



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
to representatives of the
Federation of Christian Organizations for
International Volunteer Service**

Saturday, 22 February 1997

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am pleased to welcome you today on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the birth of your worthy Federation. I address a cordial greeting to you all, beginning with the President, Mr Luca Jahier, whom I thank for explaining the significance of today's meeting. With him, I am pleased to greet all his predecessors in the office of president: I thank you for coming and I thank the Federation of Christian Organizations for International Volunteer Service (FOCSIV) for its service to the Church in recent years, as it guides the activity of so many Christians eager to be useful to their brothers and sisters in distress.

You wish to be "volunteers in the world". This brings to mind the fundamental *role* that *volunteer organizations* carry out *together with the public institutions*. Their members serve their brothers and sisters freely and directly, especially those who are in situations of hardship or marginalization. Their aim is to stand beside those in difficulty and help them to follow a path of authentically human liberation and advancement.

2. The description "volunteers in the world" reminds us of your role, but primarily of *the inspiration that motivates you*, because if you "volunteer" to "be in the world", not for your own advantage but to render a service, this is certainly a spiritual call. Thus your work is an assumption of responsibility towards your neighbour, an expression of a generous commitment aimed at making *the culture of love* grow in the world.

In this regard, I must say that I appreciated the intention, shown a short time ago by your President, to deepen the Federation's commitment to a Gospel-inspired renewal by putting the *person of Jesus Christ* more and more at *the centre* of your personal and group decisions. In this I see a choice that fully conforms to the journey of preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, which this year, 1997, asks the whole Church, in the multiplicity of her members, to fix her gaze on Christ, the one Saviour, the only Liberator of mankind and the world.

To be "volunteers in the world" for a project of human liberation and of effectively promoting his dignity presupposes that you are continually rooted in that heritage of values which down the centuries has been inspired, nourished and supported by the Gospel. How many, by drawing from these clear springs, have known how to be authentic witnesses of love, peacemakers and promoters of justice and solidarity!

3. During these 25 years, as has already been recalled, volunteers of proven solidarity and great generosity have worked among the ranks of your Federation. They were true witnesses: *witnesses of fidelity to man and to Christ*. I hope that their example may be an incentive and an encouragement to you all, and may spur you to continue in this direction, in which the Church accompanies and encourages you.

Let no one be discouraged, even when the difficulties become so serious as to seem almost insurmountable! It is precisely when confronted by situations in which we feel powerless that we must be sustained by our faith in God, for whom nothing is impossible (cf. Lk 1:37; Mt 19:26). Your witness is important, especially for the new generations of volunteers, who must learn to combine the effort of a gradual and patient journey of formation and perseverance with their initial enthusiasm.

4. Dear volunteers, your silent and active interventions for men and women in difficulty are a living proclamation of the constant presence of Christ, who walks with humanity in every age.

Dear friends, I commend each one of you and the branches of your Federation to the protection of Mary most holy. In her "behold", here I am, which was immediately followed by concrete, loving service to her cousin Elizabeth (cf. Lk 1:38, 56), you can recognize the "icon" of Christian volunteer service and draw inspiration from it for ever new projects of sharing with your brothers and sisters in every part of the world.

May you be accompanied by my Blessing, which I sincerely impart to you and to all the "volunteers in the world".

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