



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUREAU
AND GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF "CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS"**

*Consistory Hall
Thursday, 11 May 1989*

*Dear Cardinal do Nascimento,
Your Excellencies, Dear Friends in Christ,*

I am happy to meet you, the members of the Executive Committee Bureau and General Secretariat of *Caritas Internationalis*. You have come from almost all parts of the world to discuss and determine ways of implementing the mission which the Church has entrusted to your Organization: the fostering of charity and social justice. Love – *caritas* – is of the essence of our Christian vocation and of the witness which the ecclesial community must bear before the world. We read in the First Letter of John: "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another... let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth" (1Jo. 3, 11. 18).

In greeting each one of you, therefore, I express my personal appreciation and the Church's gratitude for the innumerable forms of solidarity carried out under the auspices of *Caritas Internationalis* through all its member organizations and by means of its regional, national and local activities. I also manifest the prayerful hope that your discussions and resolutions will lead to an ever increasing awareness on the part of all concerned that the loving service you promote has its deepest roots and guarantee in the love of God himself: "we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments" (1Jo. 5, 2). May your hearts continue to be filled with supernatural love so that your personal and collective commitment to the service of the poor and the suffering will always truly reflect the love of Christ himself, who came "not to be served but to serve" (Matth. 20, 28).

In the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, the Second Vatican Council offered a broad description of the nature and conditions of the works of charity which the Church claims as her inalienable duty and right (Cfr. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 8). Works of assistance and development, of charity and justice, are intimately connected with the transformation of temporal society, which is the special role of the Laity in the Church. It is therefore heartening to know that you are giving special attention to the *spiritual and professional formation of Caritas workers*, especially lay personnel. In doing so you are enabling them to fulfil their ecclesial role for the transformation of human communities into visible signs of God's kingdom through an evangelical life and professional competence (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Christifideles Laici*, 41).

The task of providing training for the lay men and women engaged in Caritas work is an essential requirement for the successful outcome of your endeavours, which seek to offer a better Christian service to individuals and society. The appropriate formation of your collaborators is a matter which vitally affects the quality and effectiveness of the service rendered in the name of Christ and of the Church. I wish to encourage you to use every available means to provide such a formation.

In all forms of ecclesial service pride of place must be given to the individual, created in the likeness of God and redeemed through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. *All have a home in the Church*. All are objects of her concern. But, *the poor and the suffering in particular* need to feel themselves individually and personally welcomed and sustained in their inalienable dignity. In my Post-Synodal Exhortation I referred to the fact that all too often in today's world the more complex institutions become in their organization, the more they lose their effectiveness as a result of an impersonal functionalism, an overgrown bureaucracy, and unjust private interests (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Christifideles Laici*). It is not enough to give; it must be done in a true spirit of solidarity and brotherhood.

By imitating the humility and compassion of Christ, all those engaged in Christian service walk the paths of the dispossessed and those who seek justice. They walk in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ, who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (*Phil. 2, 7*). To him I entrust each one of you and all those connected with the work of *Caritas Internationalis*. May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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