

To my Brother Bishops, who preside over the charity of our Churches and their colleagues in the work of Evangelisation

Object: Global Campaign against Hunger

Vatican City, 12th November 2013

Most Reverend Excellencies,
Dear brothers and sisters,

I am writing to you in my capacity as President of Caritas Internationalis on the occasion of the launch of our campaign against hunger, which is one of the greatest disgraces in the world today (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, World Food Day, 2005).

The 164 member organisations of Caritas Internationalis operating in more than 200 countries and territories around the world know there is enough food for everyone, yet one person in eight does not get enough to eat every day. Indeed, the way food is produced, marketed and distributed does not take into account the needs of the poorest. This is an injustice that we can and must help to change.

The launch of our campaign coincides with the period of Advent, an important time given to us to explore the mystery of the Incarnation of our Lord who has “come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (*Jn* 10:10). He championed the poor, the hungry and the outcast, to the extent of identifying himself with them. “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat” and “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (cf. *Mt* 25). Every starving person brings us face to face with the agony of Jesus in person!

I greatly hope that this campaign will offer us pastors, as well as those who collaborate with us in our work of evangelisation, the opportunity to respond in a new way to the call of the Good Shepherd, Our Master, who was never indifferent nor lacking in the face of any kind of human suffering.

As I am sending you this message, the wonder, full of meaning and worthy of the Messiah, which characterises the pre-Paschal ministry of Our Lord, comes to my mind. In the middle of the desert, and therefore with no possibility of relying on towns or villages where it was easier to stock up with food, he did not send away the masses who were entrusted to him, his teaching and his manifestly salvific presence. In the presence of people who without Him had no one to save them, he performed a miracle by plentifully feeding the hungry. He who at the beginning of his ministry fasted in the desert, refusing to eat in order to remain faithful to the absolute trust in the certain Providence of the Father, not only proclaimed the hungry blessed but also guaranteed them His presence and total solidarity, so that they could count on grace and daily bread for a

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dignified and just life. He carried out a remarkable act, testifying to the authority and truthfulness of his word. He actually gave food to those who were impoverished, faced with life's most pressing need. Thus he fulfilled the promise, in word and deed, what no one, except the Lord Himself, had proclaimed through a prophetic message: "I myself will search for my sheep and look after them" (*Ezek 34:11*).

The appeal I am sending to all of you on the occasion of this campaign echoes Blessed Pope John Paul II's exhortation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000: "Now is time for a new 'creativity' in charity, not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by 'getting close' to those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters. We must therefore ensure that in every Christian community the poor feel 'at home'. Would not this approach be the greatest and most effective presentation of the good news of the Kingdom?" (*Novo Millenio Ineunte*, no. 50).

This new creativity in charity should encourage us all, wherever we may be, to stop and look around, and no longer turn our gaze away from hungry children and the elderly, and exploited and dispossessed farmers. It is to us that the Lord is speaking today: "*You give them something to eat*", and he knows we have the means to do so! He says to us: *You who are my disciples, do not abandon them to their fate. Do something, you have the means to do so. Stretch your imagination and be creative. Work ceaselessly and share what you have. Fight selfishness and do not waste anything. Protest so that the exploitation of the most vulnerable comes to an end. Demand that the monopolisation of land by the rich be ended. Give the poor, youth, women and farmers the know-how and tools they need to produce, process and sell the products of their land, etc. Do just as God does; He always is interested in our daily bread: from the offering of bread in the Temple to the breaking of bread in Emmaus, from the manna of the Exodus to the multiplication of loaves and fishes, the Lord always has paid attention to human hunger.*

This new creativity of charity should encourage us to draw on the resources of our Catholic faith and of our humanity even more, so that we may be more staunchly committed and overcome this disgrace.

The essential element of these resources is prayer, especially the "Our Father", which the Lord himself taught us, and above all the Eucharist.

Therefore, I hope that prayer will accompany this campaign in order to inspire the necessary conversion and new initiatives in our dioceses, parishes, Christian and religious communities, schools and families.

The Lord taught us to pray for our daily bread. This prayer, if it is true, should encourage us to share our daily bread, and no longer accept that people around us are deprived of food. Authentic Christian prayer is not just some form of escape. Prayer does not mean repeating words, and does not necessarily mean becoming ecstatic, or having visions or extraordinary revelations. Prayer means being in tune with God, training ourselves to do God's will by asking him to "give success to the work of our hands" cf. *Ps 90*. Christian prayer does not tolerate idleness. Quite the opposite: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat" (*2 Thes 3:10*). Praying to God in truth

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means paying attention to the hunger of all men and women of our times: hunger for bread, but also hunger for justice and dignity for everyone.

May this campaign also help us to rediscover and go deeper into the mystery of the Eucharist. The Lord left us this memorial – which he wanted to remain vitally present among us through the symbols of bread and wine – for a reason. Since then, we cannot break Eucharistic bread or become communities that celebrate the Eucharist, the sacrament of communion and covenant, without doing our utmost to restore dignity to our brothers and sisters deprived of sufficient, good-quality food. Indeed, the Eucharist is the expression *par excellence* of God's compassionate, merciful and redeeming love. Partaking of the Eucharist offers great strength for making the preferential option for the poor, not through a mere slogan but rather through a concrete reality that engages us.

While reading this you might be asking yourselves: But what should we do?

Dear Brothers Bishops, I am well aware of your generosity and pastoral solicitude, and I know that in your ministry you are committed to “concern for all the churches” cf. *Decree concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church “Christus Dominus”*, no.6.

I know that to varying degrees and through various initiatives carried out in your respective countries, dioceses and Christian communities, at your urging and with the help of men and women colleagues of good will, the struggle against poverty and hunger continues. It now needs to be intensified by further mobilisation of pastoral workers and the faithful, as well as men and women of good will, by joining forces with other actors who share our values and beliefs, and by setting up structures for reflection and action at all levels so that in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity everyone may contribute to eliminating the disgrace of hunger in the world.

Therefore, I would like to entrust to you this campaign against hunger in the world initiated by our Caritas Internationalis. I invite you to support it so that it may be fruitful thanks to the involvement of everyone, first at the level of the particular Churches but also in communion with the universal Church, for the good of the whole human family of which we are members, and within which we are all responsible for each other.

For practical purposes, I would like to suggest a few appropriate pastoral initiatives for this campaign:

- Preparation of Pastoral Letters by Bishops, emphasising the local context and bringing up to date Our Lord's invitation to feed the hungry;
- Launch of a campaign at diocesan level involving all parishes under the supervision of the local Caritas and other pastoral care structures from the dioceses;
- Dissemination of messages and tools prepared by Caritas Internationalis and the local Caritas regarding the theme of this campaign, during Eucharistic and liturgical celebrations;
- Creation of a reference and awareness-raising group in each parish within the scope of this campaign and beyond. With support from the diocesan Caritas, this group could

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become a permanent space where local situations are analysed, the causes of hunger in the environment are defined, vulnerable people are identified, action opportunities are examined, successes and failures are evaluated, and injustices are condemned, etc.

- Comprehensive awareness-raising related to everyone's responsibility and the need to implement concrete actions, such as:
 - o Seeking to reduce food waste and organisation of food collection for the poorest, as well as dissemination of food preservation techniques;
 - o Learning to eat in moderation, in sufficient quantity and quality, without becoming overweight!
 - o Involving educators and young people: call for inclusion of the right to food issue in school curricula; organisation of competitions and contests; and staging of plays on the right to food;
 - o Organising exchanges on responsible citizenship regarding the impact of behaviours and actions on the right to food and access to food for everyone;
 - o Taking advantage of all available areas of land suited to food production, carrying out reforestation on a large scale and combating soil erosion;
 - o Supporting small farmers, especially women;
 - o Enhancing traditional soil conservation and fertilisation methods (compost, manure, etc.);
 - o Eliminating cultural barriers regarding implementation of modern crop-growing methods that respect the environment;
 - o Implementing advocacy initiatives aimed at encouraging authorities and people's representatives to vote for substantial agricultural budgets and fair property laws, etc.

I entrust this campaign, and all men and women participating in it, to the maternal intercession of Our Lady who never ceases to remind the Church and all its children: *"Do whatever he tells you"* (Jn 2:5).

With an expression of my fraternal communion in the Lord.

+ *Oscar A. Card. Rodríguez S. B.*

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