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MESSAGE FOR CHRISTMAS BY ARCHBISHOP PAUL CREMONA O.P.

Brothers and sisters,

Once again it is time for me to impart to you my Christmas message. For this year, I am relaying my message from St Vincent de Paule Residence. Maybe some of you might ask: Why from this Residence? Well, the reason is that 2012 has been declared as the Year for the Elderly and Solidarity Between Generations. So here I am, at this residence, together with a group of children and young people, in order to visit the residents, as well as to deliver my message.

These youngsters and children are here for two reasons. First of all, they serve to demonstrate the solidarity which exists between generations. Secondly, they highlight the reality that although we are here to visit the elderly, these people too were once youngsters, they were also once children and they have now journeyed through life's full cycle. On this subject, I wish to propose to you some reflections upon the Lord Jesus.

We are here celebrating Christmas, which is the coming of Baby Jesus among mankind. One of the effects of this coming is that the Son of God entered our humanity from all eternity and in becoming human like us, he subjected himself to the constraints of time. He was a child, he was a youth, he became an adult, yet unfortunately, man did not allow him to reach the maturity of old age – he was put to death, crucified – at the age of 33.

I'm not sure if you have ever reflected upon this: when reading the Gospel, have you noticed that although there are references to many acts of charity, there is hardly any mention of ministering to the elderly? In my opinion, the reason for this is that in those days, society was very different to the way it is today. To begin with, in the time of Jesus, life expectancy was very short. Very few people reached old age. The second reason is that in those days, people showed great respect towards the elderly and their experience and wisdom was very much valued. In this regard, society paid a lot of attention to the elderly. I think we can safely state that the fourth commandment – honour thy father and thy mother – was given much importance and formed an integral part of the culture of those days.

In our contemporary age, we face a different reality. It is different in the sense that today there are several people who reach old age. The life expectancy is much longer and many are those who live to reach old age – indeed some people live well over the age of 80. Another factor which we must consider is that although there are many elderly persons, these fall under two categories: there are those who are still active and then there are those who require the assistance of others. The third point is that today, as a society, we tend to place more value upon that which is new and innovative rather than upon the experience of those who came before us – such is their experience through which we are able to learn and reflect upon the present.

Therefore, for this year, I wish to propose that, in a special way starting from this Christmas, we should pay due attention to visit any of our relatives who may be alone, most especially those who reside in homes for the elderly. But we should not limit ourselves to that. Even throughout the new year, as members of a particular group or institution, we should support initiatives that encourage us to share the burden of those elderly persons who may be lonely and alone, in order that their burden may become lighter.

I wish you all a Happy Christmas. God willing, may all the members of our families enjoy Christmas together, in a spirit of solidarity between the generations. As the New Year draws in, may God shower His many blessings upon all our families and its elderly members.

✘ **Paul Cremona O.P.**
Archbishop of Malta