



Annual Report 2017
Report from the President

Introduction



Photo: Msgr. Van Looy with Pope Francis

The real life of Caritas Europa develops in the local initiatives and coordination at the level of the member organisations. A relationship among national Caritas in Europe and in other continents is of the greatest importance. We can see how local offices engage in contacts and collaborate in different situations where people are in need. Stronger national offices are ready to assist smaller ones in the realisation of projects at the service of people in still other countries. The situation of refugees and migrants in Europe, the poverty which hits European peoples by the millions and the crisis of

the war in Syria triggers a serious concern for many. Caritas has a leading position in the work to assist these people. On top of the social and material problems, we are facing a kind of a crisis in the European political world in a way that one speaks of a crisis of the European Project. We do not simply want to watch from the side-line this situation. We are deeply involved in it on the basis of our Christian principles and the evangelical inspiration, while we do everything to contribute to the wellbeing of all people on our continent and far across the borders of the continent.

I want to begin by paying tribute to the many professional workers and the numerous volunteers all over Europe. My warmest gratitude goes to the members of the many Action Groups and Task Forces, to the engaged team of the Secretariat, to the Executive Board and to all those who participate in Caritas Europa events, in bilateral and multilateral activities, putting daily into practice the programme of the Good Samaritan in Europe. You, my dear “workers in the vineyard of the Lord for the poor”, are the real face of Caritas, and we receive the most consoling messages about your work throughout Europe and especially in the more difficult regions of war and poverty.

As President of Caritas Europa, the past year I was able to participate in the executive meetings as well as the Representative Commission of Caritas Internationalis in Rome. These kinds of meetings allow the regional and international organisations to find further synergies in their work. In our own organisation, I was able to participate in the meetings of the Executive Board and in several other meetings. I must say that the greatest gain is on my part as every time I learn much from the gatherings and from the persons I meet.

I appreciate very much the work done by our Secretary General and his staff in Brussels. These men and women work with great capacity and drive at advocacy, humanitarian aid and institutional development. Lately, a promising Young Caritas has been developing through their efforts and the way has been opened to a theological deepening and an assistance for professional development. Strategic planning is the constant concern of the office in Brussels. The heads of office meet on a regular basis in what they call a SMT retreat. On those occasions, they go through the life of Caritas Europa in all its different aspects and concerns. We can say that the office is considered as a strong leading presence not only in our own organisation, but also in a network of European and Church organisations. I just want to say a big thanks to all of them.

A message for us all

I would like to repeat part of my Christmas message 2017. In it I stressed the need to be a strong Caritas in order to meet the many problems of our society today.

“As the political and social situation of Europe seems to be fragile, we need to offer our people a strong Caritas, firmly based upon our Christian identity. I would like to think in terms of brotherhood and subsidiarity rather than just of solidarity. I think of people growing in the conviction that each human person has the same rights, the same duty to care about the common good, the same desire for a peaceful and friendly society. While we engage in advocacy and humanitarian aid, we have the possibility to insist upon these rights, and while engaging with people, we can show them our love. Think of how Pope Francis shows concern for the most downtrodden among us. Of course people are looking for concrete means of existence, but what they crave for the most is love, understanding, a future, relationships and integration. In his message for world peace day, Pope Francis points out a process of working for peace. He sets a way of promoting peace in four milestones: welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating. It all starts with the attitude of welcoming, but there is more. If we are able to accompany people on their way to fullness, it will take the collaboration of many in order to guide them towards a full integration in a society which shares joy and happiness.”

Together with you I want to believe that peace and happiness is possible. It is the main aim of your endeavour on the local level as well as in the Secretariat in Brussels and in Rome in Caritas Internationalis.

Church involvement

A number of initiatives have been possible in relationship with Church institutions. We had some very important visits to our offices and conferences. The Secretary General and I participated in several meetings of the European Bishops (CCEE and COMECE); the response of the Church to the challenge of migration was at the core of most discussions, as was Caritas’ analysis and response to situations of poverty in Europe.

We were also present, through our Secretary General, at the gathering of the Presidents of the Bishops Conferences of 43 African nations, together with the Bishops in charge of the national Caritas organisations, from 18 to 20 September 2017.

Cardinal Turkson participated in our regional meeting in Brussels on 12 May 2017. He spoke to us about the need for a Christian anthropology, inviting us to collaborate with the new dicastery in Rome for integral human development. On many other occasions we have been in touch with this dicastery, especially with the office of refugees and Father Baggio, who is responsible in the name of the Holy Father for this section.

Caritas Internationalis Secretary General Michel Roy’s visit to our regional meeting gave us the opportunity to share with him the work of our member organisations and of the Secretariat in Brussels. With him we were able to discuss the review of our statutes.

Brother Poquillon from COMECE – Brussels came on 14 March 2018 to inform us about the role of COMECE. He stressed the need for a strong anthropological approach and the importance of the common good, insisting on the fact that we do not need to fear, but at the same time to not indulge either in, selfishness. He also recalled the 70th anniversary of the declaration of the Human Rights by the United Nations.

We meet yearly with the Apostolic Nuntio to the European Union. The last time was with the Executive Board on 14 March 2018 in his residence in Brussels. The sharing with the Nuntius is useful for both sides. From him we learn the basic needs of the European continent and the European political and social movements. From us he learns what we are doing to increase our efforts to assist European peoples, but also how we work with crisis situations such as Ukraine, Greece or the war in Syria, South Sudan or elsewhere.

Finally, we were present at the meeting recalling the 50th anniversary of the Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* in Rome, organised by the Dicastery for Integral Human Development. In many of our local units, attention was given to this important letter by Pope Paul VI after the Second Vatican Council.

Initiatives

From the above mentioned involvement in the Universal and local Church, one can see clearly the interests and networks we try to develop. From these we also receive suggestions and input which make our own work grow. But more efforts still need to be made. On Christmas and Easter, I sent a letter to the Presidents and Secretaries General of national Caritas organisations to keep them informed and linked to our network.

A Leadership Forum on discernment took place with high participation on 10 May 2017. It is our concern to work on the professional development of persons responsible in the different national and local offices. In as much as we are working in a qualified manner, driven by the gospel and lead by the Holy Spirit, we will meet the goal that Caritas stands for.

A mapping was carried out in order to gain a clear overview of where we are and what we do, with the purpose to allow local groups to communicate with each other and, in this way, to establish a strong network of assistance for the poor and needy. Discernment has become the leading thought in this.

On 18-19 September 2017, we organised in Brussels a meeting together with ICMC on the refugee situation in a number European countries. We especially welcomed the Canadian representatives who explained to us their way of dealing with immigrants and refugees.

One particularly interesting event was the publication of a book on Caritas Europa's history. Thanks to the collaboration of 70 people, the coordination of Marius Wanders and the generosity of the Portuguese Caritas, we were able to publish our history in a book of more than 350 pages. We not only tried to gather historical facts and stories, but we also tried to express the philosophy and the theological underlying aspect of what our Caritas movement stands for. On an occasional visit to the Holy Father, I was able to offer him the first copy of the book.

In similar manner, we worked with a number of theologians to go deeper into the meaning of Caritas, as a way Christ Himself expressed it through the parable of the Good Samaritan. They set out the way to develop a Caritas Academy Learning Path and worked on the network of Caritas Europa theologians.

We are looking into the future, especially through the development of a strong "Young Caritas" group. Young people have already gathered a few times to create a strong base for their activities on a European level. Young Caritas, under the leading figure of Paul Galles (Caritas Luxembourg), will have a significant role in our Caritas in Europe. In the coming times, assisted by members of the Secretariat, they want to grow in importance and in number at national and European level.

In many countries, our members have been very active in the welcoming of refugees. The different Action Groups, where experts from the national Caritas organisations are participating, with the support of the Secretariat have constantly called for attention to the need for a more dignified reception of people. In line with what pope Francis insists on time and time again, our communication and concrete efforts have opened the way to a sincere integration of many people in our western societies. It has been our constant concern to share God's tenderness with all people, as pope Francis likes to call the presence of God's grace among us.

Finally, last but not least, our Executive Board has worked hard to find a new Secretary General for the coming years. As the selected person will be present at our regional meeting, it will be possible for all to get to know her and so set the basics for a good collaboration with her in the future. Maria Nyman (from Sweden, but residing in Brussels) will certainly be a great Secretary General. At the same time, I want to express my gratitude to our present Secretary General, Jorge Nuño Mayer, for the service he renders with great professional and Christian engagement. He will continue until May 2019, when he leaves the office for Maria Nyman, but already now we want to thank him, asking him to continue working hard to set the lines out for the future of our beloved Caritas.

+ Msgr. Luc Van Looy



President of Caritas Europa