

Address of H.E. Msgr. Zygmunt Zimowski,
President of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers,
to those Taking Part in the 'Anniversary Consultation' Celebrating Twenty Years of European
Chaplaincy and the Tenth Anniversary of the Foundation of the ENHCC

London, Great Britain, 16 September 2010

*Dear Rev. Dr. Stavros Kofinas,
Coordinator of the European Network of Health Care Chaplaincy,*

Dear chaplains, representing many Churches and denominations of numerous European countries,

And all those taking part in this opening ceremony, which is taking place in this beautiful cathedral church dedicated to St. Paul, Apostle of the Nations,

At the outset let me express my deepest gratitude for the invitation to take part in this *Anniversary Consultation* in London while you celebrate twenty years of European chaplaincy and the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the European Network of Health Care Chaplaincy (ENHCC).

Fr. Stavros Kofinas, I greatly appreciate the mission and work of the ENHCC and, let me say this loudly, it was a great honour for me to receive you at my offices in the Vatican this summer. I was able to learn from you about the story and activity of the Network and also to admire your zeal and your dedication to our sick brothers and sisters. In recognition of your work I awarded you the Good Samaritan Medal, which the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers gives to those who serve the sick and suffering in an exceptional way. Indeed as you noted 'we had an open and honest dialogue that formed the foundation for a relationship for cooperation in the future'.

The topic you have chosen to reflect upon throughout this *Anniversary Consultation* concerns the future: '*The Chaplain in the Future – Giving and Receiving*'. Nowadays many people are anxious and even scared about the future, seeing it as insecure and unstable. For those of us who are involved in pastoral care in health, we face a challenge concerning how we can continue to serve and minister to the spiritual needs of those who suffer within a society that has become secular, pluralistic, relativistic, and often hostile and aggressive towards faith and religious values.

The Holy Father Benedict XVI, who in these days is visiting England, spoke very inspiring words on the future. In a homily that he gave this year in the Basilica of Saint Paul's Outside the Walls in Rome on the vigil of the feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul (28 June 2010), he said: 'The Church is young and open to the future. And I repeat this today, *close to the tomb of St Paul*. The Church is an immense force for renewal in the world. This is not, of course, because of her own strength but because of the power of the Gospel in which the Holy Spirit of God breathes, God Creator and Redeemer of the world. The challenges of the present time, the historical and social and, especially, the spiritual challenges, are certainly beyond the human capacity. It sometimes seems to us Pastors of the Church that we are reliving the experience of the Apostles when thousands of needy people followed Jesus and he asked them: what can we do for all these people? They

were then aware of their powerlessness. Yet Jesus himself had shown them that *with faith in God nothing is impossible* and that a few loaves and fish, blessed and shared, could satisfy the hunger of all. However, there was not and there is not hunger solely for material food: *there is a deeper hunger that only God can satisfy*. Human beings of the third millennium want an authentic, full life; they need truth, profound freedom, love freely given. Even in the deserts of the secularized world, man's soul thirsts for God, for the living God'.

Since its foundation, the Church has taken to heart the mission entrusted to it by its Teacher, not only to give food to the hungry but also to care for their souls and bodies. Jesus sent out the Twelve Apostles with power to cast out unclean spirits and to cure all kinds of diseases and sicknesses. He said: "as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. Freely you received, so freely give" (Mt 10:7-8). And down the centuries the health care ministry has been an excellent example of satisfying the spiritual hunger of people, of *receiving* from God's grace and *giving* to those who suffer. And I am persuaded that there is no other future for the Church and for its ministers than freely giving what we have received from the bounty of God.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I am the head of a very special Dicastery of the Roman Curia. Its name is the Pontifical Council for the Health Care Workers. It was instituted in 1985 by the Servant of God, Pope John Paul II. The main purpose of this Pontifical Council is 'to manifest the Church's concern for the sick, assisting those who perform a service for the ill and the suffering, so that the apostolate of mercy they carry out will increasingly respond to new demands' (Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, n. 152).

Therefore, I want to express my closeness to all chaplains, especially to those associated with the European Network. In a spirit of union and brotherly love, I bless everyone of you and your work and I pray that you will continue to be a light of hope for the future of the health care ministry in Europe and the entire world.

With respect and admiration, and wishing you a very successful meeting,

✠ *Zygmunt Zimowski*

President of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers,
the Holy See.