



*To the Participants in the
2026 Catholic Health Assembly*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I was pleased to learn of the 2026 Catholic Health Assembly being held in Saint Louis, and I send good wishes to all taking part. In this year in which the United States of America is celebrating its semiquincentennial, it is particularly fitting that many Church leaders are gathering to discuss the future of Catholic health care in the country. Following your theme of “United for Change,” I would like to offer some brief words for further reflection on this subject.

As you know, unity has and continues to hold a particular significance in my ministry. It is a gift from God that we must continue to implore, but it is also freely given, and as such must be recognized, welcomed and fostered. In this regard, I refer to our unity in Christ, who has deigned to incorporate us through Baptism into one body, of which he is the head (cf. *1 Cor* 12:12). As long as we abide in him, like branches united to the vine, he has promised that we will bear much fruit (cf. *Jn* 15:4). It follows, then, that the future of the Church’s mission in health care in the United States of America also depends upon your union with Christ and with one another. As long as you remain united to him, sharing in his life and motivated by the love in his heart, there is no doubt that you can continue to bear abundant fruit through caring for the sick and suffering.

Furthermore, when reflecting upon the specificity of the Church's mission in health care, it is likewise imperative to recognize the veritable excellence of Christian charity, "which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (*Col* 3:14). Throughout history, Christians have responded to the call to serve men and women of all religions, ethnicities and walks of life prompted by the love of God that has been "poured out into our hearts" (*Rm* 5:5). This same love has enabled generations of faithful to recognize the face of Christ in the less fortunate (cf. *Mt* 25:40), and to understand charitable service as a "concrete expression of faith in the incarnate Word" (*Dilexi Te*, 39). Charity has inspired the Church's preferential option for the poor, given rise to the establishment of hospitals, and motivated and sustained the work of millions of health care workers, missionaries and volunteers, transforming their daily tasks into deeds worthy of eternal life (cf. *Rm* 2:7). Charity inspires and directs service, and constitutes the distinguishing mark of Catholic health care as a ministry intimately united to the heart of Christ.

The selfless dedication inspired by charity is evident in the role that the Church has played in promoting the common good and caring for the sick and underprivileged throughout this nation's development. Indeed, the Church proclaims the innate dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God, which gives rise to a solid framework for the proper understanding of integral human development and a deep commitment to human flourishing. Precisely because the fragility of the human condition is often manifest within the field of medicine, Catholic health care is particularly called upon to embody the Church's vision of the human person both in the way it treats every individual as well as in the way it addresses today's challenges and technological advancements.

In this regard, I believe that unity and charity provide us with the necessary insight to evaluate what kind of change might be necessary in the future. Indeed, any change must be guided by a compass that can lead Catholic health care to safe harbor, ensuring that it remains faithful to its most authentic identity and never lacks the strength necessary to continue the healing ministry of Jesus. As you know, your daily efforts provide opportunities for our brothers and sisters to experience through you the love and mercy of Christ, who offers them hope and the prospect of new life. I thank you for your witness and your continued commitment to ensure that those in need will always find support and care.

Dear friends, as you begin this time of fellowship and reflection, I encourage you to continue collaborating closely with all people of good will, but especially with your bishops, so that, guided by the Spirit of wisdom and faithful to the Church's teaching, you may contribute to building up a lasting culture that recognizes the inherent value of life and supports those who suffer. Entrusting you and the Institutions you represent to the maternal intercession of Mary, Health of the Sick, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to those you serve.

From the Vatican, 18 May 2026

Leo P.P. XIV