

DOC.ID:	PRA_04
Language:	English
Original:	French
Provisional translation	



Words of welcome

Father Athanase Iskos

It is with great joy that we welcome you today to our most beautiful city. It is an important historical moment for your organisation, but also for the Christian community here in Lyon. It is our duty, indeed our sacred duty, to glorify with our whole souls the Holy Name of God, who has blessed the life and long journey of the Conference of European Churches, and has brought you to this happy celebration of your fiftieth anniversary.

We thank you most warmly for having chosen Lyon to celebrate this memorable anniversary. As the Orthodox ecumenical officer and rector of the Greek Orthodox Church, with all the representatives of CREL (Committee of Church Leaders in Lyon), we welcome you from the bottom of our hearts. Lyon is a welcoming city, a city rich in beauty, and it offers its love and human warmth to all, and to those who have chosen to make it their home.

To this city, from Smyrna in Asia Minor, the Lord led the martyr St Pothinus, the first bishop of Lyon. The shedding of his blood, and of that of the other martyrs in the year 177, has hallowed this ground. St Irenaeus, also born in Smyrna, was his successor in Lyon and he worked energetically for the peace of the Church.

From the East, from those same lands of saints and martyrs, there arrived in the last century further Christians, driven out and uprooted from their own lands. Here they sought hospitality, and they found it. They were Russians, Greeks and Armenians.

Our city has been at the forefront of the ecumenical movement, with as its chief player the pioneering figure of Fr Paul Couturier, one of the main architects of 20th century ecumenism. Imbued with charity and sympathy, full of love and a gospel-driven desire for peace, he sought out those Christian brothers and sisters, and, through his contact with them, he discovered the reality of Orthodoxy.

For fifty years now, CEC has been an ideal means showing the path for the advancement and promotion of Christian unity, while at the same time responding to the many needs of modern society. This is truly an extraordinary occasion, because it is a clear demonstration of the work and striving towards the unity of the Church of Christ. It is revelatory of the indwelling and vitality of the Holy Spirit in each one of us.



The theme of your Assembly is hope. We have that hope as a sure and certain anchor in our souls, and it gives us a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. But we Christians also wait for the complete justification of our faith. Active hope stimulates our participation in the resurrection of Christ, which gives a new content to our lives. If faith in the resurrection of Christ is the substance of the Christian message, hope for our participation in it is the means by which it is experienced as a reality. “Hope brings joy to the soul. It is the joy that anticipates joy. Hope is the force of love,” said St John Climacus. “We entrust to thee our whole life and our hope, O thou friend of humankind,” says the Orthodox priest in the prayer of the Divine Liturgy.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, our Hope, said when he sent out the apostles to preach, “Behold, I am with you,” and he went before them to alert them to the obstacles on the way. May he also be with you and guide you in the course of your work. In your Assembly may the Holy Spirit, who is everywhere, come and make his dwelling in each one of you. And may the Holy Spirit shine his love forth and keep you in hope.