



Equality, Encounter, Renewal

A Caritas commitment to the promotion of women's leadership and participation, based on the Holy Scriptures and Catholic Social Teaching values and principles

 **Caritas**
Internationalis

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Members of the CI Women’s Leadership, Equality and Participation Committee:

- Martha Skretteberg (Chair), Caritas Norway
- Patricia Adèle Félicité (Co-Chair), Caritas Ile Maurice
- Sr Regina Ignatia Aflah, Caritas Ghana
- Babita Pinto, Caritas India
- Maria Cristina dos Anjos da Conceição, Caritas Brazil
- Fr. Luis Carlos Aguilar, Caritas Costa Rica
- Rita Jarallah, Caritas Syria
- Karam Abi Yazbeck, Caritas MONA Regional Secretariat
- Jean Beil, Caritas North America Regional Secretariat
- Philomena Antonio, Caritas New Zealand
- Moira Monacelli, Caritas Internationalis
- Stephanie MacGillivray, Caritas Internationalis

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A – Foreword

Central to the proclamation and teaching of the Catholic Church is the fundamental truth of the innate dignity of every single person. And, at the heart of the life and ministry of the Catholic Church is the care and affection for the poor and most vulnerable in society, as she answers the call to serve, accompany, and defend those most in need. Christians and all believers embrace this call rooted in the revelation that we are all created in the image of God and equally loved by God. Indeed, recognising this truth through human means alone, all women and men, all people of good will, are encouraged and invited to share in the responsibility towards each other, a responsibility that necessarily includes a concern for our common home.

Despite the equal dignity of every human person, historically over the centuries, in so many aspects of life, women have not been allowed access to the same opportunities that men have had. Furthermore, besides experiencing a barrier to opportunity, women and girls have also disproportionately been innocent victims of violations against human dignity. These cases are the most serious expression of the disregard for the God-given dignity of women.

The systematic social and cultural exclusion of women can also be seen when looking at the face of leadership in the world today. Women still do not enjoy balanced representation in leadership and decision-making in many governments and organisations, even though women make up half of the world's population.

This booklet, Equality, Encounter, Renewal, focuses on the question of leadership. It lays out a scriptural and Catholic social teaching basis for the full participation of women in society. Then, from that strong theological foundation it calls for an increased effort and an increased collaboration among Caritas, the local Church, and local communities to work together to empower women.

Informed by a spirit of synodality, this booklet invites us to ar-

range for opportunities of listening and dialogue, to enter into moments of encounter, where the situations of women can be heard. The fruit of these encounters include a deeper understanding of what the issues are, where the gaps are and how to respond to them. Most certainly the responses will incorporate projects, programmes and policies which create sustainable change.

Throughout the booklet are stories and examples of the good work that is already being done across the entire Caritas Confederation to promote the leadership and participation of women. These examples are indications of best practices and signs of hope that can light the way for others to progress on this journey of encounter and renewal.

Through Jesus Christ, every human person is fundamentally connected to the other. None can achieve full human development if others are lacking basic opportunities. So, the holistic development of the human person necessarily includes the social, economic, political, cultural, personal and spiritual development of women and girls. This booklet demonstrates the effort and the urgency needed to overcome the current imbalances and injustices, requiring committed and collaborative action.

The mosaic of humanity includes the diversity of persons—women and girls, men and boys. The work and mission of integral human development embraces the unity and diversity of every human person. This booklet is a timely contribution to the collaboration of integral human development by giving us tools, which enable us to engage and to act in solidarity with the poorest women and girls. With this help, we all can ensure that the equality of women and men, in society and in leadership, is not just a hope, but, in fact, can become a reality.

The meaning of integral human development is defined by

the words of Jesus himself: 'I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10:10). The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development accepts these words as its mandate and is committed to helping those who experience poverty, injustice, violence and marginalisation by increasing the lived experience of the enjoyment of human rights, health and justice, in all aspects of public and social life, and in our common home. The task of promoting the God-given dignity of all is large and requires us to work together. We are thankful for all the work of Caritas Internationalis and for the contribution that Equality, Encounter, Renewal offers to our shared mission.

Sr. Alessandra Smerilli F.M.A.

Secretary

Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

→ CAR - Agricultural project in Bohoro village near Bozoum, Central African Republic.





↓ Sheltering from the cold in an informal settlement in Lebanon. 17 December 2013.

B – Preface

When women can transmit their gifts, the world finds itself more united and more peaceful. Therefore, an achievement for women is an achievement for all humanity.

POPE FRANCIS' HOMILY AT THE MASS
FOR SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD,
1 JANUARY 2020

Everyone – women and men, girls and boys – is created in the image and likeness of God and with unalienable human dignity. It follows, therefore, that women and girls should enjoy the same rights and opportunities as men and boys, wherever they are. In keeping with this, the Caritas Confederation is committed to promoting women's leadership and participation throughout the work of all our Member Organisations and has integrated this commitment in the Confederation's Strategic Framework.

Despite some progress in advancing women's empowerment, women and girls in many parts of the world are still denied certain fundamental rights, including access to education, basic healthcare and livelihoods.

We in Caritas witness this reality every day in over 200 countries and territories where we are working. Challenged by the injustice of this, we work to overcome the obstacles women and girls face, when working to eliminate poverty and promote the integral development of all people.

This booklet has been developed to be used as a tool to raise awareness of the Church's teaching on women's role in soci-

ety, and encourage listening, dialogue and learning between Church leaders, Caritas and communities.

It has been enriched with testimonies and good practices gathered from the entire Confederation to inspire meaningful and sustainable actions towards enhancing the leadership of women. We are grateful to those who contributed and to the Women's Committee which coordinated this work.

Thank you to all who contribute to this mission every day in every part of the world.

As we journey to 2030, working together as one human family, we invite everyone to embrace Caritas's commitment to the empowerment of women and join together on this journey, sisters and brothers all.

Alistair Dutton
Secretary General

C – Introduction

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ... God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

[GENESIS 1:27; 31]

The full participation of all of the people of God is crucial in Caritas's mission to build a future characterised by equality, solidarity and fraternal cooperation. Encounters of listening and dialogue between men and women across the Confederation, the Church and society form the foundation of this work, the goal of which is to embark upon a journey of renewal.

Renewal is linked with the need to read the signs of the times in which we are living.

This means knowing and understanding the mission of Caritas, and then creatively finding ways to fulfil it in order to achieve the common goal of the integral human development and well-being of all people. At the heart of this mission is the innate human dignity of each individual and the whole of humanity. Caritas's mission to serve the poor by protecting, accompanying and defending them is made possible when we engage in reading the signs of the times, as we open ourselves to mutual encounter with the poor, marginalised and vulnerable.

Caritas Internationalis is committed to the prioritisation of women's leadership, equality and participation at local, region-

al and global levels across the Confederation and in the communities Caritas serves. This can be achieved through raising the visibility and voices of women, creating opportunities for capacity strengthening, and removing barriers preventing women from participating in leadership and decision-making.

Recognising that today there is still an imbalance in society where inequalities exist between men and women in families, local communities, economic, political and social spheres, Caritas Internationalis has identified the promotion of women's leadership, equality and participation as a priority for its work. The increased participation of women in leadership roles aims to bring the voices, skills, knowledge and capabilities of women into the spaces where decisions are made in order to improve the effectiveness of the Confederation as a whole.

The reflections offered in this booklet are intended to provide a theological and scriptural lens through which to increase understanding of how the Church's teaching supports women's leadership, to raise awareness of the richness and value of women's role and place in society, and to encounter and listen to the lived experiences of women across the world.

During the period January-April 2022 Caritas Internationalis carried out two surveys on the state and experiences of women's leadership, equality and participation in the Confederation. The first of the eight key recommendations of the Survey Report¹ was: *Share information, tools and experiences to increase peer learning among Member Organisations, and strengthen dialogue with Bishops' Conferences and communities on the participation of women in leadership and decision making.*

Additionally, In October 2022, Caritas Internationalis and the Holy See hosted a global conference under the patronage of UNESCO, titled, *The Full Face of Humanity: Women in leadership for a just society*².

The conference aimed to show, on the one hand, how poverty, violence, and lack of access to education and basic services create a culture that excludes women and perpetuates cultural, political and institutional barriers. On the other hand, the testimonies, good practices and expertise shared during the conference demonstrated that women's empowerment, education and participation in leadership and decision making at all levels make a concrete contribution to removing these barriers and facilitate a culture of encounter in which women's experiences and expertise are valued and heard. Both the surveys and the global conference on women's leadership concluded that a cultural paradigm shift and political will are mutually required to concretely address the causes that prevent women from being empowered while at the same time enhancing their leadership capacity for a just society.

The booklet aims to serve, guide and accompany Caritas and communities in this work, by facilitating dialogue and action in the promotion of women's leadership, equality and participation at all levels.

Women in time to come will do much.

MARY WARD (1585-1645)

↓ Women working in their rice paddy fields in Orissa in India.





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↑ Ebola in Congo. 20 November 2019.



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↑ Children sit in class in the Caritas-supported Bulakipur Lighthouse school in Dinajpur District, Bangladesh. 8 September 2017.

D – Purpose and structure

» Purpose

The purpose of this booklet is for it to be used as a tool for Caritas staff and volunteers, the local Church and communities to increase individual, organisational, and community understanding about the Church's teaching on and support for women's equal participation in leadership and decision-making at all levels.

The booklet is intended to raise awareness of women's capacities for leadership and decision-making, the barriers to leadership which women experience, and how it is possible to overcome them. The exploration of scriptural and social teachings is accompanied by testimonies, stories and examples of good practice from across the Confederation in order that readers can see how the Church's teachings can be applied and be put into action in a range of contexts.

Considering the contemporary global situation of post-COVID recovery, new and protracted conflicts like those in Ukraine, Syria and the Middle East, Venezuela and the Democratic Republic of Congo, natural disasters, and the impact of climate change and food insecurity, many interlinking factors emerge as causes of the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and emerging forms of poverty linked to these phenomena which affect women in particular ways. At the same time, women rise through such challenges as key actors on the front line in the protection of families and communities.

This historical moment is an opportunity for the Confederation and wider society to open the door to women's leadership and participation so that, piece by piece, we can build a better future for all people, together.

This increased understanding and raised awareness of the reality which women face today will lead the Confederation to engage in dialogue and concrete action to promote women's participation and leadership in specific contexts.

The desired outcome of engagement with this booklet is the facilitation of listening, dialogue and action with the purpose of creating opportunities and removing barriers for women to participate in leadership and decision-making from the grassroots to governance levels across the Confederation and beyond.

» Structure

The booklet is structured in five sections. The first section introduces the spirituality of women's participation through three principal interlinking themes: equality, encounter, and renewal. This is paired with an analysis of women's role and place in society in light of the Church's teachings, explored through these themes.

With equality, encounter and renewal in mind, and informed by the Magisterium and Catholic Social Teaching, the following two sections examine what is meant by "women's leadership" and why Caritas views the promotion of women's participation as a priority for the Confederation and society.

This leads to a reflection on the signs of our times and a suggested pathway to renewal for the Confederation, characterised by solidarity and community between and among all people.



↑ Reaching out during COVID-19 in the Philippines. March 2021.

E – The spirituality of women’s leadership

Woman’s difference is no longer considered as inferiority but rather as a characteristic value.

ST EDITH STEIN, ESSAYS ON WOMAN (1996)

This section will explore what the Catholic Church teaches about the spirituality of women’s leadership. The interconnected themes of equality, encounter, and renewal offer a lens through which one can reflect on these teachings, examine the role and place of women across differing social and cultural contexts, and be guided in work to remove barriers, create opportunities, and promote equality between men and women.

» Equality

When it comes to setting women free from every kind of exploitation and domination, the Gospel contains an ever relevant message which goes back to the attitude of Jesus Christ himself. Transcending the established norms of his own culture, Jesus treated women with openness, respect, acceptance and tenderness. In this way he honoured the dignity which women have always possessed according to God’s plan and in his love. ... It is natural to ask ourselves: how much of his message has been heard and acted upon?

LETTER OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO WOMEN, 1995

Equality between men and women is a full expression of the image of God. The scriptural and social teachings of the Church illustrate that women and men have unique gifts and differences of character which should be equally appreciated for the specific role they play in contributing to the common good. However, women’s role and place in society has not always reflected their equal God-given dignity. Historically limiting social structures and norms have created barriers preventing women from enjoying equal opportunities to participate in and contribute to society. This has resulted in inequalities built upon an imbalance of power.

In contrast, Jesus led by example to demonstrate the spirituality of women’s participation by encouraging their active presence in society through listening and dialogue (Luke 10:38-42), encounter (John 4:1-42); service (Mark 14:3-9) and leadership (Mark 16:1-11; John 20:11-18).

↓ Volunteering at the Caritas Logistics Centre in Lublin, Poland, following the start of the war in Ukraine. 8 March 2022.



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LISTENING AND DIALOGUE

Luke 10:38-42

Jesus Visits Martha and Mary

³⁸Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴²there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

ENCOUNTER

John 4:21-26, 39-41

Jesus Talks with a Samaritan Woman

²¹“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” ²⁵The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” ²⁶Then Jesus declared,



© Patrick Nicholson/Caritas

↑ Women taking part in a child protection workshop in Myanmar. 23 November 2017.

“I, the one speaking to you—I am he.” ...

³⁹Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹And because of his words many more became believers.

SERVICE

Mark 14:3-9

The Anointing at Bethany

³While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? ⁵For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. ⁶But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷

For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

LEADERSHIP

Mark 16:9-11

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

⁹Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. ¹⁰She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. ¹¹But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

Each of these examples teach us that encounter, inclusion and collaboration between men and women generate positive attitudes and relations, increase faith, and encourage openness in service and love towards the “other”. They demonstrate how, at the most basic level, equality between men and women is an indispensable component of total human flourishing. Reflecting on Jesus’s example can therefore help us to understand the spirituality of women’s active presence and participation at all levels of society, and how we can act today to bring about change and progress in the creation of equal opportunities for women and men.

Society always has the potential for such change, but for this change to be genuine, effective and sustainable it requires the active participation of all members of that society, through both heartfelt commitment and deliberate planning, collaboration, and action. In other words, in order to be successful, we must convert hearts and minds to the cause of concretely promoting equality between men and women.



↑ Working together to respond to the earthquake in Syria. 1 March 2023.

» **His Eminence Cardinal Maurice E. Piat, Bishop of Port Louis, Mauritius**

Through Patricia (Director of Caritas Mauritius), I discovered the contribution of the female genius to weld a team together and to build a service to the poor that is not only effective but also fruitful, in the sense that the poor themselves are able to participate in mutual aid and service to others. With her colleagues, she has developed several projects that are effective and respond to the real needs of the poor, such as the early learning centres that prepare the youngest children to enter primary school, the “life skills” training programme that helps to restore the confidence of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are looking for a job. Under her leadership, Caritas’ services have become more professional while retaining a human touch and a sense of closeness to the poor.

I remember that when we wanted to put into practice the preferential option for the poor decided by the diocesan Synod, Patricia and her Caritas colleagues succeeded in obtaining the collaboration of the parish priests in a way that I myself had never obtained. This opened my eyes to the intangible but valuable contribution of female genius in the administration and mobilisation needed to advance the service of the poor. This is why it seems so important to me to call women to positions of leadership in the Church as well as in society. They have a unique contribution to make.

» **Mareta Lavea Leitupo, Communications Advisor at Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand; Caritas Oceania Youth Alliance Chair**

Since starting at Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, I have been guided by the wonderful leadership of women both within this organisation as well as across the Caritas Oceania network. These women hold various roles within the Church and workplace and they have poured out their hearts in service to the communities that they serve. From our Directors, the Chairs of our Boards, the team leaders, and even the women who lead the projects that we support, each of these women have served their communities with a deep love and passion that is special and unique.

As a young person starting out in my career, the impact that this has made in both my professional and personal life is monumental. I believe God has uniquely gifted women to feel things deeply and to care passionately about the world around us – from our families, our workplace, and our communities – and the ability to lead with this gift is a strength rather than a weakness. As I continue to grow in my role of service to the community and to the Church, the model of leadership from these women continues to guide me and reminds me of a Samoan proverb: O le ala i le pule o le tautua – the way to leadership is through service. And serving with our hearts is something powerful that we cannot underestimate.

» **Anahit Mkhoyan, Director, Caritas Georgia**

When we talk about equality we concentrate more on women’s empowerment and forget about educating and preparing men to operate in a more equal setting. For example, in Armenia we are investing in educating male social workers to work with people with disabilities. If we have more men working as social workers, gradually the understanding that social work is a woman’s job will diminish. We can do this for many of the jobs that are considered women’s jobs.

We need to work in the direction of making men and women allies, instead of perpetuating the idea that someone is taking someone else’s role. Caritas needs women in leadership because we need balance at all levels, and equality is the path to the balance. At the same time, we, women, have to acknowledge that we are not allowed to avoid taking more responsibility if God calls us for an action, because He is always there to help us to overcome the challenges.

Acknowledging the existence of inequality is the first step towards building a culture of togetherness where women and men work as allies in pursuit of the common good. To assist such a change of heart, we can look to the very roots of our God-given existence.

St Edith Stein posed the question: Did the Lord at any time make a distinction between men and women? This simple yet profound answer follows: ‘In His love He knew and knows now no distinction.’³

Jesus’ teachings and actions are a witness of this unconditional love, and demonstrated what we are told in Galatians 3:28: ‘There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’ Similarly, today, we see a positive example in the Church’s leadership, where we hear Pope Francis speak and teach about the spirituality of women’s leadership, but also pairing this with concrete actions, such as the promotion of women into leadership and decision-making roles within the Holy See’s own structures.

Women, so often discriminated against and excluded from positions of responsibility, are seen in the Gospels to play a leading role in the history of revelation.

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR THE FIFTH WORLD DAY OF THE POOR, 14 NOVEMBER 2021

» Encounter

Nor is equality achieved by an abstract proclamation that “all men and women are equal”. Instead, it is the result of the conscious and careful cultivation of fraternity.

POPE FRANCIS, FRATELLI TUTTI 104

Jesus' interaction with those whom society did not treat as equals, including women, showed how encountering voices and experiences which differ to our own is the first step on the path of solidarity. Pope Francis has treated such encounter as a priority, and in *Fratelli Tutti* he holds up the parable of the Good Samaritan as an exemplary model for how to build a culture of encounter based on care, love and openness towards the “other” – the person who is different, marginalised, vulnerable and in need.

Differences always help you grow; ... Being afraid of differences diminishes us ⁴.

POPE FRANCIS, THE PATH TO CHANGE

In recent times, we have seen a coarsening of public discourse which can make the encounter of even minor differences a hostile experience. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges we face today is how we accept and live well with difference within and across societies, and how we can grow, both as individuals and as a society.

According to everything which we learn from personal experience and the history of salvation, the Lord's method is to form persons through other persons. ... Persons are used as instruments to awaken and nurture the divine spark. Thus, natural and supernatural factors reveal that even in the life of grace, “it is not good that the man should be alone”.

ST EDITH STEIN, ESSAYS ON WOMAN (1996)

We learn about equality between men and women from the Scriptures and the Saints. However, the complementarity of men and women has not always been extended to and acted out all aspects of life. In particular, when it comes to leadership and participation in decision-making, women have historically and systematically been excluded and marginalised, closing off the possibility of true communion through lack of encounter with the full image of God.

» **Martha Rubiano Skretteberg, Secretary General of Caritas Norway, Chair of the Caritas Internationalis Women's Leadership, Equality and Participation Committee**

Barriers exist in society at large, in the home and in the boardrooms. I have worked in leadership positions throughout almost all my career in Norway. When I had small children my employers and the Norwegian welfare system was crucial in allowing me to combine being a mother and a leader. Removing structural barriers must be a priority and this requires cultural change.

The scriptural and social teachings of the Catholic Church are helpful for understanding difference and how we can engage in respectful encounter today.

Our task as Caritas, as the Church, as communities, and as individuals, is to translate these teachings into witness and action in order to facilitate encounter and fraternal cooperation. Truly establishing the rightful role and place of women in society means working together, in a spirit of synodality, to find unity in our diversity, recognising and accepting that “it is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18) across all societal structures. By implication, it is also therefore not good that the woman should be alone!

Building a culture of encounter and equality therefore means developing cooperation and collaboration between men and women which permeates society at all levels, including in the home, in communities, in schools, in the workplace, and in governance.

» **Sr Mariana Tevurega SM, Coordinator for Women Ministry Desk, Caritas Fiji**

As a coordinator for Women Ministry desk I am strengthened by the foundational principles of Catholic Social Teaching. As a leader I must have a compassionate heart towards all of the women I am called to serve. There is also a need to have an inclusive approach and remind myself to be broad minded and strategic in my thinking. For me, the life and dignity of every woman is valuable, and it is important to connect with all women on the ground because they deserve to be heard, and freed from suppression.



» **Myriam Koudhai, Volunteer, Caritas Tunisia**

My active involvement as a cultural mediator for the promotion of social cohesion between sub-Saharan migrants and Tunisians has allowed me to become more open. I discovered the richness of inter-culturalism lived in fraternity, which energises me to work with others for social cohesion in my neighbourhood. I am always inspired and amazed to see the humility of people of good will working together to create a more just and fraternal world.

↑ Myriam Koudhai leading a workshop. February 2022.

← A Caritas Venezuela volunteer doctor attends to the needs of a young patient. July 2018.

» Renewal

A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal. ... Simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress.

POPE FRANCIS, LAUDATO SI' 202; 194

The Caritas vision for women's leadership, characterised by equality, encounter and fruitful collaboration between men and women at all levels of society, requires entering into a process of renewal.

The financial crisis of 2007-08 provided an opportunity to develop a new economy, more attentive to ethical principles, and new ways of regulating speculative financial practices and virtual wealth. But the response to the crisis did not include rethinking the outdated criteria which continue to rule the world.

POPE FRANCIS, LAUDATO SI' 189

The ongoing lack of equality in leadership and participation between men and women suggests that some of these "outdated criteria which continue to rule the world" have also contributed to the historical imbalance of male and female participation in leadership and participation in decision making.

Vocations other than domestic had been exercised for centuries almost exclusively by men. It was natural, therefore, that these vocations assumed a masculine stamp and that training for them was adapted to the masculine nature. ... Legislative and administrative functions also require direct feminine collaboration. ... Of course, general and formal perspectives cannot be disregarded either, and, therefore, a collaboration of men and women can be especially fruitful here.

ST EDITH STEIN, ESSAYS ON WOMAN (1996)

» **Sr Alessandra Smerilli, speaking at *The Full Face of Humanity: Women in leadership for a just society*, an international conference of Caritas Internationalis and the Holy See, held at the UNESCO Headquarters on 27-28 October 2022**

We are called to practice a new form of caring, attentive, present, engaging and listening leadership, whose fundamental characteristic is the ability to care for people while leaving room for their autonomy: the new leadership stimulates collaboration and focuses on interpreting real needs, involving the members of the organisation. It is built in the partnership generated by listening, moving from a culture of control to the blossoming of relationships. A caring leadership considers the balance of all dimensions of a person's life: work, family, networks of solidarity, expression and sharing of faith. A "leadership of care" thinks of the common good, the good of each and all.

The current historic moment of planning for a post-COVID-19 world has given us a fresh opportunity to creatively rethink the "outdated criteria" and the "masculine stamp" by which humanity has lived for so long. As Caritas we are presented with a unique opportunity to realise cultural change across the Confederation when it comes to equality between men and women at the service of integral human development.

The path of renewal and progress for the Caritas Confederation includes encouraging and strengthening the capacities of men and women to be able to equally participate together in leadership and decision making at all levels. It means empowering all people through sensitisation and dialogue to look beyond established norms and behaviours and encounter each

other with fresh perspectives. The success of this approach will manifest itself gradually but concretely in the evidence of greater numbers of women in positions of leadership and involved in decision-making processes, but also through cultural change in homes, workplaces, communities and societies in which women do not currently experience equal opportunities.

The desired outcomes in any work towards renewal must include quantifiable targets, concrete actions and visible change; however, it will also mean entrusting ourselves to effects like respect, dignity and equality which may be felt, rather than seen, or which might take longer to manifest themselves.

We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread. Furthermore, such actions can restore our sense of self-esteem; they can enable us to live more fully and to feel that life on earth is worthwhile.

POPE FRANCIS, LAUDATO SI' 212



← Sr Smerilli speaking at *The Full Face of Humanity: Women in leadership for a just society* – Conference held at UNESCO, October 2022.

» **Kirsty Robertson (Chief Executive General Secretary, Caritas Australia), Mavis Tito (National Director, Caritas Papua New Guinea), Suliana Falemaka (National Director, Caritas Tonga), Sophie Jenkins (Strategy and Performance Associate Director, Caritas Australia)**

In Caritas Oceania, we have a proud history of women flourishing in positions of leadership, reflecting the deep wealth of experience, knowledge and capabilities of women in our region. This also reflects the openness of the men in our region to “make space” for women in decision making, leadership and ministry, and to do so from a mind-set of abundance.

As women who hold leadership positions in our region we know that genuine equality requires more than a seat at the table. It requires systemic change to create a world in which all people’s gifts can be recognised and respected. That is why most of our Caritas Oceania Members have programmes focusing on women leadership in our local communities; and why we continue to prioritise the voices of women and girls in our collective regional advocacy. Together the member organisations of Caritas Oceania are actively and intentionally working to ensure that the dignity of women is honoured and their gifts are given space to flourish for the sake of the Church’s life and mission.

→ Cotton farming in Chad. 2015.

» **Development and Peace – Caritas Canada - Developing policies on equality**

To reaffirm its commitment to equity and the transformative role of women in development, in 2019 Caritas Canada updated and renewed its policy on equality. The goal of the policy is to ensure that women in Canada and the Global South can assume full agency in building a more just and sustainable world for everyone, including men and boys.

The principles of the Catholic Church’s social teaching are central to this policy, focusing on integral human development that encompasses the well-being of every person in all their dimensions: economic, political, social, ecological and spiritual.

With the renewal of this policy, Development & Peace has recommitted to supporting women in all their diversity—race, class, education, physical ability, religion and language—by encouraging their inclusion and meaningful participation. They have also committed to transforming power relations, addressing the root causes of injustice and creating opportunities by eliminating barriers.



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↑ Students walking to school following the earthquake in Nepal. 2016.

F – What does “women’s leadership” mean?

Everyone has something to contribute, because they have their life experiences, they look at things from a different standpoint and they have their own concerns, abilities and insights.

POPE FRANCIS, AMORIS LAETITIA (2016) 138

Leadership can be exercised at all levels, both within and outside of organisational structures. Examples of this can be seen in formal leadership, such as holding positions within organisational structures, and informal leadership, manifested through influence, voice, participation in decision-making and agency. Understandings of different kinds of leadership are also informed by culture and context, and in some situations, being able to demonstrate agency through active participation may be just as valuable as holding a formal leadership position or title.

From Jesus’s lived example to the present day, the Church’s leadership has long understood that women’s thought and approach often differs to that of men, and that this is something to be welcomed. This was notably articulated in Pope **John Paul II**’s concept of the **‘feminine genius’**⁶. However, the established criteria by which we have traditionally assessed leadership and decision-making has unfortunately resulted in hampering both the Church and society’s openness to including women in these positions.

Women and men were created equal in the image of God, but, importantly, are not the same. Rather, their differences complement each other and create a harmonious balance of contributions to the common good. Therefore, when we speak of

“women’s leadership”, we are placing a focus on the particular gifts and skills which women bring to leadership and decision-making, while also recognising that women’s equality to men as leaders and participants in society is not yet a lived reality for many in the Confederation and across the world.

Finding unity in diversity means cultivating communities characterised by the participation of all members working towards a common purpose. The purpose of creating more opportunities for women is therefore to recognise how the participation of women in all levels of leadership and decision making would benefit the whole of society.

↓ Working with vulnerable Syrian families.



© Caritas Internationalis

» Caroline Howlett, Volunteer, Caritas KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

The same compassion seen in those women Jesus met along the way of the Cross is being demonstrated by the women working in the many Caritas projects in our communities today. In the communities I have worked with, most of the households are female-led and live in areas with high poverty and unemployment levels. Despite the challenges, I have witnessed many of these women taking responsibility not only for raising their own children but also the many other vulnerable children and families living in the community.

These women don’t see themselves as leaders, nor are they held up as leaders in their communities. They do not get the salaries or the benefits that we associate with community leaders but they personify some of the greatest leadership qualities displayed by Jesus: Servant leadership. By their actions, they are “Compassion in Action”. They transform lives and help everyone, no matter their circumstances, to live with dignity and hope.

» Rita Jarallah, Deputy Communication Director, Caritas Syria

Since Caritas Syria was able to restart its activities following the beginning of war in the country, the female face has been strongly present in this work.

This is because women have an influential presence and an important role in assessing and implementing humanitarian projects to alleviate suffering of the affected, displaced and vulnerable people and support them to face difficult conditions caused by absurd war and unjust economic sanctions imposed on Syria.

» Catherine Mella Quiroz, Head of the MAGRE Programme, Caritas Chile⁶

My experience as head of the MAGRE programme has undoubtedly been very enriching; I have felt recognised and valued for my abilities as a professional. Understanding that disasters do not affect everyone equally, that needs are different for each person, and that women are the most affected in all areas, has allowed us to establish lines of work that give value to the dignity and equality of women.

Throughout this process, the key has been the protagonist participation of women in their territories, who, from their knowledge and capacities, have led decision-making spaces, traditionally linked to men, such as the Local Emergency Committees.

Despite often facing discrimination within these spaces, women have contributed through their leadership in the construction of resilient communities, which has been highly valued by the authorities in the territories.



↑ Community Management for the reduction of forest fires, construction of risk map – Canal de Chacao Community, Quilpué, Chile.

© Caritas Chile

The COVID-19 pandemic emphasised the benefits of women's participation in leadership and decision-making for families and communities, giving further positive exposure to women's leadership and decision-making capabilities.

A series of Caritas webinars on Women and COVID-19, held in March 2021, bore witness to women's leadership, decision-making and participation at the frontline, in educating and ensuring the health, safety and nutrition of their families and communities, and in providing an effective response at senior governance levels.

» **Cristina Pancho, Coordinator Human Mobility, Caritas Ecuador**

83% of the Caritas Ecuador mobility team are women with multidisciplinary skills and backgrounds. This meant that during COVID-19 Caritas Ecuador was able to give humanitarian and emotional support to migrant and impoverished families by embarking on a path of encounter and listening. Caritas Ecuador has a female face and the work of these women has been more valued in the time of the pandemic.

↓ Responding to COVID-19 in Ecuador. March 2021.



A second webinar series held in March 2022, as part of the Caritas Celebrates Women initiative focused on the role of women as constructors of a new humanity through their central role in building dialogue, hope and solidarity.

These expressions of witness are important outward signs of the Confederation's recognition that women's equal participation in leadership and decision-making is transformative for society as a whole in a post-COVID-19 world.

» **Shiba Mary D'Rozario, Communications Manager, Caritas Bangladesh**

Religious belief restricted Rohingya women's mobility and their access to life-saving assistance, services, information and decision-making. The women staff of Caritas were active in the field despite the high risk of contracting Coronavirus. They worked to raise awareness of COVID-19 and hygiene measures, trained women in the prevention of exploitation and abuse, and provided counselling.

↓ Responding to COVID-19 in Bangladesh. March 2021.



» **Hellen Chanikare, National Programme Coordinator, Caritas Uganda**

80% of frontline health workers in Uganda are women. Women also play a great part as caregivers ensuring that preventive measures are adhered to at family and community levels. However, women also experienced higher levels of domestic violence, limited access to medical care, especially for pregnant and lactating women, financial barriers and unemployment. Caritas Uganda engages with district leadership to ensure women's representation to voice issues which are overlooked.

» **Msgr Héctor Fabio Henao Gaviria, former Director, Caritas Colombia**

More than 9 million people, most of whom are women, have been affected by the internal conflict in Colombia. Women have shown their ability to overcome barriers so that they can work in the community, playing a central role in reconciliation and implementation of the peace process in Colombia, particularly at the grassroots level in their work with victims and ex-combatants. Caritas Colombia is working to facilitate women's participation in peacebuilding which contributes to strengthening democracy and local development, and increases their capacity to do advocacy in this field.

» **Maria Nyman, Caritas Europa, Secretary General**

Inclusion and diversity make for more effective workplaces, because it allows for bringing in different perspectives and experiences into the reflections. We cannot afford to miss out on that. The promotion of women in leadership requires commitment, concrete action, buy in and support at all levels. Mentoring and peer support programmes are essential to support women in leadership positions.



↑ Caritas volunteers serve a meal to refugees in Bidi bidi camp, Uganda, on International Refugee Day. 20 June 2018.

G – Why should Caritas promote women's leadership?

Who would deny the intellect and will of girls? That would be questioning their full humanity.

ST EDITH STEIN, *ESSAYS ON WOMAN* (1996)

The promotion of women's leadership is a necessity for Caritas because of the imbalances which exist in various ways when it comes to the participation of men and women in the Confederation and in communities around the world.

Caritas Internationalis is called to show solidarity with, promote the integral human development of, and always choose the preferential option for the poor. **Albert Nolan OP, a Dominican whose theology was inspired by his work with people at the grassroots,** reminds us that, **'God has a special concern for the poor not because of their virtue but because of their suffering. ... Theologising at the site of struggle seeks to find the good news of God as acting and saving in the experience of suffering and struggle at a particular time and place.'** ⁸

Acknowledging that women suffer a poverty of participation in leadership and decision-making, it becomes evident that inequalities between men and women exist not because of any lack of women's capabilities to lead, but rather because of historical misuses of power resulting in the exclusion of wom-

en from leadership positions. In the worst cases, such power imbalances lead to discrimination and violence, which in turn breed reticence and fear. However, even in countries where women's education and employment levels are high, there has been a lack of attention given to their specific needs to be able to progress to and remain in leadership positions at various levels within society.

The promotion of women's leadership and participation therefore requires the promotion of encounter with experiences and expertise which have for too long been excluded from the grassroots to governance levels.

↓ Learning new skills as part of recovery from the humanitarian crisis in Geddo, Somalia. 27 May 2017.



© Enigma Images / Amunga Eshuchi / Trócaire

» Marina Osmonalieva, Regional Director, Caritas Kyrgyzstan

Seven years ago, the leaders of the Catholic Church in Kyrgyzstan believed in and entrusted me with the development of Caritas Kyrgyzstan, supporting me in implementing my ideas and vision of what challenges in society the Church can respond to. God created man and woman equal but rewarded each of them with their own characteristics. I believe that women have a special ability to recognise the needs. In Central Asia, we live in a rather patriarchal society, with strict rules which strongly affect women and their demonstration of any initiative and activity. But even under these conditions, women show their potential and strength of spirit in the struggle for the freedom of who to be and what to do. In the period that I have worked in Caritas Kyrgyzstan, I have been fortunate to meet and work together with many women. Every time I think back on each one of them, I am proud to be a part of the response to the challenges and problems we gave together, and how we dedicated ourselves to a common goal.

» Sr Regina Ignatia Aflah, Coordinator (Human Rights & Justice) and Safeguarding Officer, Caritas Ghana

Despite efforts to call for women's participation in leadership positions, the call is yet to be fully realised in Africa. In all probability, this absence is not due to lack of qualified and competent women, but of society's inability to recognise and reward the full potential of women. It is not simply a question of social class distinction, but of culture and tradition. Looking at women as builders of the future implies advocacy for and investment in modifications that support the development of women by addressing issues of unconscious bias and enlisting the support of both women and men in developing solutions. Both the scriptural and social teachings of the Church underscore the need for women to be acknowledged as builders of the future, who walk together for equality, encounter and renewal. We owe it to ourselves and future generations of young women to truly take our position as global leaders to build the future.



© Pia Zanetti - Caritas Switzerland

← Community education in South Sudan. 2009.

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

MATTHEW 25:40 – THE JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS

The sentiment of Matthew 25:40 is echoed by **Albert Nolan OP** when he suggests that **‘Any preaching of the Gospel that tries to remain neutral with regard to issues that deeply affect the lives of people, like the issue of the rich and the poor, is in fact taking sides. It is taking sides with the status quo, even if that is not its intention, because its neutrality prevents change.’** 9

Neutrality on the subject of women’s leadership and participation would therefore be to ignore the fact that it is an ongoing and problematic issue across the world. Ignoring it diminishes the possibility for cultural change and risks contributing to increasing the suffering and discrimination which women experience. Naming it confesses it as an inequality and makes concrete our desire to change it.

If, instead of neutrality, the starting point for all people were to be the Gospel values of the equal dignity and sanctity of each individual, manifested through respectful encounter and

greater opportunities for participation, there is real potential for true progress in the cultivation of communities and societies which are characterised by inclusive, diverse and effective leadership.

This would be a society which is truly enriched with the gifts of all of humanity.

I’ve been enriched by the relationships I’ve always had with women. Even as an adult, I learned that women see things differently from men. Because when you have a decision that needs to be taken, when you face a problem, it’s important to listen to both. 10

POPE FRANCIS, THE PATH TO CHANGE

» **Sr Maria de Lurdes Lodi Rissini mscs, National Coordinator, Caritas South Africa**

In this day and age, there is absolutely no reason for the exclusion of women from any sphere of influence. It is therefore essential for the world to create a conducive environment where women’s leadership will not only be talked about but will be seen to flourish and thrive for the betterment and the change that the world desires and needs eagerly to turn things around for the benefit of all humanity.

→ Responding to COVID-19 in South Africa. March 2021.



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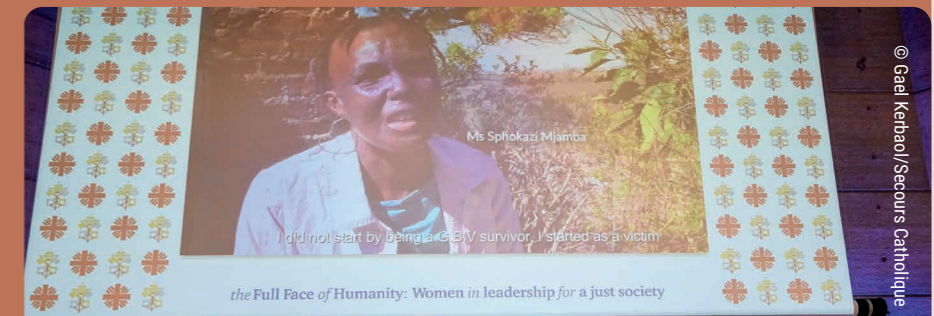
» **Sean Callahan, CEO, Catholic Relief Services (CRS)**

We must educate those currently in leadership in society and the Church about the contributions women make, and how they strengthen the social fabric of our communities and faith. CRS has implemented the “REDI” programme, which promotes respect, equity, diversity and inclusion. Next steps will also include women presenting to bishops and Bishops’ Conferences so that the hierarchy can see women as the face of leadership at different levels of society.

» **Masiphunge Women Empowerment Programme – Caritas Mthatha/Catholic Development Centre, South Africa**

In March 2018 Caritas Mthatha/Catholic Development Centre initiated a programme called Masiphunge Women Empowerment Programme. The programme was implemented in partnership with Umtata Women Support Centre. Masiphunge is a Xhosa word meaning “Come, let’s have a cup of tea together”. The increase in violence against women and femicide, coupled with the position of women in society, made Caritas Mthatha/Catholic Development Centre see the idea of bringing women together over a cup of tea to enhance lead-

ership skills, provide a platform for women’s participation and ensure that women have an equal space in all matters of society. The Masiphunge Women Empowerment Programme is not just a talking shop; women really take up leadership responsibilities and increase their participation in community events with a purpose. Those who come from Masiphunge ensure that they too must be counted in the development of their communities, in the fight against drugs, teenage pregnancy, violence against women and femicide. The Masiphunge programme has now been adopted by the National Development Agency and the Department of Social Development. The programme has spread to seven communities, and men have also joined some sessions.



© Gael Kerhaol/Secours Catholique

→ A video about the Masiphunge Project is shown at The Full Face of Humanity: Women in leadership for a just society – Conference held at UNESCO, October 2022.



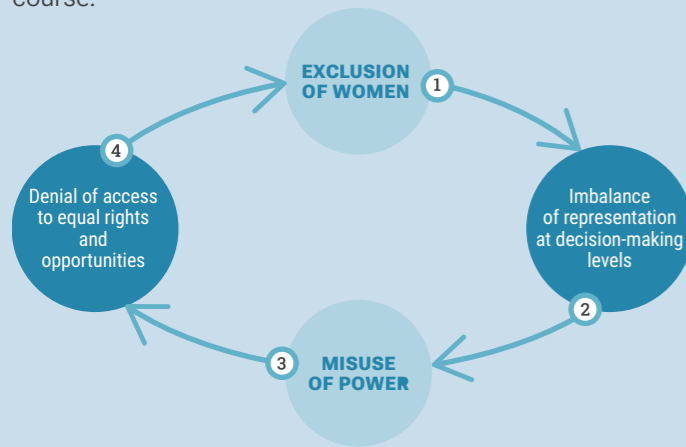
H – The signs of the times: where are we today?

Similarly, the organisation of societies worldwide is still far from reflecting clearly that women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men. We say one thing with words, but our decisions and reality tell another story. Indeed, “doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights.

POPE FRANCIS, FRATELLI TUTTI, 23

Today, many women across the Caritas Confederation and in the communities which Caritas serves do not yet enjoy equal opportunities for participation in leadership and decision making.

The perpetuation of such inequality often takes the recurring course:



This negative cycle continues to be a reality today; however, social and cultural shifts in recent years have yielded a promising and palpable sense of increased awareness and growing openness both in the Church and in society more generally to women’s leadership, and the reform and renewal required to fully realise this.

The imperturbability of the Church resides in her ability to harmonise the unconditional preservation of eternal truths with an unmatched elasticity of adjustment to the circumstances and challenges of changing times. ... Thus we can see today that ecclesiastical circles are seeking to fructify the diversity of feminine powers and abilities in the service of the Church which forms a part of the effort to permeate with the spirit of the Church all aspects of everyday life. The call to Catholic action was issued to both men and women.

ST EDITH STEIN, ESSAYS ON WOMAN (1996)

The time and place in which we find ourselves, emerging from a global pandemic, has placed an emphasis on suffering and struggle which the world has not seen in such a universal way for quite some time.

The pain, uncertainty and fear, and the realisation of our own limitations, brought on by the pandemic have only made it all the more urgent that we rethink our styles of life, our relationships, the organisation of our societies and, above all, the meaning of our existence.

POPE FRANCIS, FRATELLI TUTTI, 33

Yet, while the COVID-19 pandemic exposed social inequalities across the world and raised existential questions about the future of humanity, as we have seen, the individual, community, scientific and political responses to the global crisis demonstrated the resilience and unity of which all humanity is capable when there are opportunities for women to participate equally in leadership and decision-making.

» **Caoimhe de Barra, Chief Executive Officer, Trócaire, President, CIDSE**

Trócaire’s past investment in women proved its worth during the pandemic. Strong levels of trust and cohesion had been built, there was clear communication, and preparations had been made which enabled Trócaire to address risks which had now become realities. Having a level playing field means having an intersectional approach which sees talent across the board and putting measures in place to enable women to progress into senior roles. Change doesn’t happen without intention, and so we need vision, planning, measurement and accountability.

Yet the term ‘crisis’ is not necessarily negative. It does not simply indicate a painful moment to be endured. The word ‘crisis’ has its origin in the Greek verb krino, which means to discern, to weigh, to assess.

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TREATY OF ROME, SALA REGIA, THE VATICAN, 24 MARCH 2017

The sense of existential crisis which the pandemic brought about entailed unbearable pain for many people; but it is also possible to take comfort from the knowledge that such a crisis can also offer an opportunity for community growth.



→ A Caritas nutrition monitoring centre in Venezuela 2018.

Similarly hope-giving is the fact that, while the struggles and suffering of women are typically greater during disaster, emergency and conflict situations, their capacity to participate and lead in ways that truly enhance the lives of all people has been proven beyond doubt.

Meanwhile, social, political and cultural issues, including sexual harassment and violence, domestic violence, lack of access to education, suppression of freedoms and rights, child marriage, female genital mutilation, unequal pay for equal work, maternity rights, and more, have led many people to question historical and current models of political, economic and social power. Several Caritas Member Organisations across the Confederation have sought to raise awareness of women's experiences in different contexts around the world and have modelled successful approaches and programmes to facilitate women's empowerment in a spirit of fraternal cooperation.

» **Kiribati Health Champions – Teitoiningaina (Catholic Women's Association) in partnership with Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, with the support of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

Since 2017, in Kiribati, Teitoiningaina (the Kiribati Catholic Women's Association) has been implementing a programme called Kiribati Health Champions, supported by Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This brings women together to share knowledge on traditional foods, food preparation and nutrition.

When COVID-19 forced Kiribati to close its borders and start preparations for a COVID-19 awareness programme, Teitoiningaina immediately offered its core group of active Health Champions to raise awareness in the communities of South Tarawa, a population of approximately 70,000 people in 6,063 households.

In less than 24 hours Teitoiningaina were able to organise 31 Health Champions who were trained under the KHC programme and had become experienced, highly skilled communicators to carry out the important work of raising awareness in the community. In their first week, 15 teams visited over 275 households for around 30 minutes each. Families were provided with brochures with proper handwashing techniques and distancing guidelines and they were given time to have any questions answered. At the end of their second week, the original 15 Health Champions had reached 791 households - just under 14% of the entire South Tarawa population.

The health programme has since been expanded to include 11 of Kiribati's outer islands, with another 6 planned in the next 3 years. Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand's relationship with Teitoiningaina - the Catholic Women's Association has proved invaluable as they are the lead partners in this project.

→ Secours Catholique - Distributing service vouchers to the homeless in Bordeaux during the coronavirus crisis. 7 April 2020.



© Sébastien Le Clezio

» **Jing Henderson, NASSA/ Caritas Philippines, Head of Advocacy – response to COVID-19 in a country with frequent natural disasters**

Caritas Philippines worked to set up Caritas Kindness Stations, as well as establishing community-led Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning teams, predominantly led by and composed of women. These teams have been instrumental in increasing accountability and feedback within the communities.

↓ Responding to COVID-19 in the Philippines - March 2021.



© Caritas Internationalis

» **Fr Vyacheslav Grynevych SAC, Director, Caritas Spes-Ukraine**

Today in Caritas, the percentage of service is dominated by women, just as when men are in the army, women take care of the home and upbringing. At the end of World War II, there were whole villages in Ukraine with not a single man of childbearing age. Wars change the gene pool of nations, and affect the role of women in society. Today, a Ukrainian woman is a warrior, a refugee mother, a volunteer and a guardian grandmother who, despite the approach of the front line, does not leave her old home. If we were to imagine that today we are creating an artistic portrait of a woman in wartime, but instead of paints we use words, emotions, images, facts, then our picture is an interweaving of pain and courage, dignity and despair, strength and sometimes helplessness. This can be a very difficult composition to understand. But it is necessary to talk about this so that the fates and names of these women, so that the dignity of a woman and her creativity do not go into oblivion, but are preserved.

↓ Fr Vyacheslav Grynevych speaking at The Full Face of Humanity: Women in leadership for a just society - Conference held at UNESCO, October 2022.



© Gael Kerbaol/Secours Catholique

» **Women's Participation in Disaster Preparedness and Response – Caritas Tonga**

Caritas Tonga embeds practices throughout their disaster relief and preparedness programmes to ensure they target and safeguard the most vulnerable including women and children. As an example, Caritas Tonga have monitored the access of women and girls to water, and have implemented a number of water projects with the safety of women and girls in mind.

They worked with village Caritas committees to ensure that there is adequate lighting; a power source to refill the tanks; constant monitoring to ensure refilling and adequate supply; and that people have adequate containers for carrying water so that the water is managed conservatively. Following the volcanic eruption which impacted the Kingdom of Tonga in early 2022; Caritas Tonga has continued to engage parish committees and key community partners to support immediate disaster response. Women continue to play an integral role in supporting their communities through this crisis.

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mittees and key community partners to support immediate disaster response. Women continue to play an integral role in supporting their communities through this crisis.

» **Khulood Bashir Abdul Ahad, Director of psychosocial support in the northern and southern Nineveh plain, Caritas Iraq**

I have been working in Caritas Iraq since mid-2015 as a presenter of psychosocial support lectures within the women's empowerment programmes which were held at Caritas Iraq – Duhok office. As a woman, Caritas Iraq has given me many opportunities to train and learn to hold many roles, both through Caritas and other organisations.

I am now responsible for the implementation of a programme of psychosocial activity in the northern and southern Nineveh plain. Through this programme, Caritas Iraq works to assist and empower the women and children beneficiaries particularly who left their residential areas in Nineveh villages as an outcome of the occupation of these areas by ISIS who spread killing, intimidation and terror. Thousands of displaced people suffered from psychological traumas, poverty and losing the meaning of life and total desperation. This pain was renewed

after four years when they returned to their original areas which were liberated from ISIS to find their houses either destroyed or burned down. We lead the beneficiaries through psychological courses to heal the wounds, learning strategies to overcome this bitterness, looking with hopeful eyes for the future and adapting to reality.

So far, more than 1000 women have received training in psychological trauma and recovery, conflict management and peace building, and psychological care. This training facilitates capacity strengthening in techniques and methods for adaptation, and empowers women to manage their lives, earn a living, and contribute to rebuilding the social fabric.

» **First Responders Training – Caritas Archdiocese of Suva (Caritas Fiji), Fiji Ministry of Women, other faith-based agencies and church actors, Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre**

Caritas Fiji’s First Responders programme trains and supports volunteers to work together in their communities on community-led solutions to sexual violence and violence against women. This was the first time such workshops had been run by from a faith-based perspective in Fiji, and they generated significant interest. The Fijian Minister for Women, the Hon. Mereseini Vuniwaqa, attended all three workshops, as did the Archbishop of Suva, Peter Loy Chong.

Volunteers attend a 3-day workshop where they are trained and also network with other volunteers and local NGO support staff from their region. The First Responders are supported by local churches and communities; for example, some parishes have provided designated spaces which First Responders can use to provide support services or as an office. This approach of supporting local volunteer-driven networks enables a far greater impact than could be otherwise achieved. The workshop had broad participation from representatives from interfaith denominations, including



↑ **Training programmes in Fiji. March 2021.**

priests and pastors from different churches and faith-based organisations, as well as representatives from government and other civil society organisations. Approximately a quarter of the participants were men.

» **Facilitating girls’ access to education and improving long-term opportunities – Caritas Kyrgyzstan**

In order to attain the necessary grades for entry to university, students at public schools in Kyrgyzstan often have to attend extra classes with private tutors for a fee. Considering the high levels of poverty in Kyrgyzstan, parents of girls prefer their daughters to get married straight after finishing school, and not to spend money on their education. In response to

this problem, Caritas Kyrgyzstan has been carrying out an educational project for the last five years which allows students from public schools to prepare for university entrance free of charge, in order to be able to enter the labour market. When there is no need to pay, and recognising the benefit of education and work, parents usually allow and choose for their daughters to go to university.

These examples of strategic commitment to the promotion of women’s leadership provides an indication of the readiness of the Confederation as a whole to engage in this process of renewal, and to commit to the cultural changes needed to succeed in the long term, including the removal of barriers and creation of opportunities.

Through scriptural and theological reflection, this booklet has sought to offer a basis for Caritas, the Confederation, the Church and the communities in which we serve to recognise the spirituality of and necessity for women’s participation in leadership and decision making today. The testimonies and good practices of Caritas Member Organisations included in this booklet serve as an important contribution to the wider field of organisations working to strengthen women’s leadership.

By encountering and listening to the voices of women in the Confederation and the communities they serve, Caritas can read the signs of the times and engage in a process of listening, discernment and dialogue in order to understand the reality of women’s experiences across local, regional and global contexts.

The individual and collective task is to now concretely address these issues through engaging in encounter, renewal and action to promote the equal participation and leadership of women from the grassroots to governance levels.

When we speak of reality, we immediately collide with different viewpoints. But reality builds bridges between different viewpoints. Reality is truth. The bridges exist in our conversation. But we must take reality, not theory, as our starting point. ... Dialogue must be carried out on the basis of human experience. 11

POPE FRANCIS, THE PATH TO CHANGE

» **Christine Allen, Director, CAFOD**

We have a particular opportunity and a responsibility to engage with the Catholic Church, other faith actors and national Faith Based Organisations on their understanding and approach to women's leadership and become true champions of women and girls' rights. Caritas has to witness to a different way of being.

This requires us to look within and see our assumptions related to women and girls' leadership and our own roles as creators/supporters of structural barriers. What are our attitudes? What are our behaviours? What are we doing in practice both internally and externally that might deny women opportunities and identify what we must do to lift those barriers?

» **Jean Beil, Regional Coordinator, Caritas North America**

Caritas needs women in the same way that the world itself needs women. In God's great wisdom, humans were created as both male and female, neither in itself sufficient for the work of the kingdom. In every facet of life, the partnership of men and women provides complementarity and balance. Similarly, the ministry of Caritas requires the sharing of gifts and experiences of both men and women to make God's love visible in our world.

Our Confederation will only be better, more spirited and more flexible if we invite and accept the gifts of all of those, both men and women, whom God has sent us to care for creation and to care for those who are poor.

» **Karam Abi Yazbeck, Regional Coordinator, MONA Region**

I lost my father at age of 11 and so my mother was my first leader in my eyes. She taught me resilience, wisdom and unconditional love. I was lucky to grow up with three lovely sisters. We shared everything and with them I discovered empathy and equity. In this difficult region full of conflicts and crises where I work, my daughters give me joy and hope.

Around us, everywhere, we still see injustice. We have a long journey and it is not a war between women and men, we need to look together in the same direction. Women's leadership is not just a woman's cause; the whole of society is concerned and every person needs to advocate for equality in society.

» **Patricia Adèle Félicité, Secretary General of Caritas Mauritius and Vice-Chair, Caritas Internationalis Women's Leadership, Equality and Participation Committee**

Pope Francis gives us the example and shows us the way. Our bishops and priests must also follow suit. I had the chance and the privilege of working with a bishop who always believed in the leadership of women.

I was accompanied during my journey by two priests who were my mentors, who took care of my training and thanks to whom I became who I am today. I believe that when opportunities are offered, if the values of the person are recognised, when strong decisions are made, we can manage to pave the way for greater participation of women in decision-making, in governance bodies.

The change of society requires individual changes, of each of us, in our families, in our work, in our communities. We are all responsible for challenging our leaders and questioning our unjust structures.



↑ Women leading trauma therapy for Syrian children in a community centre in Lebanon. 2016.



← Caritas providing food and WASH for refugees arriving in Greece.

I – Conclusion: how can we engage in renewal?

Reform is first and foremost a sign of life, of a Church advancing on her pilgrim way, (...) in need of reform because she is alive. (...) Reform will be effective only if it is carried out by men and women who are 'renewed' and not simply 'new'.

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
ON THE OCCASION OF THE PRESENTATION
OF THE CHRISTMAS GREETINGS TO THE ROMAN CURIA,
CLEMENTINE HALL, THE VATICAN, 22 DECEMBER 2016**

The Caritas Confederation can be inspired by a synodal approach to renewal and the promotion of women's leadership, equality and participation. This approach is characterised by rootedness in reality, personal encounter, collaboration and communication.

Engagement in renewal can begin from the simple but effective premise: **See, Judge, Act**. In the process of the promotion of women's leadership, this could take the following form:

» **See – Recognise, witness and appreciate women's gifts and contributions to society;**

» **Judge – Engage in dialogue to question and understand why women have not had visibility or voice in that society or community before;**

» **Act – Take concrete actions to work together to create sustainable change.**

This booklet's focus on witnessing the important role of women in leadership and decision making, seen through Christ's lived example in scripture, the social teachings of the Church, and the testimonies and examples of good practice from the Confederation, aims to assist the Confederation in acknowledging the equal dignity of women and men, to recognise where inequality exists between men and women in Caritas structures and in society, and to make sustainable change for the common good and integral development of all people.

The stories, testimonies and examples of good practice from across the Confederation which have been included in this booklet alongside the scriptural and social teachings of the Church demonstrate the importance of listening to, engaging with, and making known the voices and experiences of women from the grassroots to governance levels, in order to understand and work to remove the barriers which women face to leadership.

Similarly, we hope that members of the Confederation at all levels will find this a helpful tool to facilitate and creatively engage in a process of learning, listening and dialogue in order to progress from witness to active promotion of women's leadership and participation.

As Caritas, our action on this important issue is founded on our shared mission of the integral development of the poor, marginalised and vulnerable in society. The attainment of this mission will be dependent on our mutual journeying on 'the long path of renewal'¹² through ongoing cultivation of a culture of encounter across the Confederation, the Church and society.

» **Sister Ruperta Palacios Silva, Carmelite Missionary of Santa Teresa, Mexico; Secretary of the Afro-Mexican Pastoral in Cáritas Mexicana**

I have travelled through a large part of this beautiful Latin American and Caribbean continent, and I have discovered different faces, especially the faces of women who are three times marginalised for the simple fact of being women, for being poor and for being black. But I have also seen faces full of hope, women who are overcoming racism, discrimination, sexism and other challenges every day.

The Women's Forum held in May 2023 in Puerto Rico was a rich experience to share. I believe that it is necessary to continue advancing in the awareness of our being women, in society and above all in the Church. An important step forward is the work being done by CELAM, CLAR and Caritas on the axis of women in the Church and society. Our campaigns help us to become more aware of this crude reality that women live in all spheres: cultural, economic, social, political and religious. I think we are making progress, but we need to continue to strengthen the path and weave networks. Our Afro and indigenous sisters are the first in line to experience exclusion. We still need to include them in our agendas, to visualise them, to walk with them from the grassroots. Our struggle must be inclusive, encompassing the different realities of women regardless of their religion, their colour, their culture.

↓ **Sister Ruperta Palacios Silva.**



@Caritas Mexicana

» **Yolanda Broderick, Chair of Vancouver Council, Development and Peace – Caritas Canada**

I was elected Chair of Development and Peace, Caritas Canada for the Archdiocese of Vancouver in December 2020. As I got into the work, I realised that we needed to build connections at the pastoral level – getting in front of each and every one of our pastors and generating awareness about the work that our organisation does. I also knew that this would take time, commitment, and just a little bit of organisation, and that we could not do it alone – we needed the Holy Spirit to guide our work.

By January 2022, we had come up with a strategy, organising parish visits to the 77 different parishes and initiating personal invitations across our community contacts. As you can imagine, meeting with 77 parish priests and building connections with each community can be very daunting, but there are a lot of moments of victory along the way. Watching each person voice their opinion, have respectful discourse, and come up with creative solutions is inspiring. More importantly, it shows the importance of every single person having a seat at the table – whether they be male, female, living a consecrated life, clergy, lay persons, young or old. And it truly shows the strength of the Catholic Church, particularly its valuing of every person being created in the image and likeness of God.

It is having these diverse voices and trains of thought that allows us to have empathy for the plight of those around us, to focus on serving the poor, and empowers each one of us to do what we can to help those in need. Whether they be here, or anywhere else in the world. At the heart of it, this is what leadership means to me. St. Teresa of Kolkata put it best "We cannot all do great things. But we can do small things with great love."

↓ Volunteers working to provide meals for schoolchildren during the Zimbabwe food crisis. 29 July 2016.



Undertaken in a spirit of unity, with love, respect and kindness at its centre, this process of renewal towards the promotion of women's leadership, equality and participation has the potential to be transformative for the Confederation.

*We must stop acting as if women were a marginal group in the Church. They are not on the periphery of the Church; they are in the centre. And if we do not give a voice to those who are at the center of the Church, we will have a big problem. ... Women have been ignored too much. ... Bishops must be like shepherds who listen to their people. It's not just for them to say, "Yes, I hear, but that doesn't interest me". They need to be in the midst of their flock.*¹³

CARDINAL JEAN-CLAUDE HOLLERICH SJ,
PRESIDENT OF COMECE, GENERAL RAPPOREUR
FOR THE SYNOD 2021-23

Certainly, all this calls for an alternative way of thinking. Without an attempt to enter into that way of thinking, what I am saying here will sound wildly unrealistic. On the other hand, if we accept the great principle that there are rights born of our inalienable human dignity, we can rise to the challenge of envisaging a new humanity.

POPE FRANCIS, FRATELLI TUTTI 127

→ Spending time with local women and children at a Caritas Jerusalem medical services centre in eastern Gaza city. 19 February 2019.





↓ Livelihoods programme run
by Caritas Philippines in Palo.
2014.

Notes

C - Introduction

- 1 / This report is available on the Caritas Baobab intranet platform or by request to the Caritas Internationalis General Secretariat.
- 2 / A livestream recording of the conference can be found on the Vatican News YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/@VaticanNews>

E - The spirituality of women's leadership: women's role and place in society

- 3 / St Edith Stein, *Essays on Woman (The Collected Works of Edith Stein)*, (ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington DC, 1996)
- 4 / Pope Francis, Dominique Wolton, *The Path to Change: Thoughts on Politics and Society*, (Bluebird/Pan Macmillan, 2017) 239

F - What does "women's leadership" mean?

- 5 / 'In this vast domain of service, the Church's two-thousand-year history, for all its historical conditioning, has truly experienced the "genius of woman"; from the heart of the Church there have emerged women of the highest calibre who have left an impressive and beneficial mark in history. I think of the great line of woman martyrs, saints and famous mystics. ... And how can we overlook the many women, inspired by faith, who were responsible for initiatives of extraordinary social importance, especially in serving the poorest of the poor? The life of the Church in the Third Millennium will certainly not be lacking in new and surprising manifestations of "the feminine genius"! *Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women*, 11 (29 June 1995) https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women.html
- 6 / Through its Environment, Risk Management and Emergencies Program (MAGRE), Caritas Chile seeks to generate sufficient and sustainable capacities both in the institution and in local communities for risk analysis and reduction, and the enhancement of capacities to act in the face of adverse events and the animation of recovery processes.
- 7 / *Caritas Celebrates Women* <https://www.caritas.org/caritaswomen/>

Notes

G - Why should Caritas promote women's leadership?

8 / Compagnoni OP, Francesco, Alford OP, Helen (eds.), *Preaching Justice: Dominican Contributions to Social Ethics in the Twentieth Century* (Dominican Publications, Dublin, 2007)

9 / *Preaching Justice: Dominican Contributions to Social Ethics in the Twentieth Century*

10 / Pope Francis, Dominique Wolton, *The Path to Change: Thoughts on Politics and Society*, (Bluebird/Pan Macmillan, 2017) 277-8

H - The signs of the times: where are we today?

11 / *The Path to Change*, 150-151

H - Conclusion: how can we engage in renewal?

12 / *Laudato Si'*, 202

13 / <https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/leading-european-cardinal-says-church-must-change/15528>



↓ Agriculture training for women in Nepal. 2013.



www.caritas.org

Palazzo San Calisto
V-00120 - Vatican City State
Tel. +39 06 698 797 99

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in Nigeria. © Sam Phelps/Caritas Internationalis