



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE SIXTH INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION
OF MILITARY ORDINARIATES**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, October 22, 2011*

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Friends,*

I am happy to receive you on the occasion of the Sixth International Convention of Military Ordinariates and of the Third International Course of Formation for Military Chaplains in Humanitarian Law, promoted jointly by the Congregation for Bishops and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. As I greet you cordially, I thank Cardinal Marc Ouellet for the courteous words he has addressed to me on your behalf.

These initiatives of yours assume particular importance, because they are placed — as previously mentioned — in the context of the 25th anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution *Spirituali Militum Curae*, promulgated by [Bl. John Paul II](#), whose liturgical memorial we are celebrating today. Through those legislative provisions, it is intended to give Military Ordinariates the possibility to promote an ever more appropriate and better organized pastoral ministry for an important portion of the People of God, namely, military personnel and their families, with their institutions such as barracks, military schools and hospitals. Twenty-five years after that document, it should be stated that Military Ordinariates, in general, have shown that they have adopted a style increasingly more true to the Gospel, adapting pastoral structures to the urgent needs of the new evangelization.

Ideally, in these days of study, you expect to review the historical and juridical path of the Military Ordinariates, their ecclesial mission, as it is outlined in *Spirituali Militum Curae*, identifying the common paths for pastoral ministry in favour of military personnel and reflecting further on the most important current problems. In expressing my cordial encouragement, I want to call your

attention to the need to guarantee to men and women in the Armed Forces spiritual assistance that responds to all the needs of a consistent and missionary Christian life. It is necessary to form Christians with a deep faith, to live their religious practice with conviction, and to be authentic witnesses to Christ in their sphere. To achieve this objective, it is necessary that Bishops and military chaplains feel that they are responsible for the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments wherever military personnel and their families are present.

If the challenge of Military Ordinariates is to evangelize the military world, making possible an encounter with Jesus Christ and the holiness of life to which all are called, it seems evident that the priests who are engaged in this ministry must have a solid human and spiritual formation, constant attention to their own interior life and, at the same time, be ready to listen and to dialogue, to be able to accept the personal and environmental difficulties of the individuals entrusted to them. These people, in fact, need constant support along their journey of faith, given that the religious dimension has special meaning also in the life of a soldier. The reason for the existence of Military Ordinariates, that is, spiritual assistance to the faithful in the Armed Forces and the Police. It derives from the attention the Church has wished to offer military faithful and their families all the means of salvation to give them not only ordinary pastoral care and the specific help they need to carry out their mission with Christian charity. A Christian's military life, in fact, is placed in relation to the first and greatest commandment, namely love of God and neighbour, because the Christian in the Forces is called to realize a synthesis that makes it possible to be a soldier out of love, fulfilling the *ministerium pacis inter arma*.

I am referring, especially, to charity exercised by soldiers who rescue earthquake and flood victims, and also fugitives, putting their courage and competence at the disposal of the weakest. I am thinking of the charity exercised by soldiers involved in deactivating mines, involving personal danger and risk, in areas which have been the scene of war, as well as of soldiers who, in the sphere of peace missions, patrol cities and territories so that brothers will not kill one another. There are many men and women in uniform full of faith in Jesus, who love the truth, who want to promote peace and who commit themselves as true disciples of Christ, at the service of their nation, promoting the fundamental human rights of nations.

The relation between humanitarian law and military chaplains fits into this context, given that collaboration between humanitarian organizations and religious leaders develops fruitful energies directed at alleviating the suffering caused by conflicts. The devastating wounds caused by war show everyone that human dignity is often abused and peace destroyed. However, the dynamic of law alone is not enough to re-establish the lost balance. It is necessary to undertake the path of reconciliation and forgiveness. As [Bl. John Paul II](#) wrote in the [Message for World Day of Peace 2002](#), which followed the dramatic attacks of 11 September 2001: "True peace therefore is the fruit of justice, that moral virtue and legal guarantee which ensures full respect for rights and responsibilities, and the just distribution of benefits and burdens. But because human justice is always fragile and imperfect, subject as it is to the limitations and egoism of individuals and

groups, it must include and, as it were, be completed by the forgiveness which heals and rebuilds troubled human relations from their foundations” (n. 3).

Dear friends, also in the light of these considerations, the pastoral motivations that are the basis of the identity of the Military Ordinariate are of great current importance. The work of evangelization in the military world calls for a growing assumption of responsibility, so that, in this sphere, there may always be a new, convinced and joyful proclamation of Jesus Christ, the only hope of life and peace for humanity. In fact, he said: “Apart from me, you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). May your particular mission and your zealous ministry and that of your collaborators, presbyters and deacons, foster a general renewal of hearts, the premise of universal peace to which the whole world aspires. With these sentiments I assure you of my prayer and accompany you with my blessing, which I impart from my heart to you and to those entrusted to your pastoral care.

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