

FEAMC president's Christmas message 2024

24 December 2024

Dear friends,

In the "not easy" words of Bishop Tonino Bello, Bishop of my country, Apulia, where we will meet at the end of September 2025 to experience together the joy of co-responsibility and sharing in the continuity of service to the Church in Europe, I wish you all the best for the Holy Christmas and the New Year. I have listened to Don Tonino. In his words I have tried to build my service to the Church and to others.

This is my last Christmas as President of the FEAMC, without an ecclesiastical assistant who can formulate a spiritual reflection. Therefore, I offer you the always timely reflection of the Bishop whom I loved most as a young man and whom I have always recognised as a prophet of our times, also dear to Pope Francis. I greet you, dear friends, your families and your associations: may God bless you and always enlighten your spirit. In my heart I am grateful to each of you for the immense gift of friendship and the common journey towards the truth. Thank you and best wishes!

Vincenzo Defilippis

FEAMC President



Uncomfortable greetings

Dearly beloved, I would not be doing my duty as a bishop if I said 'Merry Christmas' without bothering you. Instead, I would like to inconvenience you. Indeed, I cannot bear the thought of having to address harmless, formal greetings imposed by the routine of the calendar. I even flatter myself with the idea of someone rejecting them as unwanted.

May Jesus, who was born of love, make you sick of a selfish, absurd life, without vertical thrusts, and allow you to invent a life full of giving, of prayer, of silence, of courage. May the child who sleeps on straw rob you of your sleep and make you feel the pillow of your bed as hard as a rock, until you have given hospitality to a displaced person, to a Moroccan, to a poor person passing by.

May God, who became man, make you feel like worms every time your career becomes the idol of your life, the overtaking, the project of your days, the back of your neighbour, the instrument of your climbing.

May Mary, who found the cradle in which she tenderly laid the fruit of her womb only in animal dung, force you with her wounded eyes to suspend the longing for all the Christmas carols until your hypocritical conscience accepts that the rubbish bin, the incinerator of a clinic, becomes the crossless tomb of a suppressed life.

May Joseph, who is the symbol of all paternal disappointments in the face of a thousand closed doors, disturb the drunkenness of your dinners, rebuke the warmth of your tombolas, provoke short-circuits in the waste of your illuminations, until you are challenged by the suffering of so many parents who shed secret tears for their children without happiness, without health, without work.

May the angels who proclaim peace still bring war into your sleepy silence, unable to see that only a span away, with the aggravation of your complicit silence, injustices are being perpetrated, people are being displaced, weapons are being manufactured, the land of the humble is being militarised, peoples are being condemned to the extinction of hunger.

May the poor, who flock to the grotto while the powerful conspire in the dark and the city sleeps in indifference, make you understand that if you too want to see 'a great light', you must begin with the last.

That handouts from those who toy with people's skin are useless tranquillisers.

That furs bought with thirteenths of one's salary look good but do not warm.

That delays in social housing are acts of sacrilege when provoked by corporate speculation.

May the shepherds who watch in the night, "guarding the flock", and scrutinise the dawn, give you a sense of history, the intoxication of expectation, the joy of abandonment to God. And may they awaken in you the deep desire to live poorly, which is the only way to die richly.

Happy Christmas! May hope be born in our old, dying world.

+ *Don Tonino, Bishop of Molfetta (1935 - 1993)*