the Frioul archipelago.

The Mediterranean sustained by Hope

Despite all the divisions, hope was the keynote of this year's Encounters, which ended in happy conviviality, characterized by mutual and "face-to-face" listening. Everyone was able to appreciate the number and quality of the solidarity initiatives that abound around the Mediterranean. The village of associations set up on the esplanade of La Major, the Cathedral of Marseilles, brought together 84 exhibitors - Mediterranean communities, associations committed to preserving the environment, ecclesiastical, cultural or solidarity-based organizations, etc. - all testifying to their commitment to the Mediterranean. The solidarity banquet, attended by 620 participants and organized by 15 associations working with people in precarious situations. Throughout the banquet, a ball of Mediterranean folk dances, led by seven groups representing various regions of the Mediterranean, brought together in the same dance young and old, people of all origins. The young people who came to Marseille demonstrated their enthusiasm and creativity. With the bishops, the economic or political leaders and the representatives of civil society partners of the Festival, they highlighted how educational and charitable networks are a powerful resource capable of working wonders. Several emphasized that the creativity of young people, their ability to dream joined with the experience of their elder are a real asset for society. The experience also made everyone more aware that a lasting commitment to migrants and those left behind is demanding, even trying. How long can volunteers responsible for welcoming shipwrecked men and women hold on? Some immigrant reception centers have had to be closed, unable to cope with the influx, the violence, or the ethnic tensions. The Marseilles Assembly took stock of the challenges to be met and the resources to be valued.

Believers draw this hope from the faith that drives them. It is thanks to the assurance of God's faithfulness to his promise, that the "little girl Hope," dear to Charles Péguy, can continue to make its way in the midst of the world's dramas. *"It is that almost nothing that changes everything," and of which Christians themselves know that, because it comes from the Spirit who blows wherever he wills, they have no monopoly on it.*" (7)

So it is that, carried by men and women of good will, Christian or not, believers or non-believers, hope can and must mobilize us to face together the same challenges and to commit us to the same projects. The situation in the Mediterranean is serious, even dramatic, but the Mediterranean Encounters have renewed the taste for a path of life. Young people and festival-goers concretely "walked" together during the week of the Rencontres, from one place of

⁷ Mgr Jean-Marc Aveline, "Chemins d'espérance en Méditerranée", Conference at the Mediterranean Encounters, September 22, 2023. See also: *Dieu a tant aimé le monde. Petite théologie de la mission*, Paris, Cerf, 2023, 158 p.



worship to another; following in the footsteps of the Hellenes and Italians who built Marseilles; rediscovering the story of the Exodus, echoing today's migratory challenges; traveling to discover "shared holy places in the Mediterranean" thanks to the exhibition at Notre-Dame de la Garde in partnership with the CNRS; or examining the challenges of professional integration and training in the Mediterranean during a morning session organized in partnership with the Aix-Marseille-Provence Chamber of Commerce and Industry.



3 - The commitment of Mediterranean peoples and communities

The result was a real enthusiasm on the part of the young people and bishops present, as well as all the Festival's partners and participants. Certainly, there was a growing awareness of the need to stand up together in indignation, believers and non-believers of all faiths and religions, men and women of good will, faced with the woes of our sea and its shores. Many have come to understand better the profound coherence of Pope Francis' words on migrants and the resulting civilizational stakes. But while indignation is necessary, it is not enough. These encounters were also an opportunity for a commitment to solidarity. In her conference on the Mediterranean economy, Christine Lagarde highlighted the scantiness of exchanges between the countries of the Mediterranean basin, which she saw as a real weakness. She called for a mobilization of our human, cultural and spiritual resources in this region of the world, more necessary than ever before, in order to build our common home in justice and peace.

The Mediterranean Churches, sometimes small and in the minority, find themselves weakened by conflicts and the exiles of their members to other continents. In response, it is appropriate to consider a new ecclesial style, which engages communities to revisit their mission and to reconnect with their vocation of welcome and solidarity. The Mediterranean invites us to believe and hope that not all religious realities, however small they may be, are doomed to disappear and dissolve into globalism or uniformity. The Mediterranean style defines diversity. Our Mediterranean Churches, in their diversity, are also marked by the proximity of shared Christian holy places, uniting men and women, even beyond Christians, such as the Marian shrines. Places of prayer and intercession characterize the Mediterranean style of relationship. The path of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue is shaped by experiences of communion, exchanges, debates and cooperation, sometimes at the cost of one's life, as with the testimony of the monks of Tibhirine.

This geographical proximity is a sign that we need to commit to work together to respond better to the social, economic and environmental problems of the Mediterranean region. It's about dreaming with these concrete objectives as a horizon: the promotion of social justice, interreligious dialogue, assistance to the most vulnerable, actions in favor of peace. These dreams will become reality through a commitment on several levels:

- at the local level to meet the needs of people, promote interreligious understanding and contribute to social cohesion, particularly in educational settings.



- at the level of religious communities, like Marseille Espérance, to strengthen the logic of collaboration and exchanges in a context marked by multiple tensions.
- at the international level, by actively participating in global efforts aimed at addressing critical issues such as migration, climate change and conflicts.

For a culture of encounter and hospitality

Abbé Pierre said it magnificently: “You have to love doors, because they are the space where everyone stops, the space from which we start, where all the encounters take place. » This image of the door is symbolic of Mediterranean cities where the emphasis needs to be on the conviviality of differences, to create a culture of encounter, in resonance with Pope Francis’ encyclical, Fratelli tutti. Welcoming and hospitality towards others are not only acts of charity, but also acts of social justice. The image of the Good Samaritan comes to remind us: the salvation of a single man brought by the attitude of the Samaritan has been a profound inspiration for Christians. This parable, acceptable to all, teaches that love of neighbor and compassion must always be at the heart of social life. Being present where suffering occurs is a central requirement of life in society. It means reaching out to those in need, offering hospitality commensurate with our means, without having the ambition to solve all the problems at once.

Confronted with the violence and the multitude of challenges facing the Mediterranean, everyone wonders how to live the demands of their conscience. How to live hospitality? If it is at the heart of Mediterranean culture, we must recognize that there is sometimes a great temptation to give up, as hearts tend to harden. The “fanaticism of indifference” of states, communities and individuals, and sometimes even the hostility towards commitment, erode motivation. While welcoming others remains a duty, it does not obviate the need to question the causes of departure. Running away from home, when it is due to the inhumanity of a context, is a sign of the failure of the right of each person to live at home in peace. Hospitality is the challenge of the Mediterranean, and we must respond to it with generosity and tenderness. This response does not obviate the urgent need for global development policies that should enable everyone to live where they were born, where their families live, or to return to their own country, their own city, their own people, when the ordeal of linguistic and cultural uprooting is too heavy.

For an Ecclesial Conference of the Mediterranean

We are convinced of the need to work more closely together rather than to remain isolated in our respective approaches. This isolation has been identified time and again as a major challenge, characterized by the loneliness felt by many, including bishops. There is no real dedicated time set up to discuss these challenges all together and over the long term, hence the idea of an Ecclesial Conference of the Mediterranean.

The objective of this proposal is to keep the flame of hope alive. Is not a question of establishing a synod, but rather of considering a form of assembly that would allow for a continuation of the discussions and a deepening of the questions discussed during the previous encounters. The purpose of this forum would be to consolidate mutual understanding among the Churches themselves and among the Churches and other Mediterranean entities, and also to



support concrete proposals in the service of peace and reconciliation. By promoting interreligious dialogue and cross-sectoral cooperation, this forum could help address the challenges facing the region. *"Authentic ecumenical synodality can be a primary and important sign of the credibility of Christian witness in the Mediterranean countries and a sign of hope in a context torn by multiple tensions."* (8). The experience lived in Marseilles, with its two-fold major originality - on the one hand the Assembly of young people and bishops and, on the other hand, the Festival -, showed the relevance and fruitfulness of this type of approach.

For an education to relationship

We proposed to establish an education focused on openness and encountering others, without distinction of origins, cultures or religions, aiming to form to a greater shared civic awareness. This approach involves the training of educators and teachers in the culture of dialogue, with the aim of understanding and healing wounded memories, while deconstructing the ideologies that stigmatize the enemy or migrants.

Healing memories requires a dynamic of reconciliation based on dialogue where each person is given the opportunity to express not only their own suffering, but also their joys, aspirations and hopes, and thus contribute to the creation of a "common narrative". In this way, in conjunction with all those involved in civil and associative life, we would engage in the formation of a "Mediterranean consciousness" aimed at fostering confidence in institutions. This model of formation could draw its inspiration from the example of the Leadership Academy for Peace in Lebanon, which focuses on the development of skills promoting trust and cooperation within society.

An invitation to creativity

The richness of Mediterranean Encounters owes much to the quality of the listening and exchanges that took place during the Festival, as well as in the roundtables and thematic workshops of the Assembly that brought together young people and bishops. A number of suggestions emerged from these workshops:

- Creation of a Research Chair on the Mediterranean, with the French Embassy to the Holy See and in partnership with several academic institutions.
- Concertation between regional solidarity initiatives for the underprivileged and migrants.
- Promotion of twinning between associations, religious communities and youth movements from the five shores of the Mediterranean to promote the sharing of experiences.
- Training sessions, in coordination with the Youth Parliament of the Southern Region, in particular in the fields of interfaith dialogue and ecology.
- Launching of a peace boat traveling between the different ports of the Mediterranean to contribute to dialogue between the five shores.
- Creation of media tools to promote positive experiences, often overlooked.
- Creation of an endowment fund to support projects for peace and education in the Mediterranean.

⁸ *Manifesto: "For a theology from the Mediterranean,"* 3.2. See <https://icm.catholique.fr/>



- Sustainable continuation of the experience of the Mediterranean Encounters' Festival in Marseilles by bringing together local associative, cultural and solidarity actors from the Mediterranean rim.

A path to the future

This brief summary of the Mediterranean Encounters is by no means a conclusion, but rather a step in an ongoing process, dynamic and joyful, realistic and hopeful. Pope Francis' speech at the Palais du Pharo reminded us: "Be a sea of good to face today's poverties with a synergy of solidarity; be a welcoming harbor to embrace those seeking a better future". There is no shortage of harbors in the Mediterranean. Small or large, they all have that maritime openness that suggests an openness of heart, that which welcomes those who disembark as well as those who wish to set sail for unknown horizons. Marseilles, like many Mediterranean cities and villages, is a port of arrival and departure. The breath of Life urges us to embrace its message of hospitality and hope for the future.

The Mediterranean Encounters Organizing Committee – October 11, 2023

