



*Caritas Internationalis
General Secretariat
Palazzo San Calisto
00120 Vatican City*

‘The Church We Believe In Is Catholic’

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Lesley-Anne Knight – Secretary General Caritas Internationalis

Thank you Archbishop Smith for the opportunity to be with you today and thank you to His Eminence Cardinal Rodriguez, my boss in Caritas Internationalis, for the honour to follow him as a witness speaker.

Exactly one year ago this week, I was in Port au Prince in Haiti, just a month after the catastrophic earthquake that destroyed much of the city and left around a quarter of a million people dead. I stood in the ruins of the city’s cathedral, and said a prayer for Archbishop Joseph Serge Miot who was among the victims of the disaster; I visited what was left of a catholic seminary and saw the personal belongings of young seminarians scattered amid the dust and the rubble. Lying there on a cracked slab of concrete was a torn and battered copy of a book by Eugene Joly entitled “What is Faith?”

It is a question that many of us who work for the Church’s humanitarian aid organisations will have asked ourselves at one time or another, finding ourselves in the midst of death and destruction.

Joly wrote: “Faith is an encounter in which God takes, and keeps, the initiative.”

Following the Haiti earthquake, there were clear signs of such encounters, where God had taken the initiative.

When disasters like this occur, Caritas Internationalis issues an Emergency Appeal to all its member organisations. The Haiti earthquake provoked an enormous expression of solidarity and compassion from the confederation. Within a very short time, 63 member organisations had contributed around 31 million dollars. But the striking thing was that this money had not only come from the large Caritas organisations, such as Development and Peace here in Canada, and Catholic Relief Services in the USA; some of our smallest member organisations, thousands of miles from Haiti, in some of the poorest countries of the world, had wanted to make a contribution in solidarity with the people of Haiti, and had sent whatever they could spare from their meagre resources.

This is precisely what Caritas Internationalis stands for. The Latin words mean literally “Love across the nations.”

While we are thinking of the meaning of words: if you look up the word ‘catholic’ in a dictionary, one of the definitions you are likely to find is “all-embracing”. This is perhaps the sense in which I have most frequently experienced the catholic nature of our Church, working for Caritas.

As a part of that Church, Caritas seeks to be a sign of God’s all-embracing love for humanity. One of the principal documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, states: “the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.” (*Lumen Gentium*, 1).

In his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI recognises that charitable activities play an essential role in this sacramental essence of the Church. He says: “The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word.” (*DCE*, 22)

The all-embracing nature of our Church is manifested in many ways, but I would like to focus this evening on three particular aspects that particularly concern me in my work for Caritas:

- Firstly, the all-embracing love that motivates us and unites us as a confederation.
- Secondly, how that love, or *caritas*, is expressed in our work, for the benefit of all victims of humanitarian disasters, the poor and oppressed – regardless of race, religion, or politics.
- And finally, how Caritas Internationalis seeks to engage with the wider world, people of other faiths and of none, in order to bring to fruition our vision of one human family and a world without poverty.

One of the huge privileges of my job as Secretary General of a world-wide confederation is to be able to visit our member organisations around the world and experience at first hand how our Church embraces so many diverse cultures. I have been lucky enough to share in the celebration of the Mass in some of the most far flung regions of our planet:

- In the South Pacific islands, where beautiful girls danced, adorned with exotic fresh flowers, to the melodic chants of ancient kingdoms;
- in a sports stadium in Mozambique, where pounding drums and a vast choir produced a sound that must surely have been heard in Heaven;
- in the tiny chapel of a remote Guatemalan village, where Mayan Indians listened attentively to the homily, delivered in fluent Quiché by a Spanish missionary Jesuit;

But whatever local expressions of devotion form part of the celebration, I know that the heart of the Mass remains the same. Wherever I may be in the

world, through the Eucharist, I know that I share in a communion with my brothers and sisters in Christ.

As Benedict XVI puts it: "I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians."

The Eucharist also makes me think of the wider symbolism of breaking bread, of sharing food and drink with others. Even when we encounter language difficulties and unfamiliar customs, there is something about sitting down to share a meal or a drink with people that makes us realise we are indeed part of one human family.

I have experienced this many times. And when that food and drink is offered by people living in the favelas of Sao Paulo; in a refugee camp in Darfur; or a flooded village in India; it is always a humbling experience.

Pope Benedict says: "Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn." But he adds: "A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented."

If we see the world as one human family, how can we bear to see our brothers and sisters suffering? How can we tolerate the fact that one billion of them live in extreme poverty? That 30,000 people die every day from malnutrition and preventable diseases.

Caritas workers around the world are united in our 'catholic' Church. Wherever they may be, through the Eucharist they experience this communion and are called to "the concrete practice of love."

I am sometimes asked why, as a Catholic organisation, we deliver aid to people of other faiths, such as Muslims and Buddhists. My answer is that we help people not because *they* are Catholics, but because *we* are Catholics. The church that I believe in is catholic. Our 'concrete practice of love', which we also know as *caritas* or charity, must therefore be 'all-embracing'.

In *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict emphasises this point, made by the Second Vatican Council in its decree concerning the lay apostolate, which states that "charitable activity can and should embrace all people and all needs." (*DCE*, 30a)

It is easy enough to make a theological or moral case against discrimination in the delivery of aid, but when we are confronted face-to-face with human suffering, all intellectual argument is transcended by what we feel in our hearts.

This was what the Good Samaritan experienced when he saw the injured man lying at the side of the road. He was “moved with compassion when he saw him. He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them.” (Luke 10:33-34)

When you have been to places like Darfur and spoken to Muslim women who have seen their husbands killed and then been raped by militiamen; when you have met the survivors of a devastating earthquake in Pakistan; when you have talked to Buddhists in Sri Lanka who lost loved ones in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami or the country’s bitter civil war; then there can be no question of ignoring the suffering of these people. In the words of Pope Benedict the “heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.”

I grew up amidst the evil that is racism. I was born in Zimbabwe, then known as Rhodesia, and as a little girl I used to wonder why there were no black children at my school. We used to pass them in the car as they walked to their schools and I used to wonder why their schools were so run down and scruffy, why they didn’t have school uniforms, and why they had no shoes on.

Later, when I went to university in Cape Town, I encountered racism in the extreme form of South African apartheid. Everything labelled – entrances, even park benches – for either Blacks or Whites. From the impeccably kept grounds of Cape Town University I could look across the bay to Robben Island where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated. I was lucky enough to escape from the oppressive atmosphere of apartheid South Africa, but when I left, Nelson Mandela still had another 15 years to serve in prison.

Experiences like these left a profound impression on me and convinced me that there can be no place for prejudice and discrimination in the catholic Church that I believe in.

When I went to Pakistan after the 2005 earthquake, I was working as International Director of CAFOD, our Caritas member organisation for England and Wales. I was accompanied on the visit by the chairman of our board Bishop John Rawsthorne. After a terrifying journey in the back of a jeep, following a tortuous road up into the mountains, we arrived at the small village where CAFOD was working with Caritas Pakistan, distributing tents and blankets and setting up a clinic. During the visit, Bishop John met the local Imam, who found it difficult to comprehend why a Christian bishop should come all the way from England to visit this isolated village. He was nevertheless pleased to see him. And here, amidst the devastation, I witnessed a brief, precious moment of compassion, empathy and solidarity between these two men.

These sort of encounters are repeated over and over again during the course of our work, and I am convinced that each one sows a small seed of peace and understanding in a world that often appears to be under threat from religious fundamentalism and extremism.

Our work in countries like Pakistan, Iraq, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Somalia, Sudan, Burma and Sri Lanka has to be conducted with great discretion and sensitivity. We can only work in these countries by maintaining the strictest standards of integrity. Pope Benedict explicitly states that charity should never be used as means of proselytism.” (DCE, 31a) “Those who practise charity in the Church’s name will never seek to impose the Church’s faith upon others,” he says.

But that does not mean that through our actions we do not witness to God’s love for humanity. As Pope Benedict says, the Church’s humanitarian workers: “realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak.” (ibid)

It is relatively easy to understand why Caritas, as part of our catholic Church, reaches out to all of humanity in times of disaster and humanitarian crisis. But we must also embrace and engage other faiths and the secular world on a daily basis, for other reasons: the need to speak out on justice issues, to challenge the structures that keep people in poverty and deny them a life of fulfilment and dignity; the need to ensure the highest standards in humanitarian aid; the need to collaborate and cooperate with other organisations to make our work more effective.

As the Pope points out: “Interior openness to the Catholic dimension of the Church cannot fail to dispose charity workers to work in harmony with other organizations in serving various forms of need, but in a way that respects what is distinctive about the service which Christ requested of his disciples.” (DCE, 34)

Pope Benedict acknowledges that there have been many forms of cooperation between State and Church agencies that have “borne fruit” (DCE, 31b) He says: “Church agencies, with their transparent operation and their faithfulness to the duty of witnessing to love, are able to give a Christian quality to the civil agencies too, favouring a mutual coordination that can only redound to the effectiveness of charitable service.” (ibid)

In the course of its work, Caritas engages with governments, with international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation and various organisations of the United Nations. We also interact with ecumenical and other faith-based organisations, particularly in peace-building and conflict resolution initiatives. And we participate in networks of non-governmental organisations concerned with coordinating and establishing standards for humanitarian response.

In all of these activities we are conscious of, and remain true to, our Church identity. But at the same time, we participate with a sense of humility, open to what we can learn from others, and respectful of the fact that our colleagues from other religious traditions, as well as non-believers, when they love and serve the least of their brothers and sisters, are also signs of God’s presence

among use. Because Jesus has always gone before us (Mark 16,7), and is present even among those who do not yet know his name.

I am proud to say that the charitable organisations of the Church, such as Caritas Internationalis, are widely respected in the broader humanitarian community.

At a time when the actions of our Church are subject to rigorous scrutiny, it is all too easy to feel persecuted and want to withdraw into ourselves. But this is precisely the time when we need to embrace the wider world and humbly seek to work towards greater harmony and understanding.

We remember how Saint Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, summoned the Church to open herself to all people, their histories and their cultures. We ask how we can become a better image of our Lord, in whom "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there can be neither male nor female – for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3,28).

The Church I believe in is catholic; and if we are to play our part in building the Kingdom of God, we must reach out to all our brothers and sisters – above all to the least and most marginalized – wherever they may be.

This imperative is illustrated by one of my favourite stories, which returns to the theme of sharing food that I mentioned earlier. The story originates from the Far East and describes visions of Heaven and Hell. The vision of Hell is of a beautiful marble banqueting hall in which there is a long table laden with delicious food. The inhabitants of Hell are seated on both sides of the table and are given chopsticks with which to eat the food. But the chopsticks are a metre long and they are unable to get the food to their mouths.

In the vision of Heaven we see exactly the same scene – except that in Heaven each person is using their long chopsticks to feed the person on the other side of the table.

The story obviously illustrates the virtue and benefit of cooperation and of helping one another. But it also contains a deeper truth: With their long chopsticks, the inhabitants of Heaven are not even able to feed the person next to them – they have to reach out and feed the person further away, on the other side, across the symbolic divide of the table.

Through God's love, with God's love and in God's love we are one human family... we are responsible for each other, especially the little ones and the poor.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Lesley-Anne Knight
Secretary General
Caritas Internationalis