



The Holy See

LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II

DURING THE LAST SUPPER

TO CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS
FOR THE ACQUISITION OF A PUBLIC, JURIDIC AND
CANONICAL PERSONALITY

To my Venerable Brother

*Archbishop Youhanna Fouad El-Hage of Tarabulus for Maronites, Lebanon,
President of Caritas Internationalis*

1. During the Last Supper, on the eve of his passion, the Lord Jesus left his Apostles a precise request: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you" (Jn 13: 34). Sustained by this mandate, the Church proclaimed the Gospel and dispensed the grace of the sacraments, always concerned to accompany her action with the witness of love.

So it was that the life of the Christian community was characterized from the start by the effective practice of charity, expressed in particular by attention to the poor and the weak (cf. *Acts* 2: 42-47). Then, almost two centuries ago, parish and diocesan groups were formed that have subsequently taken the name of *Caritas*, pursuing the goal of assisting those in need. With time, they also began to coordinate their national and international action.

In the context of the Holy Year of 1950, my Venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Pius XII, decided to set up a body in Rome that would operate in the universal Church and gather together the national charitable agencies authorized by the respective Bishops in order to foster reciprocal knowledge, coordination and collaboration in carrying out charitable and social activities in the various parts of the world. Other Predecessors of mine of venerable memory followed the growth of *Caritas Internationalis* with effective fatherly interest. Thus, the Servant of God Paul VI was able to attest with satisfaction that it "is at work everywhere" (Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, n. 46).

2. Born from an impulse of this Apostolic See which then supervised and directed its activity, *Caritas Internationalis* is made up of a Confederation of charitable agencies, usually the national branches of *Caritas*. This Confederation, far from limiting the autonomy to which these branches are entitled, fosters their collaboration through its activities of animation, coordination and representation. *Caritas Internationalis*, therefore, because of its origin and nature, is closely bound to the Pastors of the Church, and in particular to the Successor of Peter, who presides in universal charity (cf. St Ignatius of Antioch, *Ep. ad Romanos*, inscr.), and draws inspiration for its action from the Gospel and from the Tradition of the Church.

Since its foundation, *Caritas Internationalis* has intervened through its member organizations in a multitude of projects and has also acquired recognition and prestige from civil Authorities.

3. Consequently, in confirmation of the ecclesial role carried out by this praiseworthy Confederation and accepting the request explicitly made in this regard, by virtue of apostolic authority and in accordance with the norms of the *Code of Canon Law*, I grant to *Caritas Internationalis* public, juridic and canonical personality (cf. [*Code of Canon Law*, cann. 116-123](#)). I approve its Statutes and Regulations, which must be interpreted in the light of what has been established in this Chirograph. All modifications to them as, likewise, any eventual transfer of its headquarters, which is currently located in the City of Rome, must be approved by me.

Because of the special link of *Caritas Internationalis* with the Apostolic See, the list of candidates for the roles of President and Secretary General of the Confederation must be submitted for the Pope's approval before being officially proposed for the final voting at the General Assembly.

Moreover, the Holy See, having heard the appropriate options, appoints a Chaplain who participates by right in the activities of the institutional Organizations.

4. Taking into account what is established by the Apostolic Constitution [*Pastor Bonus*](#) (cf. art. 146, 2), I entrust to the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* the task of supervising and guiding the activity of *Caritas Internationalis*, both in the international context and in its regional groups. The Dicastery will therefore be duly informed of the initiatives of the Confederation at the various levels, and will participate by right in the meetings of its branches, as well as in the meetings for the coordination of the activity promoted by *Caritas Internationalis*. In a word, the Pontifical Council will contribute to keeping the ecclesial spirit alive in the Confederation and in particular will see that the activities of its Members, carried out with international coordination, takes place in collaboration with the local Churches and with their Pastors. Lastly, *Caritas Internationalis* will be responsible for submitting to the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*, prior to publication, the texts of any instructions it may wish to issue.

5. In addition, for its international activities, especially with the International Agencies and in areas of the world with particular problems, *Caritas Internationalis* will refer to the Secretariat of State.

For specific matters, *Caritas Internationalis* will also coordinate its action with the other Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, and especially with the Pontifical Councils for Justice and Peace, for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, and for Health Pastoral Care, in conformity with roles established for it by the Apostolic Constitution, *Pastor Bonus*.

6. While I hope that this act will strengthen the bonds of communion of *Caritas Internationalis* with the universal Church, I order all the measures in this Document to be faithfully observed.

Venerable Brother, as I entrust the commitment and activity of the Confederation to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Visitation and of St Martin de Porres who are the Confederation's heavenly Patrons, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you and to all the members.

From Castel Gandolfo, 16 September 2004

JOHN PAUL II