

Brazil: Catholic Health-Care Institutions Meet to Address the Challenges of Sustainability and Faithfulness in Mission
The First Brazilian Congress of the ‘Brazilian Association of Catholic Health-Care Institutions’ (ABICS)

By Fr. Leo Pessini

For the first time in the history of Brazil, the various Catholic bodies that manage health-care institutions came together for an event centred around a discussion of questions connected with this field, worried by the problem of survival, of sustainability and of mission in this sector. On 16-18 July 2018, under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro (RJ), the first Brazilian congress of Catholic health-care institutions was took place.

This event tried to integrate and strengthen Catholic health-care institutions in Brazil, creating good opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and formulating proposals for the sustainability and high quality of their management, without, however, abandoning the primary objective of keeping strong the mission of care for those most in need. This event witnessed the participation of over 400 representatives involved in the management of Catholic health-care institutions in Brazil; the religious and directors of these organisations. An attempt was made to unite their forces to set in motion a collegial process in order to make Catholic health-care institutions increasingly integrated, sustainable and in line with Christian and gospel values.

At this event the creation of the ABICS was formalised – *the Brazilian Association of Catholic Health-Care Institutions* – and from now on this will coordinate all the efforts to achieve the union and the cooperation of health-care institutions in Brazil. Another important initiative was the presentation of the first census of Catholic health-care institutions, which, along the same lines, is concerned with the management of these institutions: mission, charism, Christian identity, the safeguarding of Christian and Catholic ethics in health care, professionalism and economic sustainability.

For Cardinal Orani João Tempesta, the honorary chairman of the meeting, ‘the Brazilian congress of Catholic health-care institutions has taken place in communion with the guidelines of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, and has been dynamically in line with his appeal for an increasing need for professionalism, transparency, control, sobriety, responsibility and auditing in Catholic Congregations. In always keeping strong and highly-qualified the evangelical commitment to helping those most in need, our Catholic institutions must always be open to working with technicians and professionals, with common projects and the sharing of professional good practices. We are confident that only through our union will we will able to address in a better way the challenges that arise and achieve common objectives in the promotion of health care for human beings in all their fullness’.

Pope Francis was represented at this event by Cardinal Peter A. Turkson, the Prefect of the new dicastery for promoting integral human development. Msgr. Turkson gave a speech containing a programme at the beginning of the meeting. Expressing his joy at being present at the event, he expressed his thanks for the invitation and spoke about the identity and the mission of the new Vatican dicastery of which he is the head, with reference above all to Catholic health care.

After commenting on the principal challenges that Catholic health-care institutions are now facing (the dehumanisation of care and treatment; a business mentality inclined to profit and the commercialisation of care activity; utilitarianism and ethical relativism; bioethical questions

connected with the research, etc.), Cardinal Turkson referred to the priorities of the Catholic presence in the world of health and health care, starting with the *ethical and religious guidelines for the services of Catholic health care of the Bishops' Conference of North America*.

The Cardinal observed that 'these 'Guidelines' highlight the duty to defend the sacredness and the dignity of human life, and care for the poor and the marginalised; they contribute to the common good, involve a responsible administration of resources, defend the rights of conscience and provide care that meets the holistic needs of the person'. And he ended his speech by stating that 'from the outset the Church has always been involved in care for the sick and the suffering. Down the centuries, Catholic health care has responded to this vocation and mission of the Church to engage in assistance and care through its members and its institutions. In their communities there are men and women and groups that stand out as shining examples for present and future generations'.

Fr. Leocir Pessini, the Superior General of the Order of Camillians, offered a paper on the subject of 'Philanthropy as Mission'. For religious, a magic formula does not exist by which to solve the complex equation of social responsibility and economic sustainability. 'We live in a market economy without a heart and without a face that easily abandons those who have the minimum to live and at the same time need health care, as Pope Francis has reminded us. We are faced with a reality that requires competence and human, ethical and evangelical sensitivity, together with a professional dedication, to administer these institutions'.

The first Brazilian congress of Catholic health-care institutions was organised by the archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro, the *São Francisco na Providência de Deus* Hospital, the *Ambulatório da Providência*, the *Casa de Saúde São José* and the *São Vicente de Paulo* Hospital.

The birth of the Brazilian Association of Catholic Health-Care Institutions (ABIC) was announced by *Frei* Francisco Belotti, the president of the *Fraternidade São Francisco de Assis na Providencia de Deus*, and he presented the project of the 'Pope Francis' Hospital Ship, which was officially launched on 8 December 2017 to meet the needs of the river communities of the Amazon region.

When speaking about the origins of this project for the Amazon region, *Frei* Francisco explained that when the Pope had visited Rio de Janeiro in 2013, on the occasion of the World Youth Day, he had also visited the *Hospital da Penitencia*. On that occasion the Pope asked: "are you present in Amazonia?" Brother Francisco answered: "no". The Pope suggested "so you should go there", and in response to the request of Pope Francis to set out, to meet people in the geographical fringes, in 2014 his organisation encountered the *Santa Casa de Misericórdia de Óbidos-Pará* Hospital and on 9 April 2015 the hospital in Juruti-Pa which is on the banks of the Rio in Amazonia. And now this new project of the 'Pope Francis' Hospital Ship (with an initial investment with the boat of five million American dollars) will soon be operational and will offer its services to a potential group of over 700,000 people in twelve municipalities and more than a thousand communities in the Amazon region.

Today we can no longer be in the field of health on our own. Put simply, we would not be able to survive. Faced with a world and a culture that are increasingly globalised, plural, indifferent and not least hostile to evangelical values, we need to be united and in communion not only to meet the need for a dignified survival (economic sustainability) but above all for the defence of care and solidarity. Boldness, creativity and intelligence of the heart need to become operational and to be in the very forefront in forming a new reality of hope for the field of Catholic institutions of Brazilian health.