



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE 17th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE
IDENTITY OF CATHOLIC HEALTH CARE INSTITUTIONS**

Thursday, 7 November 2002

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

1. I am glad to meet you on the occasion of the 17th International Conference organized by the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care.

I cordially greet each of you. I extend a special greeting to Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragán, President of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care whom I thank for the kind words of respect he spoke in your name and for his overview of the goals of your conference. I am pleased that your Dicastery promotes this annual initiative that is an important chance for reflection, debate and dialogue between the ecclesial and the civil world on such a priority goal as health.

The theme of the present Conference - "*The Identity of Catholic Health Care Institutions*" - has great relevance for the life and mission of the Church. In fact, in carrying out the work of evangelization, in the course of the centuries, the Church has always associated the assistance and care for the sick with the preaching of the Good News (cf. Motu proprio *Dolentium hominum*, n. 1).

2. Following closely the teaching of Christ, *the divine Physician*, several saints of charity and of hospitality, such as St Camillus of Lellis, St John of God, St Vincent de Paul established hospices for the recovery and care of the sick, anticipating what would later become modern hospitals. The network of Catholic social and health care institutions was gradually created as a response of solidarity and charity by the Church to the mandate of the Lord, who sent the Twelve *to proclaim the Kingdom of God and heal the sick* (cf. Lk 9,6).

In this perspective, I thank you for the steps you are taking to put fresh life into the *Confederatio internationalis catholicorum hospitalium* (*International Confederation of Catholic hospitals*) a valid organism for responding better to the many questions that arise in the minds of those who are involved on many fronts in the world of health care. For this reason, I encourage the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care to sustain the work realized by the Confederation so that the service of charity that is carried out in Catholic hospitals will be constantly inspired by the Gospel.

3. To understand the *identity of such health care institutions* fully, one must go to the heart of what the Church is, whose supreme law is love. Catholic health care institutions thus become powerful witnesses to the charity of the Good Samaritan because, in caring for the sick, we fulfill the Lord's will and contribute to realizing the Kingdom of God. In this way they express their true ecclesial identity.

It is right to review from this point of view "the role of *hospitals, clinics and convalescent homes...* These should not merely be institutions where care is provided for the sick or the dying.

Above all they should be places where suffering, pain and death are acknowledged and understood in their human and specifically Christian meaning. This must be especially evident and effective in *institutes staffed by religious or in any way connected with the Church*" (Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae*, n. 88).

4. In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, referring to so many needs in our time that challenge Christian sensitivity, I recalled those *who lack even the most basic medical care* (cf. n. 50). The Church looks with particular concern to these brothers and sisters allowing herself to be inspired by a new "creativity in charity" (cf. *ibid.*)

I hope that Catholic health care institutions and public health care institutions may be able to collaborate effectively, united by the common desire to serve the human person, especially, the weakest and those who, in fact, are not socially insured.

Dearly beloved, with such good wishes, I entrust all of you to the motherly protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick, while, with every best wish for the fruitfulness of your ecclesial service and your professional activity, I wholeheartedly impart to you, to your families and to those who are dear to you, a special Apostolic Blessing.