



The Holy See

**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR HEALTH PASTORAL CARE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
NINTH WORLD DAY OF THE SICK
(SYDNEY - AUSTRALIA, 11 FEBRUARY 2001)**

To My Venerable Brother

Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragán

President of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care

In the peace which comes from God, I greet you and all who are gathered in Saint Mary's Cathedral in Sydney for the Eucharistic Sacrifice that is the very heart of the Ninth World Day of the Sick. I ask you to convey to Cardinal Edward Clancy and to the Church in Sydney and throughout Australia the assurance of my closeness in prayer as you meet to reflect on how the new evangelization needed at the beginning of the Third Christian Millennium must respond to the many complex questions arising in the field of health care, always in the light of the Cross of Christ, in which human suffering finds "its supreme and surest point of reference" (*Salvifici Doloris*, 31).

Few areas of human concern are as subject to the profound social and cultural changes affecting contemporary life as health care. This is one of the reasons why in 1985 I established the body which has become the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care, over which you diligently preside. Down the years, the Pontifical Council has rendered an invaluable service not only to those directly involved in Catholic health care, but to the wider community as it grapples with the many issues which have become still more pressing in the time since the Council was established. For that service, I give fervent thanks to Almighty God.

At the dawn of the new millennium, it is more urgent than ever that the Gospel of Jesus Christ should permeate every aspect of health care, and therefore I welcome the choice of theme for this World Day of the Sick: "The New Evangelization and the Dignity of the Suffering Person". Evangelization must be new – new in method and new in ardour – because so much has changed and is changing in the care of the sick. Not only is health care facing unprecedented economic pressures and legal complexities, but at times there is also an ethical uncertainty which tends to obscure what

have always been its clear moral foundations. This uncertainty can become a fatal confusion, manifested as a failure to understand that the essential purpose of health care is to promote and safeguard the well-being of those who need it, that medical research and practice must always be tied to ethical imperatives, that the weak and those who may seem unproductive to the eyes of a consumer society have an inviolable dignity that must always be respected, and that health care should be available as a basic right to all people without exception. Regarding all of this I would apply to the work of the Pontifical Council and the discussions of your Conference what I said in my recent Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* at the close of the Jubilee Year: it has become increasingly important "to explain properly the reasons for the Church's position, stressing that it is not a case of imposing on non-believers a vision based on faith, but of interpreting and defending the values rooted in the very nature of the human person" (No. 51).

The World Day of the Sick has a vital word to say, and the Pontifical Council has an indispensable role to play, in the Church's mission of proclaiming the Gospel of life and love to the world.

As you gather on this day dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes, in the Cathedral dedicated to Mary Help of Christians, I commend you and Cardinal Clancy, the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care and all taking part in the World Day of the Sick to the loving intercession of Mary Most Holy, the Woman whom the Church invokes as "Health of the Sick". As a pledge of joy and peace in her Son, the Redeemer of the world, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 18 January 2001

IOANNES PAULUS II