



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mrs. ELÍN FLYGENRING
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF ICELAND
TO THE HOLY SEE**

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 18 December 2008*

Your Excellency,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican as you present the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Iceland to the Holy See. I am grateful for the courteous greetings and sentiments of good will which you have expressed. I would ask you kindly to convey to His Excellency President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, to the civil authorities and to all the people of Iceland, my prayerful good wishes.

Your presence here today, Madam Ambassador, is another milestone in that common journey of understanding and cooperation between Iceland and the Holy See which we have together undertaken since the establishment of formal diplomatic relations in 1976. The visit which my venerable predecessor, Pope John Paul II, paid to your country in 1989 was an eloquent expression of the closeness of that relationship. Indeed, the cordial reception he received, and the warmth of his words and gestures were, in a sense, a symbolic renewal of mutual appreciation and the desire to continue to work together in respectful collaboration. Iceland and the Holy See have many areas of common concern in the international arena, among which I would mention healthcare and the environment, freedom of conscience and religion, the promotion of peace and dialogue, and the search for an ever more just and equitable international order. I am confident that the responsibility which you are now assuming will continue to consolidate the promotion of these and other shared values.

Your Excellency's mission may also draw inspiration from that special event in the life and identity of the nation, when Christianity was accepted by the people of Iceland at your national Parliament

more than a thousand years ago. Christians in your country can look back with gratitude to that moment and recall the truths, principles and values enshrined in your society's institutions, laws and customs which continue to nurture and educate the population. My venerable predecessor, Pope John Paul II, in naming Saint Thorlac the Patron Saint of Iceland, rightly underlined the formative presence of the faith in your land. I personally had an opportunity to appreciate this heritage when His Excellency Prime Minister Geir H. Haarde kindly presented to me a copy of the new Icelandic translation of the Bible during his visit to the Vatican. It is my fervent hope that the people of Iceland, as individuals and as a nation, will continue to draw inspiration from this rich tradition. I pray that it will enlighten them as they defend and promote human rights at home and abroad while encouraging respect for all religions and the legitimate exercise of freedom.

Catholics in Iceland, though a numerically small community, are committed to religious and human service of all their brothers and sisters, both nationals and immigrants. This task has been made easier thanks to the relationship developed over the years between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland and the Catholic Church. Mature democracies, as such, tend to educate people in tolerance and mutual acceptance, in respectful dialogue and collaboration for the common good. The positive effects of this social and political environment are enriched when Christians receive and practise the gift of charity that is expressed through dialogue and practical collaboration. I trust that in your country the members of the Catholic Church and all who search for Christian unity and for the wider good of society will continue to grow in mutual knowledge, respect and cooperation. As they seek to promote together an ever more dignified and humane society, I pray that they will be enriched by the gift of love, knowing 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" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 31c).

On the global scene, the Holy See appreciates the interest your country has shown in favouring a greater involvement of the international community in the promotion of peace through the defence of human rights and the rule of law, in the struggle against poverty and especially in the protection of the environment. Your country's experience and technological expertise in the use of alternative energies can be of great service to other populations and contribute to mankind's desire to be better stewards of God's creation. I likewise cannot fail to commend Iceland's concern for those who suffer the effects of war and underdevelopment which has made your population generously open in receiving refugees and, among other initiatives, eager to see international trade established on a more equitable basis.

In your address, Madam Ambassador, you mentioned difficulties experienced by your fellow citizens as a result of recent financial hardships. People worldwide are surveying with apprehension the present period of international economic instability. The Holy See is concerned for its negative effects on countries and individuals, and follows with particular attention the proposals to consolidate national and international financial institutions on more prudent and morally responsible foundations. I pray that political and economic leaders will be guided in their

decisions by wisdom, foresight and appreciation of the common good. I am confident that the people of Iceland, noted for their resilience and courage, will overcome this time of turbulence and that, with the Lord's good favour, through wise political decisions and with the help of the nation's many professionally qualified and competent sons and daughters, they will once again enjoy economic stability.

Your Excellency, please receive these reflections as an expression of the Holy See's attentive consideration and appreciation of your country. I wish you every success in your new mission and I invite you to count on the cooperation of the different Departments of the Roman Curia. Once again I am pleased to renew my good wishes to His Excellency President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, and to the Government and people of your country. May Almighty God bestow upon the nation abundant and lasting blessings of well-being, stability and peace!

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