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PRESS RELEASE
GERMAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE



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Statement
by Tobias Knell,
Secretary-General of CIM and advisor to the Office for Youth
Ministry of the German Bishops' Conference,

Press conference at the start
of the XIII International Pilgrimage of Altar Servers
in Rome on 29 July 2024

After six years have now passed, a total of 13 (inter)national contingents with roughly 50,000 pilgrims from some 20 different countries will be coming together here in Rome under the motto “with you”. The joy of these young people can be felt in the whole city.

The participants represent at least 88 dioceses from all over Europe, 26 coming from Germany. Roughly 35 bishops are expected to attend this week of pilgrimage, which stresses the major role played by the Pilgrimage of Altar Servers. The largest group, with more than 6,000 participants, comes from the Archbishopric of Freiburg. The country with the largest number of pilgrims after Germany is Austria, followed by Hungary. We are glad to see each country which is assembled here, and to see every altar server who has come here to Rome! An estimated more than 12,000 voluntary group leaders and more than 2,000 full-time pastors, priests and pastoral workers will be accompanying the pilgrims.

We will be preparing the Audience on St. Peter's Square tomorrow with more than 100 volunteers. They will be distributing 50,000 bottles of water to the pilgrims, and helpers will be providing support at the entrances in order to optimise the stewarding process. Participants from all the countries taking part will attend the Audience, and all the languages will be spoken at least once. This symbolises the appreciation of all the nations attending, and the global service.

As a symbol of the global community of altar servers, a choir of nations made up of 500 pilgrims from all the pilgrim nations will represent and provide musical support to the 50,000 pilgrims on the Square. This pilgrimage not only

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brings the peoples together, but is also to be a sign of inclusion, so that a part of the choir will be performing the pilgrims' anthem "with you" in sign language.

Tomorrow's Audience will be moderated by Kristýna Šimůnková from the Czech Republic, who chaired the European Continental Synod, and Daniel Dickopf, who many know as Dän from the Wise Guys. His song "*Jetzt ist Sommer*" ("It's summertime") could be one of the unofficial pilgrims' anthems.

It is unbelievably lovely to see how many full-timers and volunteers have taken up a commitment to this pilgrimage, going far beyond the normal call of duty for 50,000 young people. St. Augustine said "Only if you yourself are burning can you light a fire in others." Without these people who are burning for the altar servers, this pilgrimage would not be possible! Thank you so much!