



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO "CARITAS ITALIANA"  
ON THE OCCASION OF ITS FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY**

*St. Peter's Basilica  
Thursday, 24 November 2011*

*Venerable Brothers,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I welcome you with joy on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the founding of *Caritas Italiana*. I greet you with affection, joining in the thanksgiving for your valuable service of the entire Italian Episcopate. I cordially greet Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, President of the Italian Episcopal Conference, thanking him for his words on behalf of you all. I greet Mons. Giuseppe Merisi, President of *Caritas*, the Bishops in charge of the relief services of the various regional Bishops' Conferences, the Director of *Caritas Italiana*, the directors of the diocesan *Caritas* and all their co-workers.

You have come to the tomb of Peter to strengthen your faith and to gather momentum for your mission. In 1972, at the First National Study Meeting of *Caritas* the Servant of God [Paul VI](#) said: "Above this purely material aspect of your activity, there must emerge its prevalent pedagogical function" (*L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 12 October 1972, p. 11).

Indeed, you have been entrusted with an important educational task for the community, families, and civil society in which the Church is called to be light (cf. Phil 2:15).

It is a matter of assuming responsibility for teaching the upright life of the Gospel, which is such only if the testimony of charity is thoroughly understood. The Apostle Paul's words illuminate this perspective: "For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love" (Gal

5:5-6).

This is the badge of Christians: faith which becomes active in charity. Each one of you is called to make your own contribution so that the love with which we have always been and always will be loved by God may become an active approach to life, an effort of service and an awareness of responsibility. “For the love of Christ controls us”, St Paul wrote (2 Cor 5:14). It is this aspect that you must make ever more present in the particular Churches in which you live.

Dear friends, never desist from this educational task, even when the road becomes difficult and your efforts seem to be unproductive. Carry it out in fidelity to the Church and with respect for the identity of your institutions, using the means that history has consigned to you and that “‘creativity’ in charity” will suggest to you for the future, as Blessed [John Paul II](#) said.

In the past four decades, you have been able to deepen, experience and put into practice a working method based on three interrelated and synergetic forms of attention: *listening, observing and discerning*, employing them in your mission service through the charitable animation of the communities on your respective territories. This is a style that makes possible not only pastoral action but also to follow up a profound and fruitful dialogue with the various milieus of ecclesial life, with associations and movements and with the variegated world of organized volunteer service.

This means listening in order to know, of course, but at the same time to become close, to support Christian communities in caring for those who need to feel God’s warmth through the open and willing hands of Jesus’ disciples. It is important that suffering people be able to feel God’s warmth and that they feel it through our hands and our open-heartedness. In this way *Caritas* branches must be like “watchmen” (cf. Is 21:11-12) who can become aware and make others aware, who can predict and forestall, who can provide support and suggest solutions in the sure wake of the Gospel and of the Church’s social teaching.

The individualism of our time, the presumed sufficiency of technology, and the relativism that influences everyone are all seeking to invite people and communities to higher forms of listening, to a capacity for a broader vision and more open heart concerning needs and resources, to community forms of discernment on how to be and act in a world that is profoundly changing.

In scanning the pages of the Gospel, we are struck by Jesus’ *actions*: actions that communicate grace, teach faith and the “sequela”; actions of healing and acceptance, of mercy and hope, of a future and of compassion; actions that begin or perfect a call to follow him and that flow into recognition of the Lord as a single reason for the present and for the future.

Gestures and signs are connatural to *Caritas*’ pedagogical function. It is in fact through concrete signs that you speak, evangelize and educate. A charitable work speaks of God, proclaims hope, induces people to question themselves. I hope you will be able to foster in the best possible way

the quality of the institutions you have been able to create. Make them, as it were, “eloquent”, concerned above all with the inner inspiration that motivates them and the quality of the witness they radiate. They are institutions born of faith. They are Church institutions, an expression of attention to those whose life is more of a struggle. They are pedagogical actions because they help the poorest people grow in dignity, Christian communities walk in the footsteps of Christ and civil society consciously assume its obligations.

Let us remember what the Second Vatican Council taught: “The demands of justice must first of all be satisfied; that which is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity” (Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 8).

The humble, material service that the Church offers is not intended to replace or even less to dull the collective and civil conscience. It is backed by a spirit of sincere collaboration, within the proper autonomy and in the full awareness of subsidiarity.

From the very beginning of your pastoral journey you were given as a priority commitment the faculty to create a far-reaching presence in Italy, especially through the Diocesan and Parish branches of *Caritas*. Today too this is a goal to aim for. I am sure that your Pastors will be able to support and guide you, especially by helping the communities to understand the *proprium* of the pastoral animation that *Caritas* brings to the life of every particular Church. Moreover, I am certain that you will listen to your Pastors and follow their instructions.

Attention to the country and to its animation then gives rise to the ability to *interpret* the evolution of the life of its inhabitants, their difficulties and their worries, as well as their opportunities and prospects. Charity requires open-mindedness, a broad outlook, intuition and foresight, “a heart that sees” (cf. Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 25).

Responding to needs not only means giving bread to the hungry; it also means letting oneself be challenged by the reasons causing their hunger, with the gaze of Jesus who could see the deep reality of the people who came to him. It is in this perspective that the present day calls into question your method of being animators and agents of charity. One cannot but also think of the vast world of migration. Natural disasters and wars often create emergency situations. The global economic crisis is a further sign of the times that demands the courage of brotherhood.

The gap between the north and the south of the world and the damaged human dignity of so many people, appeal for a charity that can spread out gradually from the small to the great economic systems. The increasing hardship and weakening of families and the uncertainty of the condition of youth, point to the risk of a loss of hope. Humanity does not only need benefactors but also humble, practical people who, like Jesus, are able to stand beside their brethren, sharing a little of their struggle. In a word, humanity seeks signs of hope. The source of our hope is the Lord. This is the reason why *Caritas* is necessary; not in order to delegate the service of charity to it, but so that

it may be a sign of Christ's Charity, a sign that brings hope. Dear friends, help the whole Church to make God's love visible. Give freely and encourage others to do so. Recall everyone to the essentiality of love that becomes a service. Accompany our weaker brothers and sisters. Inspire Christian communities. Tell the world of the word of love that comes from God. Seek love as a synthesis of all the gifts of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 14:1).

May the Blessed Virgin Mary who on her visit to Elizabeth brought the sublime gift of Jesus in the humility of her service (cf. Lk 1:39-43) be your guide. I accompany you with my prayers and I gladly impart to you the Apostolic Blessing, extending it to all those whom you meet every day in your many activities. Many thanks.