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A white woman with short hair and glasses stands in front of Pope Francis with a large group

Pope Francis greets Teresa Calandra, president of an Italian federation of health care associations, during an audience with Italian technicians and specialists working in the fields of radiology, rehabilitation and preventative medicine, at the Vatican Jan. 16, 2023. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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Health care is not a luxury, it is a right that belongs to everyone, Pope Francis told health care workers.

"A world that rejects the sick, that does not assist those who cannot afford care, is a cynical world with no future. Let us always remember this: health care is not a luxury, it is for everyone," the pope said.

The pope was speaking Jan. 16 with members of an Italian federation of professional associations of technicians and specialists working in the fields of radiology, rehabilitation and preventative medicine.

He expressed his deep gratitude for their work, especially during the pandemic.

"Without your commitment and effort many people who were ill would not have been looked after," he said. "Your sense of duty inspired by the power of love enabled you to serve others, even putting your own health at risk."

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In a world marked by a throwaway culture, the health professionals promote a culture of care, embodied in the good Samaritan, who does not look the other way, but approaches and helps a person in need with compassion, the pope said.

People who are ill are "asking to be cared for and to feel cared for, and that is why it is important to engage with them with humanity and empathy" along with meeting the highest professional standards, he said.

However, he added, people working in the field of health care also need people to care for them, too.

That kind of care must come "through recognition of your service, protection of proper working conditions and involvement of an appropriate number of caregivers, so that the right to health care is recognized for everyone," he said.

Every country must actively seek "strategies and resources in order to guarantee each person's fundamental right to basic and decent health care," he said, quoting this year's message for the World Day of the Sick, to be celebrated Feb. 11.