

Congregation for Catholic Education

Press Release

The time we are experiencing due to the spread of the pandemic caused by Covid-19 is a time we were not prepared for. We were overwhelmed by a traumatic event, which came suddenly and which created an extraordinary emergency. There are those who struggle with death, those with fear, those who have lost their jobs and, even more, family members or friends.

The extent of the unexpected and of the unforeseen has overtaken the place of all our certainties. This pandemic has highlighted the fragility and wounds of society: the poor, the homeless, the elderly, the prisoners, the social imbalances, as well as individual and national selfishness.

And within this blackout, which has produced a profound break in our ordinary life and in the society of the third millennium, we have the duty to return to feeling more deeply the meaning of existence, to finding ways of starting to live once more, to begin again from new foundations, even though we know it will never be the same as it was.

A clear direction comes from the experience that Pope Francis made us live during the prayer of Friday, 27 March 2020, at St. Peter's [Square]: we must go back to the memory of the story lived by God with men and women, preserved by the traditions of our peoples, as the Pope showed us when stopping in front of the Crucifix in a deserted square battered by rain, in order to understand that that death saved us, and made us all brothers.

From this extraordinary image, which will remain in history, spiritual energy surges in order to respond to the multifaceted crisis that we live in; yes, because they are personal crisis, crisis of relationships; for some, even crisis of faith because they sense the apparent distance from God; crisis of the community, of a people and of its institutions; crisis of history and of the world.

In face of this crisis and in the spirit of Lent experienced this year in an exceptional way, for the believer, there is light of the Easter of resurrection. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ opens up a perspective of life that will have no end and that allows us to look to the future with confidence and solid hope.

The Congregation for Catholic Education wishes to express its closeness and encouragement to all Catholic schools, Ecclesiastical Faculties and Catholic Universities; in particular it gives thanks to the Directors, Rectors, Presidents, Deans, teachers, and administrative and service staff who, in recent months, have been

carrying the heavy burden of ensuring the operation of their institutional and academic activities, through the telematic methods in order to guarantee the continuity and "regular" conclusion of the current year, as indicated in the *Note* of the Congregation, concerning the equivalent examinations and tests of the Ecclesiastical Academic Institutions (March 12, 2020).

Even UNESCO, taking into consideration the interventions necessary for dealing with serious emergency situations, has referred to one of the objectives of Education 2030 Agenda, where it asked *"to develop education systems that are more resilient and responsive in the face of conflict, social unrest and natural hazards – and to ensure that education is maintained during emergency, conflict and post-conflict situations"*. Unfortunately, the abruptness of the event did not give time for adequate preparation in all institutions, in order to assure continuity of lessons or to introduce the necessary switch to distance learning.

Furthermore, the crisis produced by the pandemic has created a serious emergency not only for schools and academic institutions, but it has directly involved families who, while carrying out their work, were constrained at adapting to the need to follow up their children studying at their homes; and not all of them are equipped with the corresponding information technology tools, nor are they prepared to face the continuous presence of their children at home.

Confronted with this series of problems, in the first place that which concerns health and all the precautions to be taken in order to keep it, we must respond to immediate exigencies before anything else, so as to arrive at the usual conclusion of the current year. But, at the same time, it is necessary to consider the fact that the current situation could continue and that it is necessary to organize ourselves for the future and to be able to discern the opportunities, which this crisis offers us.

While we invite you to keep yourselves updated with what the Ministries in charge for schools and universities are organizing for educational institutions in their own countries, we urge everyone to support and to secure the safety of children and young people, and to face this special moment patiently with smart and active collaboration, through the time that will be necessary.

St. Paul wrote to the Community of Ephesus: *"Watch carefully then how you live [...] making the most of the opportunity, because the days are evil [...] be filled with the Spirit [...] giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father."* (Ephesians 5:15-20) This crisis can become an opportunity for Catholic educational institutions across the world for strengthening testimony to their identity and mission as a community of faith and charity.

With St. Paul we invite you to renew faith in the Risen One, and to live this moment in active vigilance, using the gifts received from God in the best way possible.

Our Easter wish for everyone is the renewal of faith in the mystery-reality of resurrection of the Son of God, who gives meaning to and illuminates everything. This spurs us on to open our hearts and minds to God and to our brethren with courage and determination, and to invest our talents in this “present moment”. Yes, because the believer is not asked to live an unembodied and abstract spirituality, but one that corresponds to reality in which light, fraternity, joy and peace must be infused.

Happy Easter!

Vatican City, 7 April 2020

Giuseppe Cardinal Versaldi

Prefect

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