

European church should defend Christian identity

STUTTGART, Germany – Representatives of nearly 240 Christian movements have urged Europe's churches to be a cohesive force in defending the continent's Christian identity and pressing for greater solidarity with the poor and marginalized.

"We see more clearly our responsibility in facing Europe's challenges today: to be a strong social, cohesive force in its cultural pluralism," the movements said in a declaration to European politicians. "Together we want to say to Europe and the world that our movements and communities are inspired by the Gospel of life and peace."

The declaration was published after a May 10-12 ecumenical gathering, "Together for Europe 2007," in Stuttgart, Germany. About 10,000 people – including members of Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Anglican groups – attended, as did Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi, European Commission Vice President Jacques Barrot, and Cardinal Walter Kasper, chairman of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, a former bishop of Rottenberg-Stuttgart.

The declaration said the movements had renewed a "pact of mutual love" and would work together to defend the environment and life from conception, as well as "the family united by an indissoluble bond of love between man and woman."

"We want to commit ourselves together, every movement and community, according to each one's charism and potentialities," the document added.

"To this end, we want to work with all men and women, with institutions and social and political entities."

The gathering, whose promoters included the Focolare Movement and San Egidio Community, was the second in the southern German city; the first was in May 2004. A press statement said this year's 36 forums discussed evangelization, ecumenism, the media, immigration, political commitment and other topics.

In their declaration, the movements said they would work for a just economy and to

make European cities “places of solidarity and welcome for people of different nationalities and cultures,” while also asking the governments of EU member nations to “commit themselves decisively” to assisting poorer nations, especially in Africa.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said she also hoped the gathering’s “Christian message will reach many people.”

“Europe needs people who live and communicate the variety and values of our continent,” the German leader said in her message. “The religious roots, our Judeo-Christian heritage, are a defining part of our society. This European foundation is a solid basis that enables us to cope with the challenges of globalization.”