



Dear brother Bishop

Letter and presentation of Catholic Action

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IFCA International Forum of Catholic Action

www.catholicactionforum.org

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Dear brother,

Together with the coordinator of the International Forum of Catholic Action (FIAC), Eva Fernández Mateo, president of the General Catholic Action of Spain, and the national presidents of Italy, Argentina, Mexico, the Philippines, Burundi and Senegal, who make up the 2022-2026 Secretariat, we have prepared some materials that we would like to share with you, pastor and father of the People of God in the diocese entrusted to you; in particular the speech that the Holy Father Francis addressed to us during the celebration of the International Congress of FIAC on 27 April 2017, and other words for 2021 and 2022.

We are at your disposal - if Catholic Action already exists or if you wish to promote it in your diocese - and we enclose a brief introduction.

We thank the Holy Father for emphasising that *“CA’s charism is the charism of the Church itself, deeply incarnated in the here and now of every diocesan church as it attentively contemplates and discerns the life of its people and seeks new ways to evangelize and carry out its mission, starting from the different parish situations”*¹, since as the Pope points out *“Catholic Action is formed by a diocesan lay apostolate that lives in close co-responsibility with its Pastors. Here the popularity of your Association is a great help, because it is able to combine its intra-ecclesial endeavours with its contribution to the transformation of society in order to direct it towards the good.”*²

¹ Pope Francis, Address to participants in the congress of IFCA, 27 April 2017.

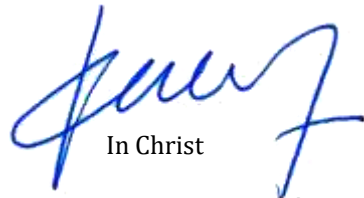
² Pope Francis, Address to Italian Catholic Action, 3 May 2014.

This constitutes a current synthesis that challenges pastors, priests, lay men and women called to respond and make fruitful this charism that history has given us, renewed by the Second Vatican Council and which reminds us of the passion of the missionary disciples, who collaborated with the Apostle Paul and whom the Acts of the Apostles describe in the early Christian community, such as Aquila and Priscilla, and many other lay people (Rom 16:1ff and Acts 18:1-3).

We look forward to meeting you and kindly ask you to send us an email on info@catholicactionforum.org suggesting a possible fraternal meeting and thank you for your attention.

We entrust our “dream” of a missionary option which can transform everything, ... to reach everyone” to Mary, Mother of the Church. (EG 27.30).

Cordial greetings.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Eduardo', written in a cursive style.

In Christ

+ Eduardo Horacio García
Bishop of San Justo (Argentina)
IFCA Ecclesiastical Assistant

Pope Francis calls on the International Forum of Catholic Action

In celebrating the 30th anniversary of the International Forum of Catholic Action, the Pope makes several requests that we try to live out in our daily lives in our countries:

- *That the forum may very strongly feel the urgency of working for fraternity and social friendship, the only way to rebuild our wounded world.*
- *That the forum may instill, in the hearts of all authentic Christians, a spirituality based on a desire for holiness and on the understanding that holiness begins with the Beatitudes and materializes with Matthew 25; loving and working for our brethren who are suffering most.*
- *May the spirit, which animates all your projects and work, be that of being an outgoing Church, which lives the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing; and let this be known to all.³*

³ Pope Francis, *Letter for 30 years of the International Forum of Catholic Action*, 9 November 2021.

An outgoing Catholic Action at the service of the dioceses

Catholic Action has its origin in the very bosom of the Catholic Church. It has no founder nor any particular charisma. Its aim is that of the Church itself, evangelization. It does not assume any or other particular field of apostolate as its own, but rather assumes the aim of the Church, the proclamation of the Gospel to all men and women and in all environments.⁴

Catholic Action's history has been forged along the Church's millennial journey. The laity were always involved in apostolic work and felt committed to building the Kingdom in different ways, involving themselves in different activities and taking an interest in different realities. In the Gospel, as well as in the "Acts" and in the "Epistles", the testimony of the 72 and of the men and women who accompanied Jesus and who generously supported the apostles in their mission, comes out very clearly.

Since then the Church's journey has been marked by men and women who have taken **their baptismal commitment** with full awareness and responsibly, immersed in everyday life, permeating the life and culture of the Gospel made flesh.

Recently, in the mid-nineteenth century, associated forms of lay apostolate began to take shape. The universal Church begins to feel the need for lay organizations to cope with the new pastoral needs of the time and an associative process, initiated by the Popes starting from Pius IX, began.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Letter for 30 years of the International Forum of Catholic Action*, 9 November 2021.

From Vatican Council II to Evangelii Gaudium

In our more recent history, Catholic Action, as an association, contributed to the Second Vatican Council through its experience and the participation of its representatives. After its conclusion, it immediately assumed with force the light that it brought to all the People of God. Some documents speak explicitly of Catholic Action: *Apostolicam actuositatem*, *Christus Dominus* and *Ad gentes*, as well as in the well-remembered point 31 of *Christifideles Laici*, the post-synodal Exhortation on the vocation and mission of the laity.

Our charism as Catholic Action is to assume the same general apostolic aim of the Church. "(AA. 20a); and this is what makes us passionate about our associative journey under the paradigm of mission.

To use the words of Blessed Cardinal Eduardo F. Pironio, the great promoter of Catholic Action and FIAC, we are aware that *"On the journey of Catholic Action there have been moments of darkness and light, moments of fatigue and loss of direction, fears of being overtaken by changing times and ecclesial standards. I believe that the Spirit has sent us this providential moment for the deepest renewal of our spiritual, doctrinal, apostolic and missionary commitment"*.⁵

This "hour" is marked by the grace that God has given us with Pope Francis. A Pope who teaches with words and gestures deeply rooted in history. He does so as a witness and teacher of the teaching of the post-conciliar Church, called to see concrete reality in order to illuminate it from the Gospel, from the faith that brings joy to life, as an open-door and evangelising Church, with a real commitment to the poor, capable of walking with all and for all.

⁵ Eduardo Pironio, *Lecture at IFCA's First ordinary Assembly*, 1994.

The legacy of Francis is the legacy of the Church, which in his person takes on the force of urgency and challenges us. We feel called to live with renewed strength this "hour", a new stage marked by "*The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus*"⁶, because we are certain that there can be no Gospel without joy. In the same way that Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, takes us back to the roots of our Christian life and of the proclamation of the Gospel, we, as Catholic Action, want to return to the roots of our vocation and to the essence of our mission.

If we are to be coherent with the essence of our ecclesial role, we need to recognise that our charism is "*the charism of the Church herself, profoundly incarnate in the here and now of every diocesan Church, as she attentively contemplates and discerns the life of her people and seeks new ways to evangelize and carry out her mission*".⁷

The teaching of Francis enlightens us on the path to follow: "*We cannot keep ourselves shut up in parishes, in our communities, in our parish or diocesan institutions, when so many people are waiting for the Gospel! To go out as ones sent. It is not enough simply to open the door in welcome because they come, but we must go out through that door to seek and meet the people! Let us urge our young people to go forth. Of course, they will make mistakes, but let us not be afraid! The Apostles made mistakes before us. Let us urge them to go forth. Let us think resolutely about pastoral needs, beginning on the outskirts, with those who are farthest away, with those who do not usually go to church. They are the VIPs who are invited.*"⁸

⁶ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1.

⁷ Pope Francis, Address to participants in the congress of IFCA, 27 April 2017.

⁸ Pope Francis, Homily with the bishops at the XXVIII WYD, 27 July 2013.

This "dream" that is at the heart of *Evangelii Gaudium* is that of a Church that walks in the ways of "**pastoral and missionary conversion**"⁹ in a personal and community attitude "*capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation*".¹⁰

This invitation to "*recover the original freshness of the Gospel*"¹¹ involves us as Catholic Action in a very strong way in our local Church where we share "*the missionary dream of reaching out to all*".¹²

The teaching of Francis encourages us and gives us a clear horizon: "*I desire a Catholic Action present among people: in the parish, in the diocese, in towns and in neighbourhoods, in the family, in offices and workplaces, in the countryside, in all spheres of life. These are the new areopagi where decisions are made and culture is created*".¹³

It is a grace to be able to rethink our associative path and our ecclesial insertion, because it means that in our hearts burns the desire to continue walking and accompanying the path of this time as Catholic Action; and that we have a proposal to live in the here and now of our beloved Church in her evangelising mission.

⁹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 25.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 27.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, 11.

¹² *Ibidem*, 31.

¹³ Pope Francis, Address to participants in the congress of IFCA, 27 April 2017.

Our service to the local Church

Its charism (of Catholic Action) is not to have one of its own but to make itself available to the needs of the Church in the particular place.¹⁴

As Catholic Action we want to put ourselves at the service of diocesan pastoral work by:

1. Assuming ownership of diocesan and parish pastoral work in communion with the universal Church.

Catholic Action should take on the entire mission of the Church through its generous affiliation to the diocesan Church starting from the Parish.

The mission of the universal Church is updated in every particular Church with its particular characteristics; likewise Catholic Action can only be authentic if it answers and assumes as its own the pastoral commitment in every diocesan Church by being concretely involved starting from the parishes..¹⁵

2. Enhance the missionary dynamism of every Christian, nourished by shared experiences and intergenerational dialogue.

All Catholic Action members are dynamically missionaries, all are agents. Catholic Action is this desire to go on a mission. Children evangelize children, young people other young people, adults other adults, and so on. (...) It is important to give a special place to the elderly who have been members for a long time or have recently joined. They could well be the contemplative and intercessory section within the various sections of Catholic Action.¹⁶

¹⁴ Pope Francis, Letter on the 30 years of the International Forum of Catholic Action 9 November 2021,

¹⁵ Pope Francis, Address to participants in the congress of IFCA, 27 April 2017.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

As lay members of Catholic Action, you can help the whole Church and society to rethink together what kind of humanity we want to be, what kind of earth we want to live on, what kind of world we want to build. You too are called to make an original contribution to the realisation of a new 'integral ecology': with your skills, your passion, your responsibility.¹⁷ (our translation)

3. To accompany and promote a comprehensive and ongoing process appropriate to each age group and each reality for the mission.

Formation: offer a process of growth in faith, an on-going catechetical journey oriented towards the mission, adapted to every reality, based on the Word of God and, which fosters a happy friendship with Jesus and an experience of brotherly love.¹⁸

4. Fostering the growth of a missionary spirituality which enlightens life and encourages the building of the Kingdom.

Pray: with that holy extroversion which puts your heart in people's needs, in their sufferings and joys. A prayer which develops, which takes you very far. In this way you will avoid being constantly looking at yourself.¹⁹

5. Growing in listening and dialogue to reach all men and women.

We need to learn to listen to each other with a synodal spirit, to relearn the art of speaking with the other without walls or

¹⁷ Pope Francis, Address to the members of the National Council of Italian Catholic Action, 30 April 2021.

¹⁸ Pope Francis, Address to participants in the congress of IFCA, 27 April 2017.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

prejudices, also and especially with those who are excluded, marginalised, to seek closeness, which is God's style.²⁰

It is important that Catholic Action be present in political, business and professional life, not to present ourselves as perfect Christians, but in order to be of greater service.²¹

6. Walking together towards sanctity in the synodal Church.

It is in the specifically lay vocation to a holiness lived out in daily life that you will find the strength and the courage to live your faith, wherever you are, making hospitality and dialogue the style by which you become neighbours to one another and experience the beauty of a shared responsibility. Never weary of pursuing avenues that encourage the style of authentic synodality, a way of being God's people where everyone is able to contribute to an attentive, reflective and prayerful reading of the signs of the times. In this way, you will come to know and to do God's will, in the conviction that the Holy Spirit is daily at work, renewing all things.²²

Your Association is a "gymnasium" of synodality, and your attitude has been and can continue to be an important resource for the Church...²³

²⁰ Pope Francis, Message to the International Forum of Catholic Action, 27 November 2022.

²¹ Pope Francis, Address to participants in the congress of IFCA, 27 April 2017.

²² Pope Francis, Address to Italian Catholic Action, 30 April 2017.

²³ Pope Francis, Address to the members of the National Council of Italian Catholic Action, 30 April 2021.

Below are the full texts of Pope Francis' addresses to the International Forum of Catholic Action in recent years:

- Address to participants in the IFCA Congress, 27 April 2017.
- Letter on the 30th anniversary of IFCA, 9 November 2021.
- Message to the International Forum of Catholic Action, 27 November 2022

You can find more at:

<http://www.catholicactionforum.org>

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL
FORUM OF CATHOLIC ACTION (IFCA)*

*[*Full-text transcript with the additions of Pope Francis to the official text published on the website of the Holy See]*

SYNOD HALL

Thursday, 27 April 2017

Dear brothers and sisters,

Greetings to you all on the occasion of the celebration of this Catholic Action International Congress, with the theme: "Catholic Action is mission with everyone and for everyone". I would like to share some preoccupations and considerations with you.

I will speak to you about CA's charism, then about some lines of action and other subjects, about who the agents and the recipients are, about the style which CA should adopt and about the project.

Allow me to leave the text because this gives me the chance to say what I feel. I also feel that I cannot express myself as I want, when I have to speak Italian in the Square. If I could speak Spanish there, I would be able to express myself better.

Charism – rebirth in the light of *Evangelii gaudium*

The Charism. The reference framework of all the apostolic action of the Church has to indicate as to how we can reformulate the charism in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), just as *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) did in its time. However EN is still valid. It is the best postconciliar document which, even today, continues to indicate the way of action of the Church. EG is a somewhat updated translation, but that which is fundamental is there, in EN: this is only fair to this document as this document has not lost its actuality. How can we reformulate the charism in the light of EG in today's context?

Historically, Catholic Action's mission has been to form lay people who assume their proper responsibility in the world. Today, in concrete terms, it is *the formation of missionary disciples*. Thank you for having decisively taken *Evangelii gaudium* as your magna carta.

Catholic Action's charism is the charism of the Church itself, deeply incarnated in the today and here of every diocesan Church which, discerning in contemplation and keeping in mind its people's lives, looking for new ways of evangelizing and of carrying out its mission, starting from the different parish realities.

It is not a project of proselytism, because this is against the Gospel. And here I would like to make Benedict XVI's words my own: "the Church does not grow through proselytism, but by attraction". It grieves me a lot when I see certain pastoral agents, lay people, consecrated persons, priests and bishops who are still reverting to proselytism, when "by attraction", the brilliant phrase used by Benedict XVI, should be the compass for our journey.

Traditionally, Catholic Action has had four pillars or legs *Prayer, Formation, Sacrifice* and *Apostolate*. According to the time in history, it has set one of these legs first and then the others. So, at a certain time, the stress was on prayer or doctrinal formation. Given the present characteristics, the apostolate should be the distinctive trait and it should be the first leg to be set.

We should not ignore the other three, but the first challenge is to go out, the apostolate comes first and then the others will follow. Missionary apostolate needs prayer, formation and sacrifice, it needs the other three. When one goes out, one realizes that if the other three are not there, one's work is superficial and does not bear fruit. This comes out very clearly in the Aparecida Document which has had a great influence on EG – I was there and had to study it. In the mission, there is an integrative dynamism which takes prayer, formation and sacrifice for granted, but it is the mission, it is the fact that one goes out, which brings everything together.

And this is not to be done to the detriment of the other realities but just the opposite. It is what provokes the others. Missionary apostolate needs

prayers, formation and sacrifice. This comes out clearly in Aparecida²⁴ and in *Evangelii Gaudium*. *There is an integrative dynamism in the mission.*

What am I asking of you? I appeal to you to offer formation to people, to men and women, children ...

Offer formation: offer a process of growing in one's faith, an on-going mission-oriented catechetical programme, adapted to every reality, based on the Word of God which fosters a happy friendship with Jesus and an experience of fraternal love.

Pray: with that holy extroversion which puts one's heart in other people's needs, in their suffering and their joy - a prayer which develops and which takes you far. Thus you will avoid looking constantly at yourself.

Avoid that winding prayer which does not urge you to go out of yourself, which does not lead you to the mission, which does not link with reality. And pray a lot. For some, praying is tedious and sometimes it is. Many times, Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus slept before the tabernacle but in spite of this she became a saint. She just sat in front of Jesus and did not move and Jesus liked this. This strengthens the heart and makes it become more apostolic. Pray with your eyes on the mission.

Sacrifice yourself: not just to feel holier - generous sacrifice is that which does good to others. Offer your time to find out what to do to help others grow, offer what you have in your pockets and share it with those who have less than you, offer the gift of your personal vocation generously to embellish the *common home* and help it grow.

There is a test which I usually give to very young children. I ask: "What do you do if you have two sweets and a friend arrives?" At times but very rarely, the answer is: "I put them in my bag to have them later". The majority would say that they would give one to their friend and keep the other one. It is good to share for the sake of others. The second question: "You have one sweet and a friend comes: what do you do?" Very few would answer: "I would eat it hurriedly". Others would say: "I would share it, half for me and half for my friend". Others, but very

²⁴ Reference to the Concluding Document of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopate - Aparecida, Brazil - 2013.

few would say: “I would give it to my friend as I would already have had one”.

How are my prayers and sacrifices? Do I keep my sweet in my bag, share it, or renounce to it as I would already have had one? Our dedication, to be of service and to evangelise, should be accompanied by a spirit of sacrifice.

If I am invited to visit an old people’s home and right on that day there is a football match, an important match on TV which I do not want to miss, what do I do? Your questions and proposals as regards sacrifice should be realistic.

Sacrifice should never be artificial or narcissist, you should imitate Jesus. He committed himself for the good of others: it is the only Christian meaning of sacrifice. When it comes to renewing our evangelising commitment, this should be the only Christian meaning of sacrifice.

Renew your evangelizing commitment – at diocesan level– at parish level

This point is very clear to me. Some time ago, during a pastoral visit as Pope, during a meeting with the parish priests, I was asked as to what the charism of the gathering should be – there were also religious persons – *fondata da San Pietro ovvero dei sacerdoti diocesani!* My reply was “a diocesan orientation”. It is the same reply which I would give to you if you had to ask me to indicate the main charism and the most important evangelising commitment found in CA’s charism. It is a diocesan orientation under the leadership of the Bishop.

In Catholic Action, the mission is not a duty among the others, it *is the duty*. Catholic Action’s charism is to carry out the pastoral work of the Church. If the mission is not its distinctive strength, Catholic Action’s true spirit is missed and it loses its reason for being.

The renewal and updating of Catholic Action’s evangelizing commitment is vital. It must aim at reaching everyone, everywhere, all occasions, and all existential outlying situations; in reality and not just as a formulation of principles.

I like to use the word ‘outlying’ situations because these are society’s most precarious places. Normally we think that this word refers to the poor, the poorest, and normally it is so, but it refers also to those who think it

differently, to agnostics, ... I am open even to these, to listen to them, to dialogue with them. This is what reorienting our ways means.

This implies *rethinking your formation plans, your apostolic ways and even your own ways of praying* so that they may be, *essentially and not occasionally, missionary.*

I am a missionary on Saturday, a little, and then? As CA members, you are characteristically and not occasionally missionary; even in difficult and risky situations.

Abandon the old criterion: 'because this is the way we have always done it'.

There have been things in CA's history which have been really good and worthwhile but today they would be out of context if we had to repeat them and here I would like to quote a phrase which you should never use: "this is the way we have always done it". This phrase is a bad word. We do not have to change because times are changing. That which is fundamental, that is the announcement of Jesus Christ, the missionary disposition, prayer, the need to pray, the need for self-sacrifice, never change. But we have to find out how to go about them but they never change. "This is the way we have always done it" has done and still does a lot of harm to the Church. When taking decisions, this obsession does not leave you free. Take Chapter 23 of the Gospel of Saint Matthew and read what Jesus said to the "obsessed". When, in a diocese, in a parish, in a centre, in a CA group there is the temptation "to be obsessed", read what Jesus is saying to you at that moment: "the obsessed are hypocrites" ... At times we should leave the old criterion behind because it does not work and instead use CA's realities with criteria which are needed today and which bear fruit.

Catholic Action must take on itself *the whole mission of the Church by totally belonging to the diocesan Church starting from the Parish.*

CA is not a satellite. Do not be wordly ecclesiastics whom we sometimes find in the Church. These maintain that they have their spirituality, are closed within themselves, self-centred ... This should not be CA's attitude as CA has a belonging. CA belongs to the diocese. A CA which is not diocesan could be a good thing but it is not a CA. A

CA which does not incarnate itself in the parish is not a CA ... but has the parish become outdated?

The mission of the universal Church is updated in every particular Church with its own characteristics; likewise Catholic Action gets its authentic life by answering and assuming as its own *the pastoral work of every diocesan Church through its concrete insertion* starting from the parishes.

Every diocesan Church has a pastoral line of action, a pastoral plan and the Bishop's directives. These are developed by the Pastoral Council so CA should insert itself in this line of action and incarnate itself in the parishes. The parish is not outdated. Parishes differ because the Church has always looked for different approaches. The parish is not outdated simply because the diocesan model is not outdated. The Bishop keeps close to the people of God through the parish.

Catholic Action should offer the diocesan Church mature laity, which, as a way of realizing its vocation, *supports the pastoral projects* of every place *with readiness*. You have to be concretely incarnated.

You should incarnate yourself in the place where you live and this is what it means to be catholic.

The apostle John fought the first heresy in the Church. This came some years after the death and resurrection of the Lord. It was scandalous to say that God was made flesh but John is very clear; whoever denies that the Word was made flesh is an Antichrist.

An ecclesial movement which does not incarnate itself in the ecclesial realities of the diocese through the parish, in a way proper to its nature, risks entering in the category of not being Christian, not to say Antichrist. When we come across these factions which thrive on themselves, study a lot but live closed within themselves ... these could be described as heretic gnostic saints ... but they are not catholic.

And a CA, which chooses to remain closed within itself and which does not incarnate itself by following the ways of the Word to redeem us, could be good but is not catholic. Always incarnated! But incarnated does not mean there where I want, but there where the Church wants me, in the diocese, in the parish.

This incarnation criterion does not apply only to inculturization which is the other aspect of incarnation. It applies to the organization as well as to the way in which the Church organises itself.

You cannot be like those groups which are *so universal* that they are not based anywhere, do not answer to anyone and keep looking for the best place for them.

These groups are orbital in the Church. It is true that we are living in a satellite era and these groups exist in the Church as well but CA cannot be one of these. You should be rooted, incarnated in concrete realities and these concrete realities are the diocese and the parish. But there is also the CA university campus. Incarnate yourself there, but always through the Bishop, not as an independent group. The diocese is the incarnation criterion and the parish is a *gran criteriu*. There is another level of incarnation. This is when there are other more original groups dictated by pastoral realities which are not parish-based like pastoral work on the university campus. These should incarnate themselves through the bishop but should not be ignored. There is no CA without a Bishop. There is no CA without a diocesan orientation.

Sometimes things happen in the spirituality of certain religious congregations. I can think of a General Mother Superior who wanted to change the congregation by giving universal recommendations. One of these was that in the morning, instead of going to the chapel, the nuns were to immerse themselves in nature! Maybe a little pantheistic! In spirituality we cannot have a disincarnated style. These are the modern forms of gnosticism which do not help.

Concreteness is a criterion you should keep – our faith is concrete – the Word was made flesh concretely. We have to keep in mind that when we go to heaven, we will be judged on a very concrete protocol which we find in Matthew 25. When we recite the creed, we affirm concrete facts. When faith is not concrete, it is not catholic. That which is catholic is always concrete. But that which is concrete can be corrupted as well. This is sin's path which is also concrete. Try to find something which is not concrete in the Creed, in the criteria demanded by Jesus in the universal judgement and in the Beatitudes which are the project for our life. And if someone thinks that the

beatitudes are an idealistic journey, the conclusion is definitely very concrete: blessed are you when they persecute you, when they judge you, when they martyr you. And here, any illusion of sophistication in that which is catholic disappears.

Agents – Everyone without exception

All Catholic Action members are *dynamically missionaries*. Children evangelize children, young people other young people, adults other adults and so on. Nothing better than one's equal to show that it is possible to experience the joy of one's own faith.

Avoid falling into the *perfectionist temptation of eternal preparation* for the mission and of *eternal analysis*, which when finished, are already obsolete and outdated.

How many diocesan curias or religious institutes are full of pastoral plans which when finished were no longer relevant.

The example is Jesus with his apostles: he sends them with what they had. Then he reunited them and helped them to discern on what they had experienced.

When Jesus sent the 72 disciples, these did not have the Denzinger in hand. They just had an experience of Jesus, they knew the gist of the Christian message and they knew the beatitudes. With that little, they went back to tell Jesus that even demons surrendered themselves to them. It was the strength of their preaching, the strength of their testimony. It was what they had and what was needed at that moment.

Reality should dictate to you the time you should let the Holy Spirit guide you. He is the interior master who enlightens our deeds as long as we are free from preconceptions and conditionings. One learns how to evangelize by evangelizing, just as one learns how to pray by praying, as long as one has a good disposition.

Everyone can go on a mission, even if not everyone is able go out into the street or in the countryside. Elderly people, who have been members for a long time, as well as newly enrolled ones, should be given a space and this is very important. One could say: they could be the *contemplative and interceding sector* within Catholic Action's different sections. They can

create the patrimony of prayer and grace for the mission. This applies to the sick as well. God listens to these with special tenderness. They will all feel involved and will find themselves active and useful.

We should include special categories in our CA groups. Involve everyone. Everyone has a mission in the world. If you have an evangelising heart, you can be included - each and everyone.

And here I would like to speak again about something which has been very close to my heart for some time: the elderly. We are living in a throw away culture ... where the philosophy is “use and throw away” and when something does not work or is not productive, it is to be thrown away. When elderly people reach a certain age, they are discarded because they are no longer of use ...the trend is to discard them ... At times they need medical treatment or special care ... so we find them a nursing home ...and leave them there... . We are thus throwing away part of our family wealth.

Young people are unemployed, 40% in Italy, 47% in Croatia, in Spagna the figure reaches 50%, and so on in all European countries. Why? They are of no use, so they become waste. We do not say that we are discarding them, but in fact, what can a young person do if he is unemployed? He gets sick or commits suicide. (The statistics showing juvenile suicides are very worrying). They may also fall on drugs or join terroristic or criminal groups seeking to find an ideal or something to do in life.

Even children are discarded because no one cares for them unless they are very intelligent and are sent to some special bilingual or trilingual school so that one day they may become leaders. Everything has become like a funnel. More people are being discarded and the funnel is taking shape.

Today I feel it is important that I entrust you with a commitment. Work to establish dialogue between the very young and the elderly. I appeal to CA to find a way of doing this especially in the parishes. Non passa tutto per questa scelta ma vedete il modo.

When I pray Joel 3,2 I am greatly touched by the fact that one of the signs of the kingdom is: “old people shall dream dreams and young people shall prophecy”.

Young people will prophesy and implement the dreams of the elderly. We have deprived old people from their ability to dream because they are boring, because they are of no help to us. And we have cut off the roots of our young ones. This commitment is really pressing and I believe that today the Spirit is asking the Church to help in this dialogue, to help children in being nearer to old people, to ask them questions, to make them speak. This is beneficial for a child's and a young person's heart. It will be a prophecy

which they will try to accomplish, to carry out. And this will be a renovation. It is impossible to bear fruit if the roots are very weak or do not exist. Everything will dry up. And we are cutting off the roots.

I seriously entrust you with this task. Keep in mind that everyone can do this and that this dialogue is important. I have seen it in some particular churches: groups of young people who go in old people's homes, in hospitals, they play the guitar and sing with the old people and then enter into a conversation with them. Then they realise that they should go again because there they have found a wealth which they should treasure. I recommend this in a special way.

Recipients – All men and all spheres

It is important that Catholic Action is present in the *political, business and professional world* but not because we believe that we are perfect and well prepared Christians but to be of better service.

It is imperative that Catholic Action is present *in prisons*

Including with those serving a life sentence because each prisoner needs a horizon and not bars or walls... CA can provide a horizon and offer rehabilitation

in hospitals, in the streets, in slums, in factories. If it does not do this, it will be a *selective* institution which does not say anything to anyone, not even to the Church itself.

We have to be very strict about this point: concreteness, involving ourselves concretely in outlying areas more. I will tell you a story about a difficult unreachable situation. This involved a bishop but any lay person could follow his example. In his diocese, a young person organised a manifestation against the Church – it was not a procession. Instead of singing hymns they sang songs heartily, accompanied by rude, offensive and blasphemous gestures, against the Church, the Pope and the bishops. The bishop realised that here he had a case of a difficult, unapproachable situation. He found out who the leader was and after having prayed, he invited him for lunch. Evidently, the leader did not ask the bishop to hear his confession or to give him communion and nor did he become Catholic. They talked about his grandfather, his grandmother and about his ancestors. What this bishop did, reaching out to outlying difficult situations, is an example which CA should follow. Do not be afraid of anything, not even of those you face in the streets and say all sort of things. Therefore we need to pray, ask for enlightenment and ask for the help of the Holy Spirit so as to take the necessary steps.

What do I ask of CA?

I would like a Catholic Action among the people: in the parish, in the diocese, in the country, in the neighbourhood, in the family, in study and working spheres, in the countryside, in all spheres of life. It is in these new *areopaghi* where decisions are taken and where culture develops.

Streamline the ways of adhering. Do not be custom houses. You cannot be more restrictive than the Church itself nor more papists than the Pope. Open the doors, do not set examinations of Christian perfection because by so doing you will be promoting a pharisaic hypocrisy. What we need is active mercy.

The commitment which lay people who join Catholic Action undertake is to look ahead. It is the decision to work for the building of the kingdom. We do not have to “bureaucratise” this particular grace because the Lord’s invitation comes when we least expect it; we can neither “sacramentalise” formalization with requirements which respond to another sphere of the life of faith and not to the evangelizing commitment.

May Catholic Action offer a welcoming space and a *Christian experience* to those, who for personal reasons, feel that they are “second class Christians”.

Method – Among the people

The word “people” might be mistaken with the word “populist” but I am referring to persons, to the people of God. One can speak about people as an idea, a logical category and so can speak about populism or, ideologically, speak about popular categories, but people is a mythical category and so we can speak about populism, people means people, persons. When we see the “crowd” which followed Jesus, we refer to the persons who followed him ..., certainly the disciples, but it is always people, persons ... they followed him because they liked him, he cured the sick and they liked the way he spoke with authority.

The method depends on the recipients. As the Council tells us and as we often pray during Mass: mindful and sharing men’s struggles and hopes so as to show them the way of salvation. Catholic Action *cannot keep aloof from the people*; it comes from the people and should stay among the people. You have to make Catholic Action more popular.

And what does this mean? Does this mean that we have to go in search of those who do not form part of society's elite? No, I am not saying so in this sociological sense because this is the popular ideology. I am saying it in the mythical sense of people. You should build a Catholic Action of those holy and faithful people to God.

It is not a question of image but of truth and charism. Nor is it demagoguery but it is following on the master's footsteps. He was never disgusted at anything.

To do this *it is good to take a popular neighbourhood* share people's lives and learn to discover where they are aiming for, their interests and their pursuits, their deepest yearnings and anguish; also what they need from us. This is fundamental if we do not want to fall into the situation of *failing to answer questions which everybody asks*.

Which are the questions which these people are asking, which individuals are asking? My answers should be based on real questions because sometimes we present a prepared speech and risk giving replies to questions which nobody is asking. This is a fundamental approach if we do not want to be ineffective.

One can sit at his desk and think of ways of evangelising but he will be in a position to do this only after having been in people's midst and not the other way round.

Go, move on, keep concrete contact and then yes, sit at your desk and draft your pastoral plans and then everything will be fine.

A more popular, more incarnated Catholic Action *will cause you more problems* because there will be more individuals, who apparently *are not in a position to make it*, who would want to be part of the institution: families where the parents are not married in Church, men and women with a difficult past or present but who struggle on, disoriented and disturbed young people

It is a challenge for Catholic Action's *ecclesial maternity*; accepting everyone and accompanying him on his life's journey with the crosses which he carries on his shoulders.

Everyone can participate *starting with what he has and with what he can do*. *For this, specific people will have to be trained. With this and for this, specific people should pray*.

Sharpen your observation to see *the signs of God evident in realities, especially in expressions of popular religiosity*. From these you can understand men's hearts better and discover the amazing ways in which God acts beyond our concepts.

There is a wisdom in people of good will, in people who earn the daily bread for their children. There are many temptations and a lot of evil but there is also so much wisdom which teaches us a lot. I remember one night, during a pilgrimage in Lujan, I was hearing confessions. There was a 22-23 year old sturdy young man, with long hair, a ring in his nostrils, full of strength, in the queue. He was a skilled worker, the son of a single mother, a part-time housekeeper in various homes. This lady had given a good education to her son. She sent him to a technical school from where he qualified as a skilled worker. This young man found himself in a messy situation and started worrying. One day he spoke to his mother about this and she told him: "Look my son, within a few days, there will be a pilgrimage to Lujan, go and ask our Virgin Mother what to do". This is wisdom. "And you, what did you do?" I asked. And he told me: "I went to the Virgin Mary" – and his eyes were wet because he had cried – "I have gone in front of our Virgin Mother and now I am going to do this and this ...". This is people's wisdom. The mother did not know what her son should do but she had suggested to him where he should go. There is a lot of wisdom in our people, a lot of wisdom which we should assimilate.

Sharpen your sight so as to see the Signs of God in real situations.

Project – An out-going Catholic Action – Passion for Christ, passion for our people

Yesterday we read the Gospel of Mark, and what does Jesus say? "Go, open out ... sometimes we imagine that the Church is ours, pretty closed. In the Apocalypse Jesus says: " I am standing at the door, knocking ... and if someone opens the door, I will come in to share a meal! ..." He asks to enter in our heart. Jesus knocks at the door from the inside so that we may let him go out. Be an outgoing CA, leading out towards the street, and I insist, this is not proselytism.

Passion for Christ, passion for our people

You have proposed an out-going Catholic Action and this is good because this takes you to the core of your being. An exit means an opening, generosity, facing reality beyond the four walls of the institution and of the parishes. This means *renouncing to excessive control and to programming results*. This freedom is a fruit of the Holy Spirit which helps you grow.

Catholic Action's evangelising project should follow these steps: *lead, that is take the initiative, participate, accompany, imbue and celebrate*. A step forward in our outreach is to be concrete and to proceed together. This is already an achievement to celebrate. Pass on the joy of your faith, the joy you feel when evangelising, in all opportune and not so opportune occasions.

Do not fall into the temptation of excessive *structuring*. Be enterprising, you are not more faithful to the Church if, at every step, you expect to be told what to do.

Please do not be of those who do not do anything before they ask for permission or because they do not find whom to ask. At times it is better to ask for pardon afterwards than to ask for permission before, but act ...

Encourage your members to appreciate the casual one to one missionary work or that initiated by the community.

And please, this serious theme preoccupies me: do not clericalise lay people!

The Holy Spirit's mission is in the first sacrament we all receive as lay people. Then the Spirit may call us in other ways. Do not clericalise lay people. It is a great temptation.

Many times it happened to me (at least three times in my diocese): a parish priest comes to me and says that he has a phenomenal lay person who does this and that and I tell him: "how good, what a good organiser he is!" and he tells me "what do think about making him a deacon?" "Do not give him a vocation. Leave it to the Holy Spirit. Do not clericalise" ...

Baptism is the first step. But in its origin the Church made a very beautiful distinction.

When the Hellenists complained with the apostles because their widows and orphans were not cared for, the apostles organised a small council and during this meeting they came out with the idea of having deacons and so they looked for seven worthy men and they entrusted them with the care of widows, orphans and other material matters. Rome has a distinguished deacon who was the bursar of the diocese, the martyr Lawrence. When Peter justified this choice, he used this phrase: “and to us, to the bishops, prayer and the announcement of the Word”. The main duty of the Bishop is to pray and together with praying he is to announce the Word ... But I am talking to CA lay people. It seems as if I am talking to the daughter-in-law so that the mother-in-law may hear what I say! No

Do not clericalise lay people. Do not let your members' aspiration be to form part of the parishes' sanhedrin which surrounds the parish priest but let it be a passion for the kingdom. However do not forget *to present the vocational theme* very seriously - a school of sanctity which basically means discovering one's own vocation, which is not to be a leader or a churchwarden, but rather, and above all, to be *an evangeliser*.

You should be *meeting places* for the other institutional charisms and movements present in the Church without any fear of the loss of one's identity. Furthermore, your members should develop into evangelisers, catechists, missionaries and social workers who work to help the Church to keep growing.

Very often it is said that Catholic Action is *the long arm of the hierarchy*. Far from being a prerogative which makes you look down on the others, it is a great responsibility, which implies faithfulness and consistency to what the Church has shown us at all times in history, without expecting to remain anchored to past ways as if they were the only possibilities. Faithfulness to the mission entails this *“good plasticity”* of those who have turned an ear to the people and the other to God.

In the 1937 publication “La Acción Católica a luz de la teología Tomista”, one finds: “Perhaps, should not *Catholic Action* be translated into *Catholic Passion*?”.

This was in 1937, when I was one year old. I ask you, should not CA try harder to convert itself and unceasingly strive to be action, with Catholic Passion?

Catholic passion, the Church’s passion is to live the pleasant and comforting joy of evangelising. This is what Catholic Action needs.

Thank you.

LETTER FROM THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM OF
CATHOLIC ACTION (*our translation*)

9 November 2021

Dear Brothers,

This celebration, which looks back at a founding moment, inevitably makes us look back in grateful contemplation. When we look back, we meet dreamers who dared to look forward with hope. That is why you are here today.

Looking back, we cannot forget a deep dreamer who started and encouraged the creation of this forum; and who today is enjoying seeing us celebrating these 30 years: Cardinal Eduardo Pironio; the one, who with a great love for Catholic Action and full confidence in its mission said: *“On the journey of Catholic Action there have been moments of darkness and light, moments of fatigue and loss of direction, fears of being overtaken by changing times and ecclesial standards. I believe that the Spirit has sent us this providential moment for the deepest renewal of our spiritual, doctrinal, apostolic and missionary commitment. The celebration of this Forum will undoubtedly contribute to this renewal - and I shall return to this point later in my address. This Forum aims to involve other countries in the rich experience of association which has borne so much fruit and is so full of hope”*.

Pironio was a man of deep roots, of memory anchored in the dynamism of history as a Kairos, a strong time of salvation, a time of work, trial, purification and hope. He loved Catholic Action and believed in its lay missionary vocation. The Church can bear witness that Catholic Action opened new perspectives in the field of the responsibility of the laity in Evangelization. Many, evangelized and formed by Catholic Action, were living witnesses to truth, profoundness and to the Gospel in civil areas, very often hostile to faith. Catholic Action lay saints and blessed are a wealth for the Church. Those were "the saints next door" in so many communities.

However, history is not so clear-cut: along Catholic Action's way, as in that of the Church itself, there were, there are and there will be lights and shadows, moments of profound disorientation, of fatigue, of indifference, of fear of defeat by the demands of prevalent times. In times of crisis or difficulty, the great temptation is to shut yourself up, to look after the little you have, to wait in hiding, cherishing memories for the coming of better times. The parable of the talents is a true reflection of what happens when this situation is accepted and when we let it become a way of being, of being in the world living the reality of an unreality.

So as not to fall into this temptation, so as not to forget who we are and where we are going: it is important that we remember again and again - as the people of God did in the desert with the promise which the Lord himself had made them - where we come from, what our origin is and to know the heart of the mother who one day gave us birth.

And, Catholic Action has its origin in the very bosom of the Catholic Church. It has no founder nor any particular charisma. Its aim is that of the Church itself, evangelization. It does not assume any or other particular field of apostolate as its own, but rather assumes the aim of the Church, the proclamation of the Gospel to all men and women and in all environments. Thus, its charism is not to have one of its own but to make itself available to the needs of the Church in the particular place. As a Church, we experience that with the power of the Spirit, we need to respond here and now to the cries of the world. In order to listen to them we have to go out, to be an out-going church, which, in a Samaritan way, approaches every man and every woman who suffers the pains of our times in their flesh or in their spirit.

We are still going through the first global pandemic in human history, which affected every country in our world without distinction. With the pandemic, the vulnerability of hundreds of millions of men and women on our planet, who have no possibility of having a chance to survive, has been revealed. Vulnerability put before us the risk of dying without any kind of foresight and regardless of where we live, of our moral condition, of our religious belief or of our socio-economic position. All humanity is affected equally. Vulnerability has managed to overcome all that which divided us and it has made us unequal. We discovered that we all have the same needs but different possibilities.

As I said at the beginning of the pandemic: “The storm exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities. It shows us how we have allowed to become dull and feeble the very things that nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities. The tempest lays bare all our prepackaged ideas and forgetfulness of what nourishes our people’s souls; all those attempts that anesthetize us with ways of thinking and acting that supposedly “save” us, but instead prove incapable of putting us in touch with our roots and keeping alive the memory of those who have gone before us. We deprive ourselves of the antibodies we need to confront adversity”. All of us, including myself, have experienced helplessness.

We come from a time strongly marked by globalization; economic, cultural etc. ... with its successes but also with the structures of sin which have emerged from it. Everything is global, even the virus made itself global.

As a forum you have a global mission and as you celebrate your first thirty years, you have a challenge and an invitation. I challenge you to discover more and more and in a stronger way where the life and history of our peoples are going, without prejudice, without fear, without distinctions and without being regulators of anyone's faith. It is an invitation to be there, where your interests, your concerns, your deepest wounds and your greatest anguishes are. We know that there is no greater poverty than not having God, that is, living without that faith which gives meaning to life, without hope which gives us strength to work, without feeling loved by someone who does not disappoint us. That is the situation and the place where Catholic Action has to carry out its mission.

Faced with the globalization of indifference, makes you feel that the task of building bridges and of creating communion is the deep call which God is making you. The Church is Communion for the mission. Communion is not an idea, it is a realization and the mission is not just another activity, it is the essence of ecclesial life. For Catholic Action, this presupposes communion with the diocesan pastoral plan and with the pastors and a formation with a missionary bias. Catholic Action must not aim at forming future Christians but must and needs to accompany the process of faith in today’s Christians in keeping with the characteristics of the stages of life they are passing through.

Communion is not something you acquire but the certainty of the presence of the Lord in the accomplishment of the mission. Evangelizing must be the passion of each baptized person, of each Catholic Action member, it means making a continuous effort to remain faithful to our identity. "Catholic Action has to rediscover the passion for the proclamation of the Gospel, the only possible salvation for a world that would otherwise fall into despair" (Paul VI). Catholic Action needs to create spaces where it can be present, give witness and where it can carry out missionary evangelization. In this way, it lives the mission of the Church, which is: to serve humanity within the Church of Christ, that is, in our Diocese and in our Parish, in perfect communion with the Universal Church.

I thank God for all the work you have done in these thirty years, which undoubtedly entailed a lot of effort. This applies above all to the early days when technology did not allow you to reach different parts of the world so easily and when everything needed strong determination. I thank you for all the initiatives of solidarity and accompaniment in the most peripheral dioceses, especially those of the third world, where I am aware that the presence of Catholic Action is strongly missionary and supports the work of the local churches.

Before finishing I want to ask three things from you:

- That the forum may very strongly feel the urgency of working for fraternity and social friendship, the only way to rebuild our wounded world.
- That the forum may instill, in the hearts of all authentic Christians, a spirituality based on a desire for holiness and on the understanding that holiness begins with the Beatitudes and materializes with Matthew 25; loving and working for our brethren who are suffering most.
- May the spirit, which animates all your projects and work, be that of being an outgoing Church, which lives the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing; and let this be known to all.

Thank you for all that which you are doing and for all that which you will be doing. Don't forget to pray for me.

May Jesus bless you and may the Blessed Virgin take care of you.

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM OF CATHOLIC ACTION

27 November 2022

After the election of the new authorities for the International Forum of Catholic Action, I congratulate those who have accepted the task of leading it for this next period, which continues the journey that began more than 30 years ago. In that moment, Venerable Cardinal Eduardo Pironio sensed the need to create this forum so that the life of Catholic Action would contribute to the challenge of the new evangelization, enriched by the uniqueness of each place and culture. Many steadily accompanied that insight and put forth their own skills and the desire to proclaim the Gospel in that service, despite the difficulties of their own time, as they did not have the means of communication and access between countries that exist today.

Certainly, the global context that accompanies the new phase is not the same as the one from 30 years ago, nor is the context from the previous leadership. The social and personal consequences of the pandemic continue to mark the spirit and outlook of the life and future of many. In some areas, the individualism of a one-size-fits-all salvation has been revived; not to mention the scourge of violence between countries and brothers that is shaking the desire for universal brotherhood. However, difficult times can represent a challenge and become times of hope. As Cardinal Pironio, a man of hope, used to say, “How important it is to be a sign in life! But not an empty sign or a sign of death; rather, a sign of light that communicates hope. Hope can overcome difficulties, disagreements, the crosses of daily life”.

At the same time, as a Church we are going through a time in which we need the synodal spirit to take root in our way of being Church. That means the exercise of walking together in the same direction. I am convinced that this is what God expects from the Church of the third millennium: that she regain the awareness that she is a people on a journey, who must journey together. For this reason, I would like to ask you to inspire the Catholic Action groups in different local churches with this spirit. We need to learn to listen to each other with a synodal spirit, to relearn the art of speaking with the other without walls or prejudices, also and especially with those who are excluded, marginalised, to seek closeness, which is God's style (cf. The Pope Video For a Church open to everyone, October 2022).

From this perspective, I urge the new leadership to be men and women who listen. I hope that they will not be desk, paper and Zoom "executives", and that they will not fall into the temptation of institutional structuralism that plans and organises from statutes, regulations and inherited proposals, which were good and useful in their time, but that perhaps today are not relevant. Please, I ask you to listen.

Firstly, listen to the real men, women, elderly, young people and children, in their contexts, in the silent cries expressed in their gazes and in their profound lamentations. Have an attentive ear so as not to give answers to questions no one asks, nor say things that do not interest or help anyone. Listen with open ears to newness with a Samaritan heart.

Second, listen to the beats of the signs of the times. The Church must not be on the margins of history, embroiled in her own affairs, staying in her own bubble. The Church is called to listen to and see the signs of the times, to make history — with its complexities and contradictions — a history of salvation. We need a vitally prophetic Church, starting from signs and gestures that show that there is another possibility for coexistence, human relations, work, love, power and service.

And lastly, to make this possible, we need to listen to the voice of the Spirit. In every age, the Spirit opens us to his newness; "He constantly teaches the Church the vital importance of going forth, impelled to proclaim the Gospel. The importance of our being, not a secure sheepfold,

but an open pasture” (Homily on Pentecost Sunday, 5 June 2022). While the worldly spirit pushes us to focus only on our own problems and interests, on the need to be important, on the tenacious defence of our goods and group, the Spirit frees us from obsessing over urgencies, and invites us to walk ancient and ever-new paths: those of witness, poverty and mission, to free us from ourselves and send us into the world.

Perhaps you feel that the proposal to listen is a small thing. However, listening is not passive. It is active listening that gives our work rhythm; it is the necessary inhalation to be a Church that breathes in a missionary way. That is what the Most Blessed Virgin did, because she listened, she got up and went to serve.

I pray that you will be able to make this period a time of grace, with the boldness to know how to listen, the serenity to discern and the courage to proclaim with life and starting from life. Thank you for having accepted this challenge. I pray to God for each one of you. Please, do not stop praying for me.

May Jesus bless you and the Blessed Virgin keep you.

Fraternally.

Appendix

LUMEN GENTIUM

Like those men and women who helped the Apostle Paul in evangelisation...



The lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself; (...) Thus every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself "according to the measure of Christ's bestowal" (Ef 4,7)...

Besides this apostolate which certainly pertains to all Christians, **the laity can also be called in various ways to a more direct form of cooperation in the apostolate of the Hierarchy.** This was the way certain men and women assisted Paul the Apostle in the Gospel, laboring much in the Lord (cfr. Fil 4,3; Rm 16,3 ss)...

Upon all the laity, therefore, rests the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation to all men of each epoch and in every land. Consequently, may every opportunity be given them so that, according to their abilities and the needs of the times, they may zealously participate in the saving work of the Church. **(33)**

Familiar relationships between lay people and pastors

A great many wonderful things are to be hoped for from this familiar dialogue between the laity and their spiritual leaders: in the laity a strengthened sense of personal responsibility; a renewed enthusiasm; a more ready application of their talents to the projects of their spiritual leaders. The latter, on the other hand, aided by the experience of the laity, can more clearly and more incisively come to decisions regarding both spiritual and temporal matters. In this way, the whole Church, strengthened by each one of its members, may more effectively fulfill its mission for the life of the world. **(37)**

CHRISTUS DOMINUS

A commitment for the Bishops



The faithful should be earnestly urged to assume their duty of carrying on the apostolate, each according to his state in life and ability. They should be admonished to participate in and give aid to the various works of the apostolate of the laity, **especially Catholic Action. (17)**

AD GENTES

For the establishment of the Church and the development of the Christian community



...various ministries are needed, which are raised up by divine calling from the midst of the faithful congregation, and are to be carefully fostered and tended to by all. Among these are the offices of priests, of deacons, and of catechists, and **Catholic action**. Religious men and women likewise, by their prayers and by their active work, play an indispensable role in rooting and strengthening the Kingdom of Christ in souls, and in causing it to be spread. **(15)**

APOSTOLICAM ACTUOSITATEM

Catholic Action and the four characteristics that define it by this name or by another name



Catholic Action

20. Many decades ago the laity in many nations began to dedicate themselves increasingly to the apostolate. They grouped themselves into various kinds of activities and societies which, while maintaining a closer union with the hierarchy, pursued and continue to pursue goals which are properly apostolic. Of these associations, or even among similar and older institutions, those are specially noteworthy which followed different methods of operation and yet produced excellent results for Christ's kingdom. These societies were deservedly recommended and promoted

by the popes and many bishops, from whom they received the title of "Catholic Action," and were often described as the collaboration of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy

Whether these forms of the apostolate have the name of "Catholic Action" or some other title, they exercise an apostolate of great value for our times and consist in the combination and simultaneous possession of the following characteristics:

- a) The immediate aim of organizations of this kind is the Church's apostolic aim, that is, the evangelization and sanctification of men and the formation of a Christian conscience among them so that they can infuse the spirit of the Gospel into various communities and departments of life.
- b) b) Cooperating with the hierarchy in their own way, the laity contribute the benefit of their experience to, and assume responsibility for the direction of these organizations, the consideration of the conditions in which the pastoral activity of the Church is to be conducted, and the elaboration and execution of the plan of things to be done.
- c) The laity act together in the manner of an organic body so that the community of the Church is more fittingly symbolized and the apostolate rendered more effective.
- d) Whether they offer themselves spontaneously or are invited to action and direct cooperation with the apostolate of the hierarchy, the laity function under the higher direction of the hierarchy itself, and the latter can sanction this cooperation by an explicit mandate.

Organizations in which, in the opinion of the hierarchy, the ensemble of these characteristics is realized, must be considered to be Catholic Action even though they take on various forms and titles because of the needs of different regions and peoples.

The most holy council earnestly recommends these associations, which surely answer the needs of the apostolate of the Church among many peoples and countries, and invites the clergy and laity working in them to develop the above-mentioned characteristics to an ever greater degree and to cooperate at all times with all other forms of the apostolate in a fraternal manner in the Church.

Esteem for lay apostolate associations

All associations of the apostolate must be given due appreciation. Those, however, which the hierarchy have praised or recommended as responsive to the needs of time and place, or have ordered to be established as particularly urgent, must be held in highest esteem by priests, Religious, and laity and promoted according to each one's ability. Among these associations, moreover, international associations or groups of Catholics must be specially appreciated at the present time. (21)

PAUL VI

Evangelii Nuntiandi (1975)

Lay people called to collaborate with Pastors



... the laity can also feel themselves called, or be called, to work with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community for its growth and life, by exercising a great variety of ministries according to the grace and charisms which the Lord is pleased to give them. (73)

Speech to the National Assembly of Italian Catholic Action (1977)

School of holiness for lay evangelisers (the official translation of the text is missing)



In una In a word: Italian Catholic Action must be, we might say, a school of holiness, following in the footsteps of so many men and women, young people and children, who in the programme of “prayer, action and sacrifice” have found the path of their generous and even heroic fidelity to the Lord. (...)

We would like to draw your attention to ***the particular importance of Catholic Action, which, as a collaboration of the laity in the hierarchical apostolate of the Church, has a place in the ecclesial*** structure that is not historically contingent but theologically motivated. After what the Council said (cf. [*Apostolicam Actuositatem*](#), 20; [*Ad Gentes*](#), 15) and what we ourselves had occasion to emphasise in our Apostolic Exhortation ‘*Evangelii Nuntiandi*’ (cf. PAULI PP. VI [*Evangelii Nuntiandi*](#), 73), the specific role of Catholic Action in the constitutional design and operational

programme of the Church cannot be underestimated. It is called to realise a unique form of lay ministry, aimed at the “plantatio Ecclesiae” and the development of the Christian community in close union with the ordained ministries.

Lay evangelisers are therefore the militants of Catholic Action, enabled by the gift of the Spirit and in full fidelity to the word received from the Pastors, to realise in daily life the synthesis between faith and life, recovering that unity which the snare of secularism with lucid intentionality tirelessly aims to dissolve. In other words, it is a question of giving priority to the *pastoral* moment. (...) . We need to re-evaluate our commitment to the growth of the Christian community in faith and witness of life, proclaiming loudly the supernatural end of man and helping believers to rediscover the values, including political ones, that a consistent profession of Christianity develops for the benefit of a more humane coexistence: the ferment of renewal introduced by the early Christian community into the socio-political structures of the pagan state is eloquent testimony in itself.

JOHN PAUL II

Christifideles Laici (1988)

In communion with the bishop and priests



Among the various forms of the lay apostolate which have a particular relationship to the hierarchy, the Synod Fathers have singled out various movements and associations of **Catholic Action** in which "indeed, in this organic and stable form, the lay faithful may freely associate under the movement of the Holy Spirit, in communion with their bishop and priests, so that in a way proper to their vocation and with some special method they might be of service through their faithfulness and good works to promote the growth of the entire Christian community, pastoral activities and infusing every aspect of life with the gospel spirit" (31)

Address to the ecclesiastical assistants of Italian Catholic Action (1992)

The assistant priest of Catholic Action (the official translation of the text is missing)



... participates in the life of the Association, helping to nourish the spiritual commitment and apostolic spirit of its members and promoting, in particular, their unity. He achieves this, first and foremost, by example and through his commitment to ongoing and comprehensive priestly formation in the human, spiritual, doctrinal and pastoral dimensions; a formation that is understood in its 'entire truth' and 'unmistakable originality,' in order to "revive" the 'divine gift' received at ordination, so as to 'live it in its timeless freshness and original beauty' (Pastores dabo vobis, 70). A priestly life continually striving towards holiness, to which the priest is especially called by a specific vocation (cf. Ibid., 19), is the first and greatest gift of the assistant to the Association.

Message to the participants in the International Congress of Catholic Action (2004)

Serving the vocation of the laity



"Facing the future with courage" is an attitude that does not stem from a voluntary choice but draws its consistency and dynamism from the memory of how precious a gift Catholic Action has been since it came into being. According to my Predecessor Pope Pius XI of venerable memory, it stemmed from a "providential inspiration" and was a cohesive force that gave structure and an impetus to that contemporary trend of the "promotion of the laity" that was solemnly confirmed by the Second Vatican Council. Generations of the faithful have developed their vocations in Catholic Action, through a process of Christian formation that brought them to full awareness of their co-responsibility in building the Church and fostered their apostolic zeal in all walks of life.

Angelus after Loreto, 12 September 2004

The three duties



I am grateful to the Lord for having given me the opportunity to take part in this important ecclesial event,

which culminated in the proclamation of three new Blessed: Alberto Marvelli, Pina Suriano and Pere Tarrés i Claret.

In recalling their witness, I would like here to recall the three duties I entrusted to Catholic Action: "contemplation", to walk on the path of holiness; "communion", to promote the spirituality of unity; and "mission", to be Gospel leaven everywhere.

May Our Lady help *Catholic Action* to persevere enthusiastically in its commitment to apostolic witness, always working in close connection with the hierarchy, taking a responsible part in the pastoral work of the parish and the Diocese.

The Church is counting on the active presence of *Catholic Action* and its faithful devotion to the great cause of Christ's Kingdom. I too look to Catholic Action with great confidence, and I encourage all its members to be generous witnesses of the Good News of the Gospel in order to restore hope to contemporary society which is in search of peace.

BENEDICT XVI

Message on the occasion of the sixth ordinary assembly of the International Forum of Catholic Action (2012)

The co-responsibility of lay people...



...demands a change in mindset especially concerning the role of lay people in the Church. They should not be regarded as “collaborators” of the clergy, but, rather, as people who are really “co-responsible” for the Church’s being and acting. It is therefore important that a mature and committed laity be consolidated, which can make its

own specific contribution to the ecclesial mission with respect for the ministries and tasks that each one has in the life of the Church and always in cordial communion with the bishops.

Renewing the commitment to walk the way of holiness

Your Associations of Catholic Action boast a long and fruitful history, written by courageous witnesses of Christ and of the Gospel. The Church has recognized some of them as Blessed and Saints. Following in their footsteps, you are called today to renew your commitment to walking on the way of holiness, keeping up your intense life of prayer, encouraging

and respecting personal ways of faith and making the most of the riches of each one, with the guidance of your priest-chaplains and those in charge who can teach ecclesial and social co-responsibility. May your life be “transparent”, orientated by the Gospel and illumined by the encounter with Christ, loved and followed without fear.

For a vibrant, ministerial and missionary community

Make your own and share the pastoral decisions of the dioceses and parishes, fostering opportunities for meeting and for sincere collaboration with the other members of the ecclesial community, creating relations of esteem and communion with priests for a lively ministerial and missionary community. Cultivate authentic personal relations with everyone, starting with the family, and offer your readiness to participate at all the levels of social, cultural and political life, constantly aiming for the common good.

FRANCIS

Address to participants in the congress of the International Forum of Catholic Action (2017)

Catholic Action’s charism is the charism of the Church herself ...



profoundly incarnate in the here and now of every diocesan Church, as she attentively contemplates and discerns the life of her people and seeks new ways to evangelize and carry out her mission, beginning with the different parish situations ...

For Catholic Action, mission is not one task among others: it is the task. The charism of Catholic Action is to advance the Church’s pastoral activity. Unless mission is its distinctive strength, Catholic Action will lose its true nature and its reason for existing.

Letter on the 30th anniversary of the International Forum of Catholic Action (2021)

Accompanying the faith journey of today’s Christians

(the official translation of the text is missing)



Di Faced with the globalization of indifference, makes you feel that the task of building bridges and of creating communion is the deep call which God is making you. The Church is Communion for the mission. Communion

is not an idea, it is a realization and the mission is not just another activity, it is the essence of ecclesial life. For Catholic Action, this presupposes communion with the diocesan pastoral plan and with the pastors and a formation with a missionary bias. Catholic Action must not aim at forming future Christians but must and needs to accompany the process of faith in today's Christians in keeping with the characteristics of the stages of life they are passing through.

Message to the International Forum of Catholic Action (2022)

With a synodal spirit



...as a Church we are going through a time in which we need the synodal spirit to take root in our way of being Church (...) with a synodal spirit, to relearn the art of speaking with the other without walls or prejudices, also and especially with those who are excluded, marginalised, to seek closeness, which is God's style. (...)

Please, I ask you to listen. Firstly, listen to the real men, women, elderly, young people and children, in their contexts, in the silent cries expressed in their gazes and in their profound lamentations. Have an attentive ear so as not to give answers to questions no one asks, nor say things that do not interest or help anyone. Listen with open ears to newness with a Samaritan heart. (...)

Second, listen to the beats of the signs of the times. The Church must not be on the margins of history, embroiled in her own affairs, staying in her own bubble. The Church is called to listen to and see the signs of the times, to make history — with its complexities and contradictions — a history of salvation. (...)

And lastly, to make this possible, we need to listen to the voice of the Spirit. In every age, the Spirit opens us to his newness; the Spirit frees us from obsessing over urgencies, and invites us to walk ancient and ever-new paths: those of witness, poverty and mission, to free us from ourselves and send us into the world.. (...) It is active listening that gives our work rhythm; it is the necessary inhalation to be a Church that breathes in a missionary way.

Unity in pluriformity

... Referring to Catholic Action, we can speak of unity in pluriformity. Maybe, this could be explained by underlining the Pontifical Magisterium on Catholic Action as the fundamental basis of its unity and the incorporation of Catholic Action in the local Churches as the demonstration of its multiformity.

We could also say that the International Forum inaugurates a stage of greater openness and encounter of Catholic Action Groups at universal level. (...) So this Forum is most welcomed! On a universal level it is called to express the renewed vitality of a tradition which presents itself as an associative and apostolic proposal for all the Churches ... (...) Thus, it is important that the Forum is only this, a "forum", a place of encounter, exchange, collaboration and promotion of the Catholic Action

Cardinal Eduardo F. Pironio (Beatified on 16 December 2023) – FIAC Constitutive Assembly 1991

(President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity – now the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life)

HISTORICAL NOTE

While Italy was completing the 'national Risorgimento' that would lead to the unification of the entire country with Rome as its capital, in an anti-clerical climate fuelled by liberalism and Freemasonry, the Catholic Youth Society (1867) was founded. It was founded by two young men, Mario Fani and Giovanni Acquaderni.

From its very beginnings, the Society took on the characteristics that would later become those of Catholic Action in Italy and around the world: the primacy of spiritual formation, summarised in the motto 'Prayer, Action, Sacrifice', and fidelity to the Pope and the Church.

Between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Catholic Action was founded in Italy and in many European and Latin American countries (1868 CA Italy, 1857 CA Switzerland, 1926 CA Spain, 1922 CA Austria, 1925 CA Poland, 1929 CA Romania (AGRU and ASTRU), 1930 CA Argentina). In the second half of the 20th century, Catholic Action movements began to spring up, starting in France, and spreading to many countries and continents.

Catholic Action, in its various organisational forms in many countries, contributed to the preparation of the Second Vatican Council at all levels, from the formation of young people, women and lay people to the establishment of universal Church bodies (e.g. international congresses for the lay apostolate) and participation with other lay men and women in the work of the Council.

After the Council, Catholic Action was renewed and updated with the whole Church in the countries where it was already active and was established in new countries, with different organisational forms and even different names, in fidelity to the definition of *Apostolicam actuositatem* 20.

PIUS XI (1938)

Becoming good Christians

(the official translation of the text is missing)



... Catholic Action, this well-known apple of Our eye, which — as has had to be acknowledged and confessed, even by the tampering with the various offices and their archives — Catholic Action does not engage in politics or undesirable competition, but solely intends to make good Christians who live their Christianity, and therefore elements of the first order for the public good.

PIUS XII (1951)

Catholics in action

(the official translation of the text is missing)



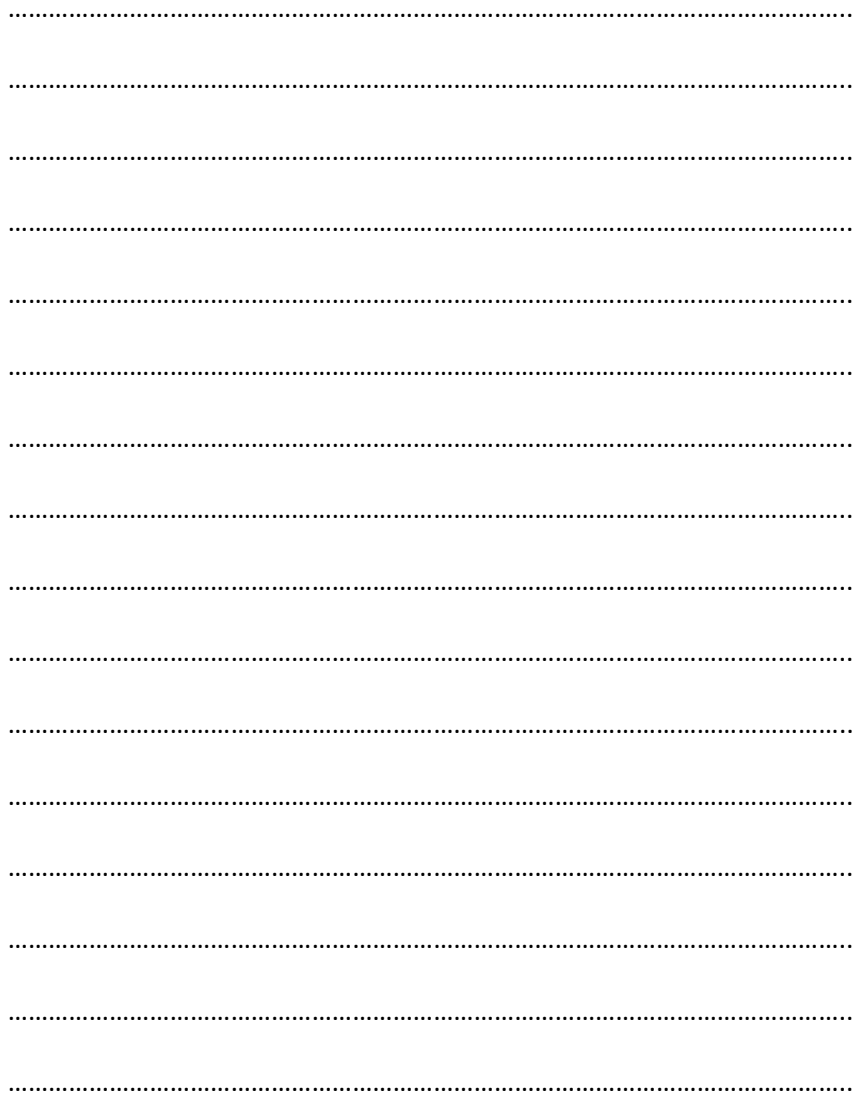
First of all, you are 'Catholic Action.' This word 'Action,' which is both precise and comprehensive, indicates the specific character of your organisation and distinguishes you from other Catholic associations... You call yourselves simply "Catholic Action" because, having a general rather than a particular or specific aim, you are not a fixed axis around which the mechanism of any organisation revolves, but rather a gathering place where active Catholics converge and organise themselves... Its structure must adapt to the particular circumstances of each region, but in one respect all its members must be equal: in 'sentire cum Ecclesia' (feeling with the Church), in dedication to the cause of the Church, in obedience to those whom the Holy Spirit has appointed as bishops to govern the Church of God, in filial submission to the Supreme Pastor, to whose care Christ has entrusted his Church.

JOHN XXIII (1961)

The history of meetings with the Pope marks the history of Catholic Action (the official translation of the text is missing)



The presence of so many young people from Catholic Action brings to mind those first ones who gathered here in this Basilica around Pius IX on 29 June 1867, at the very dawn of the Society that was then beginning. Then the meetings became frequent, in joyful times as well as in sad circumstances, to bear witness to the Successor of Peter of the fervent adherence of hearts, generous and convinced fidelity, and a firm response to recurring opposition. Since then, our predecessors have often rejoiced in the presence of young Catholics, men and women, university students, graduates, and teachers. The history of the numerous meetings with the Pope is written in golden letters in the annals of Catholic Action, from the courageous gestures of the time of Pius IX, which brought so much comfort to the heart of the great old man, up to the exhilarating audiences of Pius XI and the grandiose demonstrations celebrated under the pontificate of Pius XII.



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