



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE MEMBERS OF THE RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL-HEALTH INSTITUTES (ARIS)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, 1. I am pleased to address my Message to you on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the foundation of the Religious Association of Social-Health Institutes. In warmly greeting each of you here, I would like to join, through you, all the members of this meritorious Sodality which offers a precious contribution to the professional and spiritual renewal of the world of health. I exhort you to continue serving the sick with competence and dedication. The Lord, Giver of every good, continues to accompany and bless you as he has in the past 40 years. 2. In these days that conclude the liturgical year, believers are almost naturally directed to cast their gaze on the ultimate realities, to the time when the Lord at the Last Judgment will ask us if we have loved, helped and served our neighbour in need (cf. Mt 25: 31-46). In order to prepare for that decisive encounter we must engage daily in finding and contemplating in our brothers and sisters the face of Jesus, only Saviour of the world. We can recognize, especially in the sick and the suffering, the sorrowful face of Christ, who on the Cross has revealed to us the merciful love of the Father, a redeeming love that has definitively healed wounded humanity of sin. In light of these perennial truths of faith, how important your mission to the sick appears! May the apostolate of mercy, to which you dedicate yourselves, become an authentic service of charity that, in time and space, makes visible and almost tangible the tenderness of the heart of God. 3. Those who live in situations of profound pain and suffering often fail to understand the meaning and significance of their existence. It is crucial, then, that someone like the Good Samaritan be beside them, to sustain and accompany them. Persons such as the recently beatified [Mother Teresa](#) are concrete and simple witnesses to the charity and compassion of the Lord for the marginalized, the suffering, the sick and the dying. While they soothe their physical wounds, they help them to encounter Christ who, by conquering death, has revealed the full value of life in each of its phases and conditions. Do not cease, dearest Brothers and Sisters, proclaiming the Gospel of suffering! Through your service, witness to the redemptive power of divine Love. 4. I gladly take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the generous work that your Association carries out in many Nations, and especially in mission territories. You are helping these young Churches to develop structures that welcome the sick and suffering and to prepare qualified health-care and pastoral workers. It is good that such beneficial collaboration between the Ecclesial Communities of the North and of the South should be increasingly intensified, so that in every part of the world, especially where the most profound crises of religious and moral values exist, believers may be ready to uphold their faith. With these hopes I renew to all the expression of my gratitude for your work. I assure you of my prayers and I affectionately impart the Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to your respective Religious families and to the many sick and bedridden in the structures of ARIS. *From the Vatican, 24 November 2003.* JOHN PAUL II

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