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**Welcome Speech for the 17th Asian Federation of Catholic Medical Associations
(AFCMA) Congress by Most Reverend Julian Leow Beng Kim, D.D.**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace be with you!

It gives me great pleasure to be able to address you at the commencement of the 17th Asian Federation of Catholic Medical Associations Congress today September 16, 2021. As the host country I greet you with a warm Malaysian welcome of ‘Selamat Datang’. Incidentally we gained independence 64 years ago from the British and became Malaysia 58 years ago.

It is heartening to see that amidst the busyness of your work especially during this time of the pandemic, you have made a **commitment** to attend this congress. Our lives **must** go on despite the difficulties and inconveniences caused by the pandemic.

It cannot be denied that many people have been emotionally and psychologically affected by the pandemic and so it is apt that the congress has chosen as its theme ***‘Building Bridges through Healing and Spirituality’***.

Yes, this is indeed a time for building bridges as it creates opportunities for openness, dialogue, interaction, exchange and reciprocal understanding.

Many of us in the Church, have built Bridges of Innovation and Creativity to minister to the faithful while encouraging and supporting our parish communities in these dire times. We have built Bridges of Humanity with the different faith groups and NGOs to reach out to those who have been adversely affected by the pandemic. Our Bridges of Contribution and Service have helped fulfill the needs of healthcare facilities in need of equipment and of centres in need of volunteers.

Today, you have brought your complementary strengths together to build bridges that will integrate and collaborate your efforts with other health, medical and faith associations. You have firsthand experience that in your profession, medical care and technical services are not enough, even if provided with exemplary professionalism. You must also be able to offer the sick that special spiritual balm which is the warmth of genuine human contact. This can restore the love of life to your patients, inspiring them to struggle for it with an inner determination that is sometimes decisive for their recovery.

The sick must be helped to regain not only their physical health, but also psychological, emotional and spiritual well-being. This presupposes that the doctor, in addition to his/her professional skill, also has an attitude of loving concern inspired by the Gospel image of the Good Samaritan.

Catholic physicians beyond their scientific competence and human empathy, are also souls who sees the suffering Christ in their patients, and who prays for the patients who suffer. With every suffering person, the Catholic doctor is called to bear witness to those higher values which have their firmest foundation in faith.

My dear medical professionals,

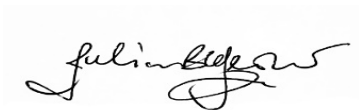
Every day in your professional work you render a noble service to humanity. Your mission as doctors puts you in daily contact with the mysterious and wonderful reality of human life, prompting you to be concerned for the sufferings and hopes of our many brothers and sisters. **In this time of the pandemic, your presence with Covid patients at the last moments of life, may be the only human touch they feel, the only comfort they receive, the only human voice they hear.**

Your professionalism, enriched with the spirit of faith, is a further reason to collaborate with those — even from different religious beliefs— who recognise the dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God.

My prayer is that all of you will be enriched by the talks during this congress and will be inspired to go out and be bridge builders. Seeing every patient as a hurting human being in need of healing, making the person wholesome again.

I leave you with these words of St Camillus de Lellis (the Patron saint of hospitals, nurses and the sick), who in proposing the most effective method to care for the sick, simply said: **“Put more heart into those hands”**.

Thank you and wishing all of you a fruitful congress. God bless.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julian Leow Beng Kim', with a stylized flourish at the end.

+Most Reverend Julian Leow Beng Kim, D.D.
Titular Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur