PHILOSOPHY OF CARITAS BANGLADESH (1994)

1. Caritas Bangladesh (C B) is a social arm of the Catholic Church in Bangladesh (est.. 1972), mandated by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB). It was registered under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 (July 13, 1972) and under the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulations Ordinance 1978.

2. Caritas has experienced a rapid growth process through many and far-reaching changes in the backdrop of the country and global events: Coming at the wake of the War of Independence (1971), Caritas has operated according to the Teaching of the Gospel, keeping in view the authentic directions contained in the four State Principles of democracy, socialism, secularism and nationalism.

   From the very beginning the total program of Caritas has been marked by the following two basic principles:

   a) Integral development of "whole person". In accordance with the mind of the Church Caritas is in search of a New Humanism which will enable humanity today to find itself anew by embracing the higher values of life and friendship, of prayer, contemplation and Compassion. Caritas professes the growth of the person from less human to more human through the integral development of the whole person.
   Caritas, thus, is committed to a spirituality in development, i.e. to improvement in the total quality of the human life through the harmonious blending of the spiritual, moral, cultural, social, political and economic well-being of the person integrated in the society in equal dignity as man and woman.

   b) **Universality and openness to all peoples of Bangladesh :** In a spirit of prayer and humility, and of deepening faith in God and submission to His Holy will, Caritas is with and for all peoples of goodwill in Bangladesh irrespective of caste, creed or religion, by standing up for what is righteous in the eyes of God and in upholding the dignity of the person.
   In this Caritas professes preferential option for the poor and the marginalized persons and groups.

3. At the completion of the first decade Caritas reviewed its philosophy at great depth and intensity in 1981 adopting some basic principles of its philosophy in accordance with the objectives of its Memorandum of Association(1972):

   a) **Primacy of Human Person:** This is an accepted value in all religions and cultures. The integral development of the human person is to be inter-related to the integral development of the community.

   b) **Witness to the Gospel:** Caritas works in accordance with the Gospel principle of Love and Mercy for all in order to alleviate suffering and oppression, and bring true human development. In this Caritas is one in mind and heart with the same Love and Mercy of the creator toward all His creatures, found in all religions and cultures.

   c) **Power among the Powerless:** This remains the cardinal principle of Caritas development thrust . Through a process of coming together to think and act as a community a spirit of one in mind and heart is created among people, and power and ability is achieved to assert themselves and stand against injustices and oppression, in conformity with one's authentic rights and duties.

   d) **Caritas invests heavily in people:** This is the area of formation of the human person through authentic education. Caritas has been very active in the area of functional and non-formal type of education, and can provide transformative approach for more life-oriented and holistic education at formal level.
   Universal literacy and primary education is the basis in this process.

   e) **To Spread Social Justice and Charity:** Forcefully yet non-violently vigilant against forces that subvert authentic development, Caritas insists on the rooting out of the causes for poverty and underdevelopment. Programs of development must bear fruit in the lives of the poor in very concrete ways through fair and equitable distribution of wealth etc., as manifestation of God's special blessings.

   f) **Caritas professes preferential option for the poor:** Caritas has opted to work for partner groups of especially the rural poor and the socially, economically, culturally and geographically marginalized communities.

4. At the end of the second decade of Caritas (1992) an evaluation was carried out to pin-point some new orientation in the philosophy and vision of Caritas, especially in the light of the Pastoral Plan of the Church in Bangladesh (1985). The following are some of the more salient points:

a) **Caritas propagates living a life of Religion:** While many times development as such can tend to lead people away from God and Religion, authentic development will lead people to God and Religion, i.e., to that love for God and for all humanity, Which is true religion.

b) **Healing Misery and Oppression:** Age-old misery and oppression have created deep wounds in the body, mind, heart and soul of the oppressed person and society. Eradication injustice and oppression is not merely uprooting them in an impersonal way, but above all through a personal loving and caring engagement as a wounded healer with the person wounded by injustice and oppression.

c) **Caritas creates communion of mind and heart among peoples:** Division among peoples is the greatest misery, under-development and sin in world culture. Reconciliation and communion among all peoples and religions should get clear emphasis in all Caritas policies and programs.

d) **Integral development of the human person as man and woman:** The human person as man and woman is a nuclear communion. This communion is painfully disturbed especially because of deep-rooted offenses against the dignity and equality of women. Caritas is to work to remove discrimination against the girl-child and women, in order to promote their rightful dignity and equality toward promotion of that nuclear communion.

e) **Respect to the earth and its goods :** Integral development requires respectful use and proper development of earthly goods. Humanity is to be friends of the earth by preserving its resources and environment. Wasteful exploitation of resources and pollution of the environment are to be avoided.

f) **Caritas upholds partnership and participation:** Partnership and participation are concrete expressions of communion of mind and heart with others. On the one hand Caritas operates in a spirit, not of competition, but of partnership with agencies which pursue goals akin to Caritas. On the other hand Caritas works not only for people but rather with people as equal partners for development.

g) **Caritas is for "sheba" :** Caritas is for "sheba", i. e., service in a spirit of religious devotion. Involvement in Caritas should be seen as a call from God to offer one's life for others and to see others as precious gift of God for our life. It is not only work but life itself is offered; and it is mutually offered, for as we serve we are in turn served by a friend, by a brother or a sister. Both Caritas personnel and those benefiting from Caritas programs should have this same spirit of "sheba".

h) **Caritas offers formation to become "Caritas - minded" :** Caritas personnel and those within Caritas projects and programs will receive formation in the vision and philosophy and spirituality of Caritas, in order to themselves become truly "Caritas-minded.