



DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING
INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Vatican City, March 28, 2022

Message from His Eminence Cardinal Michael Czerny S.J.
Prefect *ad interim* of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development
to the participants of the annual assembly
of *Comité Catholique International des Tsiganes* (CCIT)
St. Ottilien, Germany, April 22-24, 2022

Reverend Fr. Dumas,
Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I was pleased to learn that, after an extended interval due to the pandemic, the "red thread" of the annual meetings of the *Comité Catholique International des Tsiganes* (CCIT) has been re-tied on this occasion in St. Ottilien, Germany. I am sorry that I cannot be with you to greet you personally and to have the experience of welcoming one another and our commitment to our Roma brothers and sisters. I am sure that the spirit of mutual hospitality that you will experience and that you have chosen as the central theme of this meeting will open unexpected and enriching spaces in your hearts for the manifestation of the Spirit.

First of all, I would like to express to each and every one of you the gratitude of the Pope and of the whole Church for your choice to be among brothers and sisters who, unfortunately, are in the ranks of the most disadvantaged, the long-standing marginalized in our so-called advanced societies. The COVID period has perhaps further highlighted the level of marginalization, oblivion even, if not the scapegoating function of these communities, who have paid a very high price everywhere they are. For this reason I wish to join in their appreciation, because caring for human mobility is a concern close to our hearts, at the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development that I preside at present, and not only because it is mentioned in the new Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*.

We were under the illusion that a new era had begun for the future, but now the winds of war have plunged us back into the past. In this context, the theme you have chosen for your meeting



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is a declaration of war against war, a real challenge: "Mutual Hospitality" not only for the Roma communities, but for every nation and society.

On March 8, I left on a journey of prayer, prophecy and denunciation to visit the displaced people in Ukraine and the refugees on the borders of Hungary and Slovakia. Among them were Gypsy families, a minority that is present in the country. On my return, I can say that it was also a mission of witness, love and hope.

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What struck me most was the solidarity and hospitality of ordinary people. That of the Hungarians and Slovaks, of course, but also of the many people I met from Italy, Belgium, Spain... who chose to leave home with their own means of transport, at their own expense, travelling thousands of kilometers to the Ukrainian border, to unload the foodstuffs collected in their own countries and take on board the refugees that they will welcome into their homes. Here is hospitality in the flesh.

I have witnessed how Europe has been able to put aside its closures and fears in order to open its doors and borders. I have seen that Europeans are still capable of experiencing hospitality, by being good Samaritans and transporting in cars and buses - horses or donkeys of yesteryear - half-dead strangers found along the roads leading to the border. I hope that when the crisis is over, Europe and Europeans will still be capable of hospitality, of opening their arms to welcome people, and every person, especially the most marginalized and vulnerable!

In short, I saw *Fratelli tutti* in action, in people's hands and faces, in their actions and acts of hospitality. The Church has a great role to play, both during the crisis and in the times ahead. Once peace is achieved, there will be the need for an even greater effort of closeness, rooted in living hospitality, to accompany people as they return to their homes, to resume lives that now seem lost, to overcome the grief, wounds and suffering that war leaves in its wake, in order to build a future of peace for all.

This is the starting point "to live in a liberating and responsible way the experience of the Church as a "mystique" of living together" (*Veritatis Gaudium*, 4a), in which that hospitality is rooted, nourished by universal brotherhood, which knows how to look at the sacred grandeur of one's neighbor, how to find God in every human being, following the example of divine love, which unceasingly seeks the happiness of its children... Hence " the imperative to allow our hearts and minds to heed the cry of the earth's poor[36] and to give concrete expression to the social dimension of evangelization, which is an integral part of the Church's mission... It is true that we may not always be able to reflect adequately the beauty of the Gospel, but there is one sign which



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we should never lack: the option for those who are least, those whom society discards. This option must pervade the presentation and study of Christian truth" (*Veritatis Gaudium*, 4a).

Pope Francis reminds us that this option for the most vulnerable comes from the Trinitarian imprint that makes the cosmos in which we live a "network of relations", fostering a spirituality of welcoming and global solidarity in dialogue (cf. *Veritatis Gaudium*, 4a).

In fact, the path of hospitality leaves no one behind, because it unfolds within a people, it is not a solitary path: this perspective of life naturally opens up to one's neighbor.

Back in 2020, on the occasion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity focused on the theme of hospitality, Pope Francis reminded us that "hospitality belongs to the tradition of Christian communities and families. Our elders taught us this by their example: there was always something extra on the table of a Christian home for a passing friend or a person in need who knocked on the door. In monasteries a guest is treated with great respect, as if he or she were Christ. Let us not lose, indeed let us revive, these customs that have the flavour of the Gospel!" (Francis, Homily, 53rd Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, January 25, 2020).

The responsibility is common and shared: it is a matter of rebuilding the fabric of human relationships, of welcoming and placing the person at the center of our communities, as the Good Samaritan did on the road to Jericho. The challenge is to avoid the risk of dehumanization by emphasizing the values that protect our humanity and bring us closer to God's plan for each of us, that of the happiness of fraternity in the one human family.

The CCIT lives the dimension of the spirituality of welcome, which enables the building of a friendship based on a genuine exchange as equals between Roma and Gaḡé. It is committed to manifesting and living the Gospel message that encourages us to welcome others, especially the most fragile in society, as "living incarnations of Christ". Its members strive to build bridges between two different cultural worlds, to try to create a community where the universal Christian hospitality and brotherhood that are proclaimed are brought to life and which also require the communities of faithful to cultivate different forms of welcome towards the Roma who arrive, even when they arrive as refugees and end up as the least among the least, if we give in to the temptation to discriminate against them, while we must never forget that need is need for all, without distinction. "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me..." (*Mt 25:35*)

An ever greater collaboration with the local Churches, Bishops and parishes is always to be sought, to work as a network, because the talents and involvement of all are necessary to show the world that all are one, so that the world may believe that God sent his beloved Son for the salvation of humanity (cf. *Jn 17:21*).



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Only through sharing can the human family achieve true, fraternal and harmonious integral development.

I wish you a fruitful sharing of ideas, experiences, friendship, welcome and fraternity during this meeting. This moment of renewal will enable you to return home with new enthusiasm, to be more and more the leaven and the light wherever you are committed to your pastoral mission. May the Lord bless and reward you and may Our Lady accompany you on your journey.

Card. Michael Czerny S.J.
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