



THIRD EUROPEAN ECUMENICAL
ASSEMBLY
Sibiu, Romania
4 – 9 September 2007

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Sibiu, Tuesday 4th September 2007
19:00 to 21:00 hrs, Piața Mare
Welcoming Act

PROVISIONAL TEXT – CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

WELCOME

**Opening of the Third European Ecumenical Assembly
Bishop D. Dr Christoph Klein
Bishop of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania**

4 September 2007

Your All Holiness
Your Beatitude
Eminences
Înalt Prea Sfințiile și Prea Sfințiile Voastre
Your Excellencies
Your Grace
Dear participants at the Third European Ecumenical Assembly
Iubiți creștini
Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

I have the honour of greeting you in the name of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, whose Bishop has his seat here in Hermannstadt/Sibiu. This German-speaking church is one of the two Lutheran churches in Romania. The emigration of many of our faithful, especially after the political changes which the year 1989 brought in its wake, have made of us a minority church. Our church is the church of the so-called 'Siebenbürgen Saxons' who founded this town in the 12th century and who, whilst still owing allegiance to Rome, built, among other churches, the 14th century Minster Church in which some of our services and Assembly events will take place.

We find ourselves here in Siebenbürgen at the faultline between Christianity which looks towards the west for its inspiration and Christianity which looks rather towards the east. Within the majority Orthodox Romania, Siebenbürgen remains a melting-pot of ethnic backgrounds, languages, cultures and, not least, confessions, among which are numbered not just the Lutheran and Orthodox Traditions, whose Bishops have their seat in this city, but also the Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Reformed and Unitarian traditions, all represented by congregations here. The fact that these Christians have lived together for centuries in their linguistic and confessional multiplicity is a good context for ecumenical relations in this city, which have their roots as far back as the 16th century when religious toleration was already recognized in law. It has for many a long century been a feature of this town that it is possible to take cognizance of varied church buildings, to offer varied forms of prayer within them to the one God and to the Lord Jesus Christ and to respect each other's differences in faith and in religious observance. In our own age, we have learnt alongside respect and tolerance for each other, to discover each other's values, to share with each other, to enter into dialogue with each other and so to learn from each other.

For all these reasons we believe that this city offers the best possible context for the Christians of Europe from all our churches to share in positive encounter, for common prayer and celebration and within our overall theme, for engagement with the questions which face Europe today. Here the Light of Christ shines indeed on all; there are hardly any among us who do not confess allegiance to a Christian Confession or Denomination. Here there is certainly to be discovered something of the treasures from the wise people of the East which can equally enrich the Wise of the West and vice versa. If we can achieve a positive exchange of spiritual and theological treasures in our encounters, conversations and worship, then we will be able to return home with new hope for renewal and unity in Europe.

And so our wish for you all is that you may feel at ease in our city and that you may use the opportunities which these and the next days will bring you to widen our horizons. May we be open to experience what is new, perhaps strange or different and that in that we are enriched and find new joy. We hope that in this way signals may be sent out from Hermannstadt/Sibiu which will lead to a new orientation and that even if what we achieve cannot be characterized as sensational, we may nevertheless set out clear signs for possible new ways which lead us to reconciliation, justice and the integrity of creation in our churches and in a Europe which is growing together.

In this week, may our Lord God bless our time together and send His Holy Spirit to accompany us along the way