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Audience with the Artists of the Concert “Christmas in the Vatican”

At 12.30 today, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the promoters, organisers and artists of the Concert “Christmas in the Vatican”, on the 25th anniversary of its initiation, which will take place tomorrow, Saturday 16 December, in the Paul VI Hall, under the aegis of the Congregation for Catholic Education. The proceeds raised will be donated to the Foundation *Scholas Occurrentes* and the Foundation *Don Bosco in the World*.

Upon arrival in the Clementine Hall, Pope Francis was welcomed with a Christmas carol sung by the artists, including the *Little Choir of Piazza Vittoria* and the choristers of the *Art Voice Academy* and *Hallelujah Gospel Singers*. The Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education, H.E. Msgr. Angelo Vincenzo Zani, then briefly presented the reasons for the Concert and the institutions involved. The Holy Father spoke some words of greeting, blessing those present, and symbolically, an olive plant.

The following are the words of the Holy Father:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I welcome you to this meeting, which allows me to express my appreciation for your participation in the “Christmas in the Vatican” concert, the proceeds of which will be donated to finance two projects for the children of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for young people in Argentina. I greet and thank the promoters of the event and those who will perform tomorrow night, as well as those who will take part, thus expressing sensitivity to the needs of the most disadvantaged and in need who ask for help and solidarity.

Christmas, as we know, is a feast that is keenly felt and participated in, able to warm the coldest of hearts, to remove the barriers of indifference towards others, to encourage openness to the other and to giving freely. This is why today we need to spread the message of peace and fraternity proper to Christmas; we need to represent

this event by expressing the authentic sentiments that animate it. And art is a formidable means of opening the doors of the mind and heart to the true meaning of Christmas. The creativity and genius of the artists, with their works, also with music and song, manage to reach the most intimate levels of the conscience. Art enters precisely in the depths of consciousness.

I offer my best wishes that the Christmas Concert in the Vatican may be an opportunity to sow tenderness – this word which is so forgotten today! “Violence”, “war” ... no, no, tenderness – to sow tenderness, peace and acceptance welcome, which spring from the stable in Bethlehem. I reiterate my gratitude to each one of you and, as I offer a cordial greeting for serene Christmas holidays, full of joy and peace, I bless each one of you, your families and your loved ones.

And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
