



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 25th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ORGANIZED BY THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS**

To my Venerable Brother Archbishop

ZYGMUNT ZIMOWSKI

President of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers

I joyfully wish to extend my cordial greeting to the participants in the 25th International Conference, which fits in well with the year celebrating the Dicastery's 25th anniversary and offers a further reason to thank God for this precious instrument of the apostolate of mercy.

My grateful thoughts go to all those who do their utmost, in the various sectors of pastoral health care to live that *diakonia* of charity that is central to the mission of the Church. I am therefore pleased to remember Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini and Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragán, who have led the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers in the past 25 years and to send a special greeting to Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, the current President of the Dicastery, as well as to the Secretary, to the Undersecretary, to the Officials, to the collaborators, to the speakers at the Congress and to everyone present.

The theme you have chosen this year "*Caritas in Veritate*: toward an equitable and human health care", is of particular interest for the Christian community in which care for the human being, for his transcendent dignity and for his inalienable rights is central. Health is a precious good for the person and the community to be promoted, preserved and protected, dedicating the necessary means, resources and energy in order that more and more people may benefit from it.

Unfortunately the fact that still today many of the world's populations have no access to the resources they need to satisfy their basic needs, particularly with regard to health care, is still a problem. It is necessary to work with greater commitment at all levels to ensure that the right to

health care is rendered effective by furthering access to basic health care. In our day on the one hand we are witnessing an attention to health that borders on pharmacological, medical and surgical consumerism, almost a cult of the body, and on the other, the difficulty of millions of people in achieving a basic standard of subsistence and in obtaining the indispensable medicines for treatment.

In the health-care sector too, which is an integral part of everyone's life and of the common good, it is important to establish a real distributive justice which, on the basis of objective needs, guarantees adequate care to all. Consequently, if it is not to become inhuman, the world of health care cannot disregard the moral rules that must govern it.

As I emphasized in the Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, the Church's social doctrine has always highlighted the importance of distributive justice and of social justice in the different areas of human relations (cf. n. 35).

Justice is promoted when one welcomes the life of the other and assumes responsibility for him, responding to his expectations, for in him one perceives the very Face of the Son of God who for our sake became man. It is on the divine image imprinted in our brother and sister that the most exalted dignity of every person is founded and inspires the need for respect, care and service. Justice and charity, in the Christian perspective, are very closely linked: "Charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is 'mine' to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is 'his', what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting.... If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is 'inseparable from charity' and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity" (*ibid.*, 6).

In this regard, St Augustine taught using concise and incisive words that "justice consists in helping the poor" (*De Trinitate*, XIV, 9: PL 42, 1045).

To bend down, like the Good Samaritan, over the wounded man left by the roadside is to fulfil that "greater justice" which Jesus asks of his disciples and practised in his life, because the fulfilment of the Law is love. The Christian community, in following in the Lord's footsteps, has complied with his mandate to go out into the world "to teach and to heal the sick" and, down the centuries, "has felt strongly that service to the sick and suffering is an integral part of her mission" (John Paul II, Motu Proprio *Dolentium Hominum*, n. 1), to bear witness to integral salvation, which is health of soul and body.

The pilgrim People of God on the tortuous paths of history, joins forces with many other men and women of good will in order to give a truly human face to health-care systems. Justice in health care must be among the priorities on the agenda of Governments and International Institutions.

Unfortunately, alongside the positive and encouraging results there are opinions and mindsets that damage it: I am referring to issues such as those connected with the so-called “reproductive health”, with recourse to artificial techniques of procreation that entail the destruction of embryos, or with legalized euthanasia.

Love of justice, the protection of life from conception to its natural end and respect for the dignity of every human being should be upheld and witnessed to, even going against the tide: the fundamental ethical values are the common patrimony of universal morality and the basis of democratic coexistence.

The joint effort of all is required, but also and above all a profound conversion of one’s inner orientation. Only if one looks at the world with the Creator’s gaze, which is a loving gaze, will humanity learn to dwell on earth in peace and justice, allocating the earth and its resources justly to every man and every woman, for their good.

For this reason, “I would advocate the adoption of a model of development based on the centrality of the human person, on the promotion and sharing of the common good, on responsibility, on a realization of our need for a changed lifestyle, and on prudence, the virtue which tells us what needs to be done today in view of what might happen tomorrow” (Benedict XVI, *Message for the 2010 World Day of Peace*, n. 9, 8 December 2009).

To our suffering brothers and sisters I express my closeness and my appeal to experience illness also as an opportunity of grace to grow spiritually and to participate in Christ’s sufferings for the good of the world; and I offer all of you who are committed in the vast field of health, care my encouragement for your precious service. As I pray for the motherly protection of the Virgin Mary, *Salus infirmorum*, I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing, which I also extend to your families.

From the Vatican, 15 November 2010

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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