



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO MEETING ON CHILDREN WITH BRAIN DISORDERS**

Friday, 13 June 1997

*Your Eminence,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am very pleased to receive you, distinguished participants in the meeting held during these days on: "Families of Children with Cerebral Impairments". First, I would like to acknowledge the kind words of Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, which has organized this praiseworthy initiative in conjunction with the Centre for Special Family Education (CEFAES) and the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health-Care Workers, whose President, Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragán, is also present at this audience.

The family, as an integrating framework for all its members, is a community of solidarity where love becomes more responsible and concerned even for those who, because of their special situation, need closer, more patient and loving attention from all the members and more concretely from the parents. Within society there are a number of tasks or forms of social mediation which the family can and must carry out with particular competence and effectiveness, in conjunction with other institutions. As a social subject, the family's participation frequently opens many doors and creates a well-founded hope for its own children's recovery. This is precisely the context you address, with the collaboration of researchers, experts and persons involved in this field. Therefore, I am pleased to encourage your work and the concern that spurs you to help families with these needs.

The family, a place of love and concern for its neediest members, can and must be the best place to collaborate with science and technology in the service of health. At times some families are put

to the test — a harsh test — when children are born with cerebral impairments. These situations require fortitude and special solidarity from parents and other family members.

The Lord of life accompanies families that welcome and love children with serious cerebral impairments and know how great their dignity is. They also recognize that the origin of their dignity as human persons is in being the beloved children of God, who loves them personally with an everlasting love. Supported and protected by divine love, the family becomes a place of commitment and hope, since all the members concentrate their energies and care on the welfare of their children in need. In fact, you are both the privileged witnesses and the proof of all that true love can achieve.

As is demonstrated by the projects being undertaken in various nations — for example, the Leopold Programme — through patient, diligent and well-disposed attention to the possibilities offered by science and within families, surprising results are being achieved in the rehabilitation of children born blind, deaf and mute. This is a miracle of love, as it were, that does not only permit the brain gradually to develop, but makes the child the centre of all its attention. With this help and everyone's co-operation, the entire community of love and life which is the family grows and is formed in God's presence and fatherly sight. He gives them new energy in their pain and serenity in their suffering, in order to accept illness and, in many cases, to seek the most satisfactory remedies and solutions.

The family is an irreplaceable community in these situations, not only because of the enormous cost of certain treatments provided by health-care institutions, but also because of the quality, talent and tenderness of the loving care which only parents can unselfishly offer their children. These families, without having their attention to their children replaced, must receive the help they need from the surrounding community and society as a whole in order to make this attention more effective. In this regard, it is necessary to point out the importance of parents' associations that seek to share experiences, assistance and technical means in the service of families with these needs.

Programmes and activities like those you have in your hands, which rely on the Church's support, are an extension of the Gospel of life from the family itself. Continue, then, with your gaze focused on the home in Nazareth whose centre was the God-Child. In fact, the sword of sorrow (cf. Lk 2:35), illumined by the hope that comes from on high, was not lacking in the Holy Family. Like Mary, who with a contemplative soul kept everything in her heart and pondered over it (cf. Lk 2:19-51) in obedience to God's will, may you too, with fervent faith and charity, bring hope to many other families by your commitment and experience.

With these heartfelt sentiments, as I invoke abundant gifts from the Lord upon your persons and activities in this very important area of family life, I affectionately impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.

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