

European meeting at the occasion of the Holy Year of Mercy Sarajevo, September 15-18, 2016 Fr. Giovanni Peragine

On September 15-18, 2016, the CCEE Commission *Caritas in Veritate* in collaboration with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bosnia-Herzegovina promoted a meeting for the protagonists of the Works of Mercy in Europe. This meeting was attended by several European Catholic organizations (**Caritas Europe, COMECE, Commission Justice and Peace Europe, FEAMC, ICMC, ICCPPC, UCESM, FEBA and UNIAPAC**). It was also the occasion for reflecting on the urgency and the topical character of Mercy in Europe today and the different forms of commitment of the Church.

Several moments of reflection and testimony have shown that the human person is at the heart of the action of the Church. It is not an anonymous individual, but the person, within the limits of his or her creatural being - always in need of relations (and not only human ones) and of experiencing the love of God – the object of the attention of the Church when she feeds people through the Food Bank, when she visits the prisons, when she receives the migrants or refugees, when she visits the sick and takes care of them, when she buries the dead, when she defends fair jobs, or she brings to the world of politics the rich heritage of her social doctrine. The numerous activities put in place by these Church bodies highlight a sense of gratitude and strong hope for the creative boldness and innovative capacity in tackling the various forms of poverty. Through the Works of Mercy, the Catholic Church in Europe is aware that she is educating to the meaning of human suffering, which recognizes and appreciates the value of each individual life and opposes the culture of discard. At the same time, participants have identified certain phenomena that challenge the Church and the whole society in Europe.



UCESM has been asked, through the President Fr. Giovanni Peragine, to present a corporal work of mercy: *Sheltering the homeless*. It was the occasion to present the action of all the religious who, throughout Europe, every day and without sparing themselves, endeavour to meet the human and spiritual needs of the man of today.



In a time of great challenges, it is ever more urgent to restore hope to Europe. This is possible through a presence that lives an evangelized Christian love that is not reduced to mere sentimentality. At the same time, participants repeatedly noted that the privatization of faith in secularized countries has often led to a rift between spiritual and corporal works of mercy, because the latter, perceived as a public expression of one's faith, are not always well received by secular institutions. Not unfrequently, in fact, the legal and administrative apparatus put in place by governments in Europe, while appreciating the immense service that the various Church organizations make to society, seems to reduce Christian commitment to mere philanthropy, thus depriving it of its religious reference.

In his message to participants, Pope Francis recalled the need to "*contribute to the rebirth of Europe*" and dream of "*a new European humanism*" while encouraging the "*representatives of the bishops in Europe, to involve more and more your communities and the different social actors who carry out activities in the field of charity and social aid in the commitment to proclaim the Gospel to those who have lost – due to various causes - the direction of their lives*". Only in this way the Church can "*be a process-generating mother, a fertile mother, because she respects life and offers real hope*".

The numerous testimonials shared in these days have shown how the works of mercy are interconnected. Their wish is therefore that the different ecclesial bodies can continue to support each other and develop new forms of collaboration. In fact, it is absolutely necessary that, wherever an ecclesial body is involved, the entire Christian community feels challenged. A proper communication must then promote an awareness that impacts the whole humankind. In fact, in the face of human suffering there is no religious or political barrier: "everyone should feel co-responsible for the well-being of the others," said the participants.

Finally, in Sarajevo, emblematic city of our time because of the intense suffering endured and the still open wounds caused by a conflict that lasted years and by agreements - such as Dayton - which are favouring a policy based on inertia and discrimination on ethnic grounds, the mercy of the Church is made visible by numerous works, such as the School for Europe - one of the six works of mercy visited by the participants – which had been opened during the conflict, to testify that the war was not necessary, nor the ethnic separation inevitable, but that peaceful coexistence was and is still always possible.

September 2016