



Caritas Internationalis – 19th General Assembly
“One Human Family: Zero Poverty”
Final Message

Assembled as the Caritas Family

Representatives of 168 national member organizations of Caritas Internationalis, 307 strong, we gathered in Rome, from 22 to 27 May 2011, for our 19th General Assembly. We are bishops, clergy, religious, and laity, united in firm belief that “our love must not be just words, or mere talk, but something active and genuine (1 Jn. 3:18).”

Our Assembly coincided with the 60th Anniversary of our founding as a global Confederation, based in Vatican City and privileged to enjoy a special bond with the Successor of St. Peter, our Holy Father, the Pope.

On the Opening Day of the General Assembly, Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone, Secretary of State for His Holiness, presided at a Solemn Mass to invoke the grace of the Holy Spirit on the participants and offered the encouragement and blessing of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI.

Celebrating Sixty Years of Diaconal Service

During the past sixty years, Caritas Internationalis has been able, through the grace of God, to fulfil the mandate received from the Servant of God Pope Pius XII to “operate in the universal Church [and] to foster reciprocal knowledge, coordination, and collaboration in carrying out charitable and social activities in the various parts of the world.”ⁱ Thus, in the words of the Servant of God Pope Paul VI, “[o]ur own organization, *Caritas Internationalis* ... [is] at work all over the world.”ⁱⁱ

Reflecting on the Vocation of Caritas

During this General Assembly, we were graced with the presence and teaching of our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI and of his closest collaborators, including the Cardinal Presidents of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum and of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and other officials of the Roman Curia. We re-affirmed Caritas organizations as an essential component of the Church that, “at diocesan, national and international levels, ought to do everything in their power to provide the resources and above all the personnel needed for this work.”ⁱⁱⁱ We further reflected on the sacred significance of the ministry we are called to perform since, “[t]he Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the sacraments and the Word.”^{iv}

Reading the Signs of the Times

We gather at a time when the “cries of the poor” are deafening. We stand in solidarity with those affected by natural disasters and civil conflicts, especially in Japan, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Colombia, North Africa-Middle East and other parts of the



world. We seek protection for refugees, forced and involuntary migrants, and victims of human trafficking. We express compassion with those who face rejection or discrimination because of their ethnic or racial origins, their religion, or socio-economic status. We are especially concerned with the plight of women and young girls who are deprived of education, health care, decent wages and working conditions and other basic necessities of life. We are keenly aware that countless people have been further impoverished by the global economic crisis and the widening gap between the rich and the poor. These cries oblige us “to awaken consciences to the drama of human misery and to the demands of social justice made by the Gospel and the Church”.^{vi}

Thus the admonition of Blessed Pope John Paul II echoes in our hearts: “Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world.”^{vii} The advocacy we undertake in this regard “is not a means of changing the world ideologically ..., ^{viii}” since “Christ, to be sure, gave His Church no proper mission in the political, economic or social order ... ^{ix}” It is prophetically undertaken, however, as “a light and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to divine law.”^x

Seeing with our hearts and acting with our hands

Neither our efforts to organize charitable assistance nor to advocate with and on behalf of the poor truly will be effective without a “heart which sees.”^{xi} We understand well that we are dealing with human beings ... [who] need heartfelt concern ... a “formation of the heart.”^{xii} Thus we affirmed “the person of Christ [as] the ultimate foundation of the spirituality of Caritas workers.”^{xiii}

We reviewed the accomplishments of the Caritas Confederation during the past four years. We launched 100 Emergency Appeals in 46 countries of the world, bringing humanitarian support to more than 11.5 million people. During 2009-2010, the Confederation spent a total amount of 2.2 billion euros on international programmes, including humanitarian relief and integral human development and 0.7 billion euros in domestic poverty relief programmes. We engaged with governments, international institutions and civil society to challenge unjust systems and structures that keep people in poverty, with special attention to climate justice, food security, poverty eradication, health and pandemics, the “Female Face of Migration”, and Peace-building. We shared the stories that give hope and inspiration and raised awareness of the plight of the poor and marginalized. We express heartfelt gratitude to the countless benefactors, staff, and volunteers who have initiated and sustained these efforts. Among them are many people living in poverty who serve as our best teachers in the virtues of humility, love, and hope. We hold sacred the memory of those who gave their lives in Caritas’ service to the poor and express deep sympathy to their families.

We strove to strengthen our governance structures by proposing a revised set of statutes and internal rules that will conform to the special status of “Public Juridical Person” under the Canon Law of the Church, accorded to Caritas Internationalis by Blessed Pope John Paul II in September 2004. This privileged status brings particular



rights and responsibilities since we are expected to “fulfil in the name of the Church” the “proper function entrusted to” Caritas and “within the purposes set out for” this Confederation.^{xiv} In this regard, we were especially grateful for the constructive dialogue being pursued between the officers of Confederation and the officials of the Holy See and of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum. We sincerely hope that this dialogue will be intensified and continued so that, together, we can offer respective contributions to enhancing ecclesial communion.

Expressing Gratitude

We express particular gratitude to the professional and inspiring leadership and loving and selfless service rendered to the Confederation by our outgoing Secretary General, Dr. Lesley-Anne Knight, during the past four years.

We celebrated the renewed mandates of our President, Oscar Andrés Cardinal Rodríguez Maradiaga, S.D.B., and of our Treasurer, Mr. Juerg Krummenacher, and of incumbent Regional Presidents. At the same time, we welcomed the newly-elected Regional Presidents and Secretary General Mr. Michel Roy. We welcomed the five new national members of the Confederation: Caritas Mongolia, Caritas Vietnam, Caritas Monaco, Caritas Sweden, and Caritas Samoa.

Hope for the Future

We committed ourselves to a dynamic Strategic Framework 2011-2015 that seeks to enhance “Compassion in Action” by reducing the risk and impact of humanitarian crises; “Promote integral human development” so that women and men in the poorest and most disadvantaged communities have equal access to essential services; “Transform Unjust Systems and Structures” by accompanying disadvantaged women and men as they influence the systems and decisions that affect them; and “Build Organizational Competence (within the Confederation) and Global Partnership” with other faith-based and civil society organizations that share similar values. These actions will be inspired and guided by our hope-filled strategic vision of “One Human Family ... Zero Poverty”.

We discussed preparations for the upcoming October 2012 Synod of Bishops that will focus on New Evangelization, since “our contribution to a meaningful definition of evangelisation in the field of the Church’s *diaconia* is much needed.^{xv}” In the words of the Servant of God Pope Paul VI, “evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and man’s concrete life, both personal and social.^{xvi}” We are keenly aware, however, that charity must not be utilized “as a more or less subtle way of imposing beliefs on others.^{xvii}” According to Pope Benedict XVI, “Love is free; it is not practiced as a way to achieve other ends.^{xviii}”

The love of Christ impels us

May the God who sent His Son so that we “might have life, and have it to the full,^{xix}” and whose Spirit renews the face of the earth, continue the good work that has



begun in Caritas Internationalis. The challenges before us are many, but “God gives us the strength to fight and to suffer for love of the common good, for He is our All, our greatest hope.”^{xx}

Caritas Christi Urget Nos!^{xxi}

ⁱ As noted by the Servant of God Pope John Paul II, in his letter, *Durante l’Ultima Cena*, granting Public Canonical Legal Status to Caritas Internationalis, 16 September 2004.

ⁱⁱ Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, #46,
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum_en.html

ⁱⁱⁱ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, #31,
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html

^{iv} *Ibid.*, #22.

^v Psalm 34:7.

^{vi} Pope Paul VI, *Evangelica testificatio* 17f. (Enchiridion Vaticanum [EV], 4, p. 649f.

^{vii} Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, #51,
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html

^{viii} *Deus Caritas Est*, op. cit., #31.

^{ix} Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, #42,
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

^x Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, #42,
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

^{xi} *Deus Caritas Est*, op. cit., #31.

^{xii} *Ibid.*, #31.

^{xiii} P. Raniero Cantalamessa, ofmcap, “Let your Love be Active and Genuine,” address to the 19th General Assembly of Caritas Internationalis, 23 May 2011.

^{xiv} Code of Canon Law, #116, <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/PD.HTM>

^{xv} Oscar Andrés Cardinal Rodríguez Maradiaga, S.D.B., Opening Address, 19th General Assembly of Caritas Internationalis, 22 May 2011.

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^{xvi} Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #29, 31,

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html

^{xvii} Peter Cardinal K.A. Turkson, “The Caritas Enterprise: Laborious and Stimulating,” Address to the 19th General Assembly of Caritas Internationalis, 23 May 2011.

^{xviii} *Deus Caritas Est*, op. cit., #31.

^{xix} John 10:10

^{xx} Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 78,

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html

^{xxi} 2 Corinthians 5:14.