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## **Pope Francis: to Bartholomew I, “closeness between our Churches is an indispensable contribution to universal brotherhood”**

“I sincerely thank you for ceaselessly indicating the way of dialogue, in charity and in truth, as the only possible way for reconciliation between believers in Christ and for the re-establishment of their full communion. With God’s help, this is the path along which we will most certainly continue to walk together, for the closeness and solidarity between our Churches are an indispensable contribution to universal brotherhood and social justice, of which humanity is so urgently in need”. Pope Francis addressed these words in a letter to Patriarch Bartholomew I to mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his election as Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch. “Ad multos annos!” - this is the affectionate greeting sent by the Pope, who prayed to God, “from whom all gifts come”, that He may grant the Patriarch “health, spiritual joy and abundant grace”. “It is with gratitude to God that I reflect on our own profound personal bond, from the time of the inauguration of my papal ministry, when you honoured me with your presence in Rome”. “Over time - the Pope wrote -, this bond has become a fraternal friendship nurtured in many meetings not only in Rome, but also at the Phanar, in Jerusalem, Assisi, Cairo, Lesvos, Bari and Budapest”. Patriarch Bartholomew has recently been in Rome to participate in an interreligious meeting on the environment at the Vatican ahead of the COP26 in Glasgow and in the International Meeting for Peace sponsored by the Community of Sant'Egidio. Referring in his letter to Bartholomew’s participation in these recent events in Rome, where “your presence was most appreciated”, the Pope went on to write: “I share with you the understanding of our common pastoral responsibility in the face of the urgent challenges confronting the entire human family today. In particular, I assure you of my appreciation for your commitment to safeguarding creation and for your reflection on this issue, from which I have learned and continue to learn much. With the outbreak of the pandemic and the ensuing grave health, social and economic repercussions, your testimony and teaching on the need for the spiritual conversion of humanity have acquired enduring relevance”.

Valentina Bombelli