

Building a caring society

Take care that's the formula we are using to express our good wishes and positive hope to another person. Care is a key word within the human family. Caring persons and not-caring persons are highly distinctive and different people. Caritas is all about caring. Caritas takes care of many people in need all over the world and so here in Lithuania. Taking care of people at their homes is a very specific service provided by Caritas and other organisations in Europe and worldwide. Today and tomorrow we are going to discuss home care as a very specific service provision. A lot of people needing help prefer to be taken care of at their homes. Others prefer to be taken care of in institutions like homes for people living with disabilities, elderly people, or homeless people. There is a discussion about the costs. Is home care less expensive than institutional care? Is home care part of professional services or is it a voluntary service rendered by volunteers in a pastoral way? But don't worry. I will not answer all those questions now. I hope that we are going to discuss and why not controversially discuss all those questions during our forum here in Vilnius.

As Caritas Europa we are very grateful to all of you who attend this important event. You are experts in the field of home care services. We are here to exchange and to mutually learn from one another. We are here because the national contexts of our services are quite different. We are here because the deeper roots of home care services provided within the framework of Caritas are bringing us together. We are here because we are working for all people needing homecare services independently of their race, their opinions and their orientations. We are here because we are Church. We are here because we collaborate with state authorities. But first of all we are here to work.

Let us at the beginning of this forum look more closely to the concept of caring. In France recently Martine Aubry brought up the concept of a caring society in order to make a difference to a non-caring society. In countries like the Baltic countries exposed for years to communism and Marxism the difference between a caring and a non-caring society might still be graved in the memory of the citizens. Part of the communist ideology was to cut links and relations between people. Suspicion and control replaced the caring attitude among people. In the western ideology the concept of individualistic pride and autonomy did the same. Autonomous people do not care about others. Autonomous people do not need other's people care. And perhaps the boost of so-called caring professions in the communist and western tradition can only be understood against the background of both ideologies. A certain type of professionalism reduced care to a very technical activity. Individual acts were defined and paid for. This ill-conceived reduction and so-called professionalism did not only reduce the clients to objects of the care givers but reduced as well the care givers to soulless machines being part of a bigger system monitored by money and control. And so it was not surprising that caring professions had to undergo big changes. Humanising care giving professions and humanising care providing institutions is an ongoing concern of the last decades. Pope Benedict XVI in his inaugural encyclical *Deus Caritas est* made it very clear. There is no opposition between professionalism and empathy. Empathy or as he calls it "the formation of the heart" is part of the professionalism today. And professionalism has to include the soul and the heart of those giving care. As the luxembourgish branch of Caritas in this field puts it in its *Leitmotif Menschlichkeit a Kompetent* – humane and expert. This fight within the social professions for expertise and human competence has become the standard of art today in most of our countries.

I think that this fight to merge professionalism and humanity should become an example for the whole society and the society as a whole. The integral development within a given society is a never ending process. Keeping this process going is a task and a duty of each citizen and for politicians specifically. How the society can learn from the experience of caring professions and service providers in this area is a challenge we should take up during our Forum as well and thus contributing to the theme of our Forum "How home care can fight poverty". Our learning curve can serve as an example how to humanise the whole society. Our learning experiences can serve as examples how to boost participation and a philosophy of active inclusion in our society. If a caring attitude is more than a moral claim it can be used as a trigger for the whole society.

A caring society is a modern and a professional society behaving as a democratic institution. And our Christian faith and tradition can even nourish more that concept. The world famous story of the Samaritan tells us a paradigm for care. The Samaritan is the hero in Jesus' parable. He saw and he was moved by what he saw. That's the difference to the Levite and the priest. They saw but they were not moved by what they saw. The Christian way to look at a humane society makes its difference not on a level of faith and discourse but on the level of concrete behaviour and acts. Christians together with all people of good will see the need and they don't ignore that need. They are moved by the need of people. They act in order to help. They pay for the service rendered by the innkeeper. To care or not to care that's the difference which it is all about.

My dear friends, if we are meeting for the next couple of days here in Vilnius, let us meet as persons, professionals and caregivers. Let us take care of one another. Take care, be attentive to one another. As Christians we are happy to know and to believe that someone is taking care of all of us: God himself. His love is at the beginning of our history. We are not simple products of an intelligent evolution but He wanted us to be and He wanted us to love thus entering in His history of salvation following the example of His son Jesus.

As professionals you know that providing care to people in need requests professional acts as well as professional and human words. Caring people might be silent and quiet people, if their hands and their hearts speak. But a good word can change a whole situation. And very often that good word comes from the person in need. He or she acknowledges the helping hand and heart. He or she is grateful. If care givers and care receivers meet as persons the third dimension of our world opens and the sky, heaven or God becomes visible. Open your eyes and you will see. Open your hearts and you will understand. Open your minds for the mystery of humanity.

During these days we are going to struggle for words giving meaning to our acts. Let us accept that the last word and the first word is the human person in its openness to God. Let's be careful when we are talking to one another. Let us use careful words if we are discussing and struggling. Let us not be afraid to confront our views and our discourses. Let's use this forum as an open exchange.

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