



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE FEDERATION OF CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS
FOR INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER SERVICE (FOCSIV)***

Saturday, 14 December 2002

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am happy to welcome and greet each of you gathered here, representing Catholic international volunteer associations under the umbrella of the Federation of Christian Organizations for International Volunteer Service.

I address a special greeting to your chaplain and to your President, whom I thank for his cordial words expressing your common sentiments.

2. In these days you are holding the annual assembly of your federation that is particularly important since this year is the 30th anniversary of the establishment of FOCSIV. The federation came into being after the Second Vatican Council, through the initiative of the laity, encouraged by my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI.

From its beginning, the federation has been outstanding for its concentration on cooperation among peoples, for the dedication with which it has constantly promoted their development through the generous work of the thousands of volunteers whom the organizations that comprise the Federation have sent to countries in what is known as the Third World since 1972. Today your associations are present on the five continents. They carry out important initiatives of solidarity in collaboration with the local Churches and missionaries.

3. A typical feature of your praiseworthy federation, called to work with all the relief agencies that encourage human advancement, is the Christian inspiration that guides and supports its action in many parts of the world.

In Sacred Scripture, the call to the duty to love one's neighbour is linked with the commandment to love God with one's whole heart, with one's whole soul, and with all one's strength (cf. *Mk* 12,29-31). Love for one's neighbour fully realizes Christ's mandate if it is based on the love of God.

In a certain sense the Christian is called to make "experimentable" the providential tenderness of the heavenly Father through his selfless devotion to his brothers and sisters. If love for our neighbour is to be free from reservations or tiredness, it must be nourished by the furnace of divine love. This implies prolonged periods of prayer, attentive and constant listening to God's word, and above all a life centred on the mystery of the Eucharist.

4. For this reason, the secret of the effectiveness of your projects is the constant reference to Christ. Many of your friends, distinguishing themselves as authentic and generous Gospel workers, sometimes even to the point of giving their lives, have witnessed to this.

Following their example, dear brothers and sisters, move forward confidently. Indeed, intensify your apostolic enthusiasm to respond to the urgent needs of so many who today are obliged to live in conditions of hardship or abandonment.

May the Immaculate Virgin protect you and make you artisans of justice and peace!

With these sentiments, I express my best wishes for a rich and fruitful apostolate to those of you who have come here and to all your associations. With the approach of Christmas, I add my fervent good wishes to you and your families, and as I assure you of my remembrance in prayer, with affection I bless you all.