

Caritas Internationalis General Assembly

22nd to 27th May 2011, Domus Mariae Palazzo Carpegna, Rome



General Assembly Opening Address – Sunday 22nd May 2011
+Oscar Andrés Cardinal Rodríguez Maradiaga S.D. B.
President Caritas Internationalis

Dear friends,

We are gathering here in Rome to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Caritas Internationalis. The Caritas confederation is composed of 165 colourful and diverse members from around the world. Many of you have made a long journey to gather here to meet. Our General Assembly is an authentic expression of our common mission within the Church: to serve the poor.

In late 1951, the Statutes of Caritas Internationalis were signed and approved *ad experimentum* after Monsignor Montini, the later Pope Paul VI, had worked hard to make them an expression of what Caritas should look like worldwide and in the horizon of the contemporary understanding of the Church in the fifties.

Since then 60 years have passed. The Church has changed, the world has changed and Caritas has changed. This is true at the local level as well as at the universal level.

The Second Vatican Council was a milestone in the history of the Church. We have still not fully realized its outcomes. Being the people of God in the world is our vocation as Christians. The Church itself in “*Lumen Gentium*” is defined as “Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church. Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission. This it intends to do following faithfully the teaching of previous councils. The present-day conditions of the world add greater urgency to this work of the Church so that all men, joined more closely today by various social, technical and cultural ties, might also attain fuller unity in Christ.” (LG 1).

As a communion we are an instrument and a sacrament for the unity of the whole human family across the world with God the Creator, His Son the Saviour and the Holy Spirit, the *Parakletos*.

Since 1951, over 150 new members from all over the globe have joined our network, our confederation, our communion. In our midst we count very small and very large Caritas organisations, laity-inspired movements and church-based members, organisations dealing mainly with disasters and organisations entering into the work of integral human development in their own countries and across borders, organisations run by professionals and organisations run by volunteers. This diversity



in our midst is richness and the fruit of the creative spirit of Caritas. There is indeed not one model for a true Caritas, there is nevertheless a call to all the different organisations and communities to be *Caritas in Veritate*, caritas in the truth.

We are here over the next week to face the challenges of our diversity in union and communion. I have experienced together with our Secretary General Mrs Lesley-Anne Knight the wealth of our different ways to be Caritas. When visiting your organisations and activities, we were overwhelmed by your will to serve the poor. As experts in humanity, you transformed disasters into ways out of poverty, you transformed powerless people into people believing in justice and freedom, you united people from different faiths and convictions into communions of action in order to build together His Reign. I am proud of your work and of your being Caritas. You are real witnesses of God's love in the world. His love is a never-ending source for renewed creative ways of incarnation in today's world.

In 2004 Caritas Internationalis was granted a new juridical status in the *Chirographo* "The Last Supper" by Blessed Pope John-Paul II. This changed the legal status of Caritas Internationalis. As a "Public Juridical Person" on the level of the universal Church we take, within the limits of our mandate, part in the "*munus docendi*" and even in the "*munus regendi*" of the Holy Father, when we talk and act "in the name of the Church". This second nature complements our historical first nature as a confederation and it transforms it into a specific body in the Church.

In the framework of our statutory work, to which many of you have participated during the two big consultation processes, we are now in constructive dialogue with the Holy See talking about a dual legal and theological nature of Caritas Internationalis. As "*confederatio sui generis*", we bring together the Caritas organisations of the world, as designed by the local bishops or bishops' conferences. As a "Public Juridical Person", Caritas Internationalis is an instrument of the Holy Father who is represented in our midst through the Secretary of State, Cor Unum and the other dicasteries in charge of charity and justice.

Caritas Internationalis experiences in this anniversary General Assembly its full potential as the worldwide gathering of Caritas members in the name of the Church. For this reason the Secretary of State specifically invited more bishops to attend this meeting. Today we are more than 50 bishops gathered together with our Caritas organisations and linked to all the others represented here through priests, sisters and lay people. Caritas at the local level has already developed over many years this dual theological and legal nature. Some of our members are part of bishops offices or conferences; others were constituted as civil society organisations and recognised by their local Church as such or either as private or public associations of faithful. Whatever the legal nature of a local Caritas might be, there is no doubt about its ecclesial nature and its tethering to the Church and the bishop.

Presently Cor Unum is preparing a decree to reemphasise the bishops' responsibility in their local or national Caritas. And we are happy to have so many of our Caritas bishops with us, thus helping us to frame the purpose and theology of Caritas



Internationalis as it is actually under discussion. By this, dear brothers in the Episcopate, you take part on the level of the universal Church. Together we are implementing what Pope Benedict recalled in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*. “In conformity with the Episcopal structure of the Church, the Bishops, as successors of the Apostles, are charged with primary responsibility for carrying out in the particular Churches the programme set forth in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 2:42-44): today as in the past, the Church as God's family must be a place where help is given and received, and at the same time, a place where people are also prepared to serve those outside her confines who are in need of help.” (DCE 32).

Dear friends, our mission is to serve the poor, and even more the poorest of them first. This is our *raison d'être* and thus we are at the heart of the Church's mission of *diakonia*. For many people in need, Caritas is the loving face of Christ who brings relief and comfort, respect and recognition. As Caritas we are called to witness His love and we do it with enthusiasm. We know that God is love and we know and believe that He has created every single person in his image. Therefore we can't afford to lose one single person from our one human family without losing our own destiny. We would lose a brother or a sister in Christ, who made Himself equal to all of us. Therefore poverty cannot be accepted in our world. Where poverty is not chosen, but imposed by unjust structures and decisions, it affects the dignity of our brothers and sisters who are all in their own right images of God, who we dare to call “Our Father”.

In the Post-synodal Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict XVI synthesises the ambiguity in the concept of poverty. “The Church also knows that poverty can exist as a *virtue*, to be cultivated and chosen freely, as so many saints have done. Poverty can likewise exist as *indigence*, often due to injustice or selfishness, marked by hunger and need, and as a source of conflict. In her proclamation of God's word, the Church knows that a ‘virtuous circle’ must be promoted between the poverty which is *to be chosen* and the poverty which is *to be combated*; we need to rediscover ‘moderation and solidarity, these values of the gospel that are also universal ... This entails decisions marked by justice and moderation’” (*Verbum Domini* 107).

“One Human Family - Zero poverty” is more than just a slogan for our gathering. It is the summary of our will to fight injustice and poverty. It is a simple expression of our understanding of the world. **Yes, we are one family.** We should not allow divisions, creating second and third and fourth worlds in our midst. Zero is a starting point. From “zero” the positive and the negative numbers start. “Zero” can be conceived as a “condition of possibility” for all the numbers. It is an analogy for equality. We cannot negotiate about 2 percent or 20 percent or 0.7 percent of poor people.

Within the European Union and among the European Caritas organisations there is some criticism about this concept, because the poverty line is calculated differently and in a relative way. In this concept, equity and social inclusion do prevail. Nevertheless I remain convinced that nobody would agree that extreme poverty can be accepted. And the fight for a significant poverty line in Europe expresses the



same concern. Poverty is unacceptable as it affects the dignity and equality of the human person and thus the whole human family.

Our *raison d'être* has brought us to Rome and we are going to discuss in our assembly our new Statutes, our Internal Rules and 'Transitional Norms and Declarations'. As you know a lot of work has been done in this field during the last four years. And I am grateful to Mrs. Anne Dickinson and Msgr. Michael Landau the respective chairs of the Working Party on Governance and the Legal Affairs Commission. We finished our draft Statutes last year in May and I had the privilege to hand this great piece of work over to the Secretary of State, His Eminence Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone.

Now from February 4th onwards an extensive dialogue between the Secretary of State and Caritas Internationalis took place about our Statutes and Rules in the light of our dual juridical nature. The fruit of this productive cooperation was shared with you. We will not be able to vote on the Statutes because some technical issues and some essentials are still open and under discussion. Our forum as General Assembly will be a great opportunity to consult once again with you about the purpose of Caritas Internationalis as "*Confederatio sui generis*" and as "Public Juridical Person". The plan is to fix guidelines and options for the next mandate starting after the General Assembly. We will ask you to mandate the next Executive Committee to carry on this work in the light and in the spirit of our deliberations and in the already productive dialogue with the Holy See. With your agreement, the next Executive Committee could approve *ad experimentum* our Statutes and Rules as a package until the next General Assembly in 2015. We would ask the Holy Father to do the same and put into force *ad experimentum* our new Statutes and Rules with a decree, as it was done 60 years ago. This period of trial could help to test the Statutes and Rules and to propose commonly with the Secretary of State possible improvements to the General Assembly 2015. To avoid all misunderstandings let me clarify that our present General Assembly will be run under the current Statutes and Rules. The new Statutes and Rules are discussed under the current Statutes and Rules.

We all would have loved to continue our journey with the current Secretary General, Mrs. Lesley-Anne Knight whose professionalism, deep faith and commitment to Caritas is known and appreciated within the Church and outside in the humanitarian and development community. In only four years she has put in place and led an international team of highly skilled and committed people who serve our confederation in the fields of humanitarian aid and advocacy. Lesley-Anne has invested her vision, personal energy and faith into our work. Lesley-Anne will not be with us for the next mandate. The way she was not allowed to stand as a candidate to be appraised by the incoming Executive Committee has caused grievance in our confederation, above all within the many women working for Caritas across the world. They have seen much hope in her election and achievements. We will not lose Lesley-Anne as a vibrant Christian and a strong believer. We will lose her as our next General Secretary. But what she achieved must go on. We need more than ever before a strong Secretariat and a strong leader. The dialogue with the Holy See about our common future and way of being Church must also continue. Several



sessions during the next days will be dedicated to this future. Join in the debate and share your experiences and your faith. In communion we will grow for the sake of the poor and the glory of God.

We are celebrating our General Assembly in the joy of Easter. The unexpected happened when God Himself resuscitated Jesus His Son from death, a death He freely accepted. The *Paschal Mystery* is at the heart of our faith and of our commitment. Lent prepared us and the Holy Week taught us the truth about our sufferings, about our death and about our life. God is present in our life and in our suffering. He unites with those who suffer and He alleviates their pain. In Him the Magnificat, the canticle of Mary became true: "He has shown the strength of His arm, He has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly."

We cannot change history. As experts in humanitarian crises we know this. As experts in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, we know that justice and peace need future perspectives to succeed. Opening a new perspective beyond His and our death puts us as Christians in a new era of hope. As children of God we must not be afraid. In God's history with His people there are no barriers anymore. What looked like a tragic end on a cross was transformed in three days into a new life and time in God the Father. The history of salvation is hope for all oppressed if justice cannot be done on earth. Our faith is not wiping away injustices or errors. Our faith is hope in action. Nobody gets lost in the history of love. It is our duty to continue in communion with the entire Church our journey as Caritas Internationalis. By doing this we honour the commitment of all those who served Caritas and believe in its future.

Dear Robert Cardinal Sarah: our common journey has started recently when you were appointed the President of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum. I am grateful for your friendship to Caritas. You recently received the members of the Bureau of Caritas Internationalis after we both had the opportunity to meet in your offices. You shared your wish of an enriching future for Caritas Internationalis with us. We count on you for accompanying the confederation during its next steps in the framework of your mission to "orient and to coordinate" (DCE 32) the work of so many Catholic charitable initiatives. And you can count on us as true partners in our common mission to witness the love of Christ through our daily work worldwide and at the very grassroots.

In all our occupations and important work we should not forget what we are about. The model for our work as Caritas is the Samaritan. With his "heart which sees" (DCE 31b) he saved a life and became the paradigm for our priorities. Nothing can be more important than our duty to help people in need. In this we are encouraged by our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI when he introduced in parallel to our duty to render a professional service the wonderful concept of the "formation of the heart". This formation is most needed in our secular world. It is most needed in our own actions.



When we are celebrating our 60th anniversary, we are not celebrating our own successes. We are celebrating His Love we are able to “receive and to give” (CiV 5). Caritas is at the heart of a new economy, the economy of love, which translates in the words of Pope Benedict to “gratuitousness” (CiV 34 / 36 / 38). May our gathering become an expression of this new economy where sharing is not measured and appraised but received as a gift. We know that communion among people and within the Church are building on this gratuitousness.

The way charity and justice harmonize is beautifully reflected in *Caritas in Veritate*, when Pope Benedict XVI states with Pope Paul VI: “*Ubi societas, ibi ius*”: “every society draws up its own system of justice. *Charity goes beyond justice*, because to love is to give, to offer what is “mine” to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is “his”, what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting. I cannot “give” what is mine to the other, without first giving him what he is entitled to by justice. If we love others with charity, then first of all we are ‘just’ towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity or, in Paul VI's words, “the minimum measure” of it, an integral part of the love “in deed and in truth” (1 Jn 3:18), to which Saint John exhorts us. On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the *earthly city* according to law and justice. On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving. The *earthly city* is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion.” And let me add: “Charity always manifests God's love in human relationships as well, it gives theological and salvific value to all commitment for justice in the world” (CiV, 6) – within Caritas Internationalis and the church as well, and in all our dealing with each other.

Dear friends, let us use this Assembly to reflect and to meditate the purpose and the *raison d'être* of Caritas Internationalis as our beloved confederation celebrating its 60th anniversary in the horizon of a new era of cooperation and communion. Let us face the challenge in order to grow and to better serve the poor.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hilltop cannot be hid” (Matthew 5,14). Caritas shines that light upon the forgotten, the poor and the despised. Caritas thus shares in the preaching of the Church, by shining Christ's light on our brothers and sisters who have sometimes been hidden by poverty and even have been regarded with contempt. It thus helps to build the city of God in which all human beings can find a home. Our mission embodies *Caritas in Veritate*, a love which reveals the truth of human beings, who hunger for more than just food but for love itself, and the One who is love. By helping the poorest to take charge of their lives, and by involving them in planning development (CiV 47), we recognise them as moral agents, whose dignity requires them to be liberated from cultures of dependence.



Very often our Caritas workers can confirm what Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans already experienced and expressed “I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.” (Rom 10:20). With this quotation, the *Lineamenta* for the Synod of Bishops on the new “Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith”, starts talking about the urgency and duty to evangelise in today’s world.

Certainly charitable work as such is convincing *per se* and if delivered from person to person needs no other legitimisation, as Benedict XVI clearly states. “Those who practise charity in the Church's name will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak. He knows that God is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8) and that God's presence is felt at the very time when the only thing we do is to love.” (DCE 31c)

I express my hope and my desire that our General Assembly will encourage its future leadership to actively participate in the preparation of this Synod of Bishops scheduled 7th to 28th October 2012. Our contribution to a meaningful definition of evangelisation in the field of the church’s *diaconia* is much needed and we can orient our contribution in Pope Benedict’s wisdom when he shortly distinguished four ways of witnessing God’s love in the field of Caritas. “It is the responsibility of the Church's charitable organisations to reinforce this awareness in their members, so that by their activity—as well as their words, their silence, their example—they may be credible witnesses to Christ.” (DCE 31c).

My dear friends, our journey within the Church and within the world continues as we enter this 19th General Assembly. Let us enter this space of dialogue, commitment, truth and justice while asking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Veni Creator Spiritus

Latin text

Veni, creator Spiritus
mentes tuorum visita,
imple superna gratia,
quae tu creasti pectora.

Qui diceris Paraclitus,
altissimi donum Dei,
fons vivus, ignis, caritas
et spiritalis unctio.

Tu septiformis munere,
digitus paternae dexteræ
tu rite promissum Patris
sermone ditans guttura.

English Translation

Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest,
and in our hearts take up Thy rest;
come with Thy grace and heav'nly aid,
To fill the hearts which Thou hast made.

O Comforter, to Thee we cry,
Thou heav'nly gift of God most high,
Thou Fount of life, and Fire of love,
and sweet anointing from above.

O Finger of the hand divine,
the sevenfold gifts of grace are thine;
true promise of the Father thou,
who dost the tongue with power endow.

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Accende lumen sensibus,
infunde amorem cordibus,
infirma nostri corporis,
virtute firmans perpeti.

Hostem repellas longius
pacemque dones protinus;
ductore sic te praevio
vitemus omne noxium.

Per te sciamus da Patrem
noscamus atque Filium,
te utriusque Spiritum
credamus omni tempore.

Deo Patri sit gloria,
et Filio qui a mortuis
Surrexit, ac Paraclito,
in saeculorum saecula.
Amen.

V. Emitte Spiritum tuum, et creabuntur:
R. Et renovabis faciem terrae.

Oremus: Deus qui corda fidelium Sancti
Spiritus illustratione docuisti: da nobis in
eodem Spiritu recta sapere, et de eius
semper consolatione gaudere. Per
Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum,
Filius tuum, qui tecum vivit et regnat in
unitate eiusdem Spiritus Sancti Deus.
Per omnia saecula saeculorum. Amen.

Thy light to every sense impart,
and shed thy love in every heart;
thine own unfailing might supply
to strengthen our infirmity.

Drive far away our ghostly foe,
and thine abiding peace bestow;
if thou be our preventing Guide,
no evil can our steps betide.

Praise we the Father and the Son
and Holy Spirit with them One;
and may the Son on us bestow
the gifts that from the Spirit flow.

V. Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be
created. R. And Thou shalt renew the face
of the earth.

Let us Pray: O God, Who didst instruct the
hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy
Ghost: give to us, in the same Spirit, to
know what is right, and ever rejoice in His
consolation. Through Jesus Christ, Thy
Son, our Lord, Who with Thee livest and
reignest in the unity of the same Holy Spirit,
God. World without end. Amen.

Ubi Caritas et amor, Deus ibi est