

Pope Leo urges Catholic schools to help young people find new way to live in the world!



Meeting with participants in the International Congress for Pastoral Care in Schools and Universities, Pope Leo XIV urges Catholic educational institutions to make young people feel encouraged and loved, in order to help younger generations build a better world.

By Isabella H. de Carvalho

Catholic schools and universities should be places where young people can feel loved and seen and thus they can then help build a more peaceful and just world, Pope Leo XIV emphasized on Thursday, October 22.

“Beneath the armor that so many teenagers build around themselves to avoid suffering lies the desire to love and be loved,” he said to participants in the *International Congress for Pastoral Care in Schools and Universities*, organized by the Dicastery for Culture and Education, and taking place at the Vatican from October 22 to 23. “Help the young people you meet to become protagonists of a new way of inhabiting the world, builders of fraternity and of a more just society,” he encouraged. “Courage is born from a pact of trust: from the experience of someone who believes in you before you believe in yourself,” he added, recalling that Jesus chose the 12 Apostles not “because they were brave,” but because “He called them and, through His trust in them, made them capable.”

Our ruthless, performance-driven culture

The Pope stressed the importance of this trust, especially today as “we live in a performance-driven culture that constantly compares and ranks people, sometimes ruthlessly” and a “misguided understanding of meritocracy ultimately fails to respect people,” meaning many members of the younger generation give up before even trying. “Quite a few young people today are paralyzed by the fear of making mistakes, of not being good enough, of being misunderstood, or of failing to live up to expectations,” the Pope reflected. Additionally, he noted, there are many “false teachers and misleading messages” that “promise to provide quick answers to young people’s questions.”

Catholic schools and universities should feel like a home

In this context, the Pope underscored that Catholic schools and universities should be “first and foremost, a ‘home’—a familiar place where people know they are expected and

welcomed,” where “someone who looks you in the eye, remembers your name, notices your absence, and rejoices when you return.”

“Many walk through the corridors of our schools and universities and perhaps feel anonymous,” he continued. Many students are distinguished by “enthusiasm, generosity, and spirit of service,” but many also “experience forms of existential distress,” such as “wounded families, digital loneliness, feelings of inadequacy, or fear in the face of a future that seems uncertain,” the Pope pointed out. In a welcoming environment, a student can understand and find meaning in reality and participate in the “shared pursuit of truth,” he explained.

In this regard, the Pope urged those who work in Catholic institutions to stimulate young people’s intellect, to help them encounter Christ and discover “the fruitfulness of the synergy between faith and reason.” “School and university pastoral ministry is called to accompany the slow germination of thought, teaching young people to discern and to seek with perseverance,” the Pope insisted.

Educating the heart

Lastly, Pope Leo highlighted that pastoral care in schools and universities will be “all the more fruitful the more it focuses on educating the heart.” “We must educate the heart in compassion, gratitude, and the ability to be moved by the suffering of others; we must educate it in praise and in the desire for God,” he explained.

“Service to the poor, volunteering, and care for creation are not merely supplementary activities, but places where the heart learns to expand,” he said, adding that charity goes hand in hand with prayer. He encouraged those present to continue on the mission they have chosen, that is “to walk alongside [young people] on their journey until they discover the gifts that God has already placed within them.”