



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr Javier Guerra Laspiur,
AMBASSADOR OF COSTA RICA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 29 October 1998

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to receive the Letters of Credence accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Costa Rica to this Apostolic See. On this occasion I would like to express my gratitude for your kind words, which bear witness to the noble sentiments of closeness and adherence to the Chair of Peter present in the heart of so many Costa Rican citizens.

I am also particularly grateful for the respectful greeting that you have conveyed to me from President Ángel Rodríguez Echeverría, which I reciprocate with my best wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the progress and spiritual good of all the sons and daughters of this beloved nation.

2. Costa Rica, Mr Ambassador, is a nation the world admires for its unwavering vocation to peace, which led it to eliminate the army as a permanent institution from its political Constitution. This decision did not only guarantee its democratic process, but enabled it to put aside considerable financial resources for promoting education, improving health standards, implementing housing plans for the poorest and seeking the integral advancement of its people.

Moreover, your country has always been distinguished for its hospitality. In recent years, thousands of Central American citizens, tried by difficult social, political and economic situations in their countries of origin, have set out for Costa Rica in search of refuge. It is well known how the Pastors of the Church motivated the faithful and all citizens to see in each refugee the image of

the Holy Family, which had to emigrate from Nazareth to Egypt. This has helped them to be welcomed with fraternal affection and to obtain the same services as the rest of the population, especially in education and health care.

3. It is also known that the Government of the Republic and your country's most representative groups, in accepting my appeal to the Episcopate of Costa Rica, seek to find the best solutions for the most serious problems identified through a process of co-ordination (cf. *Comunicado de la CECOR*, 1 December 1997). Experience teaches that the more institutions and persons join forces in the search for common objectives for the good of all, the quicker and easier it is to achieve them. On the other hand, division inexorably leads to recession and stagnation. In this respect, it is pleasing to note that the Costa Rican people, showing great civic maturity, are seeking in concerted action what they could never achieve through confrontation.

4. Moreover, you have stressed the importance of the family in society, especially in a country with a long Christian tradition like Costa Rica. If we call it "the basic 'cell' of society" (*Gratissimam sane*, n. 4), it is because whatever happens in the family has a deep impact throughout society. It is in the family, especially the Christian family, that children learn from their parents respect for human life, sacred and inviolable from the moment of its conception to its very end. It is also a school of proven virtue, which continues to give the Church and society exemplary Christians and citizens who fight against corruption, violence, crime and moral degradation in its most varied and painful forms. Church-State collaboration in this area, in schools and in the social communications media, is indispensable in order to protect and foster the family as a sanctuary of life and love, a teacher who furthers the development of every individual.

5. Inspired by Jesus' words: "The poor you always have with you" (Jn 12:8), the Catholic Church in your country, Mr Ambassador, is making noble efforts at all levels to assist orphaned and abandoned children, neglected elderly people and those terminally ill with AIDS, as well as to build centres for women tempted to resort to abortion. Likewise, praiseworthy efforts are being made, especially at the parish level, to provide for families affected by unemployment and the housing shortage, or who care for disabled family members. With regard to these situations it is highly commendable that the State, the Church and the private sector should join forces not only to help the poor, but above all to improve standards through education. Thus they will be able to progress by their own means and be responsible for their own future.

One is also aware that your country is making considerable efforts to improve the economy. In this regard it is to be hoped that an improved economy will especially benefit the poorest people. In this way social peace, far from disintegrating, will be strengthened day by day in Costa Rica, since it should not be forgotten that the economy must be at the service of man and not man at the service of the economy.

6. Since its independence, Church-State relations in Costa Rica have been marked by mutual

respect and cordiality. Mutual respect for each institution's proper competence combined with reciprocal support and collaboration achieve the greatest well-being for the national community. Therefore, through constructive dialogue, it is possible to promote the basic values for the ordering of society, by fostering its development. In this regard, even if the Church's mission is spiritual and not political, encouraging cordial relations between the Church and the State powerfully contributes to the harmony, advancement and well-being of all, without exception.

7. As you begin the high office to which you have been appointed, I would like to offer you my best wishes for a happy and fruitful fulfilment of your mission to this Apostolic See, ever concerned that good relations with Costa Rica be maintained and constantly strengthened. In asking you to kindly convey these sentiments to the President of the Republic, his Government, the authorities and the beloved people of Costa Rica, I assure you of my prayer to the Almighty that, through the intercession of your patroness, Our Lady of the Angels, with his gifts he may always assist you and your distinguished family, your co-workers, the leaders and citizens of your noble country, whom I always recall with special affection.

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