



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR HEALTH PASTORAL CARE**

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 22 March 2007*

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care. I address my cordial greeting to each one of you, who have come from various parts of the world as an effective expression of the commitment of the particular Churches, the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Christian community's numerous institutions in the health-care sector. I thank Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragán, President of the Dicastery, for the courteous words with which he has expressed your common sentiments, describing to me the current goals you are working to achieve. I greet with gratitude the Secretary, the Undersecretary, the Officials and Consultors present and the other collaborators.

Your aim is not to examine a specific theme at this meeting, but rather, to check on the implementation of the programme you established previously and consequently, to determine your future objectives. Thus, meeting you on an occasion such as this gives me the joy, so to speak, of making each one of you actually feel in your ecclesial service the closeness of the Successor of Peter, and through him, of the entire Episcopal College. Indeed, the pastoral care of health is a typically evangelical context, which immediately recalls the work of Jesus, the Good Samaritan of humanity. When he passed through the villages of Palestine proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God, he always accompanied his preaching with signs that he worked for the sick, healing all those who were prisoners of every kind of disease and infirmity. The health of the human being, of the whole human being, was the sign chosen by Christ to manifest God's

closeness, his merciful love, which heals the mind, the soul and the body. Dear friends, may this always be the fundamental reference of your every initiative: the following of Christ, whom the Gospels present to us as the divine "doctor".

It is this biblical perspective that enhances the natural ethical principle of the duty to care for the sick, on the basis of which every human life must be defended in accordance with its own particular difficulties and with our practical possibilities of providing help. Going to the aid of the human being is a duty: both in response to a fundamental right of the person and because the care of individuals redounds to the benefit of the group. Medical science makes progress to the extent that it is willing to constantly discuss diagnosis and methods of treatment, in the knowledge that it will be possible to surpass the previous data acquired and the presumed limits. Moreover, esteem for and confidence in health-care personnel are proportionate to the certainty that these official guardians of life will never condemn a human life, however impaired it may be, and will always encourage endeavours to treat it. Consequently, treatment should be extended to every human being, meaning throughout his or her entire existence. The modern conception of health care is in fact human advancement: from the treatment of the sick person to preventive treatment, with the search for the greatest possible human development, encouraging an adequate family and social environment.

This ethical perspective, based on the dignity of the human person and on the fundamental rights and duties connected with it, is confirmed and strengthened by the commandment of love, the heart of the Christian message. Christian health-care workers therefore know well that there is a very close and indissoluble bond between the quality of their professional service and the virtue of charity to which Christ calls them: it is precisely in doing their work well that they give people a witness of God's love. Charity as a task of the Church, which I made the object of reflection in my Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, is implemented in a particularly meaningful way through the care of the sick. This is attested to by the history of the Church, with countless testimonies of the men and women who either individually or in groups have worked in this field. Thus, among the saints who practised charity in an exemplary way, I was able to mention in the Encyclical emblematic figures such as John of God, Camillus de Lellis and [Giuseppe] Cottolengo, who served the poor and suffering Christ in the person of the sick.

Dear brothers and sisters, allow me, therefore, to present to you in spirit the reflections I proposed in the Encyclical with the relative pastoral instructions on the charitable service of the Church as a "community of love". And I can now add to the Encyclical the recently published Post-Synodal *Apostolic Exhortation*, which in a broad and structured way treats the Eucharist as the "*Sacrament of charity*". It is precisely from the Eucharist that health pastoral care can continuously draw the strength to relieve human beings effectively and to promote them as befits their proper dignity. In hospitals and clinics, the Chapel is the vibrant heart where Jesus ceaselessly offers himself to the Heavenly Father for the life of humanity. The Eucharist, distributed to the sick in a dignified and prayerful way, is the vital sap that comforts them and instils in their souls the inner light with which

to live the condition of sickness and suffering with faith and hope. I therefore also entrust this recent Document to you: make it your own and apply it in the field of pastoral health care, drawing from it the appropriate spiritual and pastoral guidelines.

I offer you my best wishes for the success of your work in these days and accompany it with a special remembrance in prayer, as I invoke the motherly protection of Mary Most Holy, *Salus infirmorum*, and with my Apostolic Blessing, which I cordially impart to you who are present here, to all those who work with you in their respective departments and to all your loved ones.

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