

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE



People on the Move
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FINAL DOCUMENT

I. EVENT

The III World Congress on the Pastoral Care of International Students, promoted and organized by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, was held at the “Casa Bonus Pastor” in Rome, Italy, from 30th November to 3rd December 2011.

There were 128 participants: cardinals, bishops, priests, religious sisters and brothers, lay pastoral agents and 34 international students. They came from 36 nations: 14 in Europe, 8 in America, 7 in Africa, 4 in Asia-Pacific and 3 in the Middle East. They represented Episcopal Commissions for Human Mobility and University Pastoral Care, religious institutes, ecclesial associations and international Catholic organizations.

The presence and messages of *fraternal delegates*, on behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Anglican Communion and the Lutheran World Federation, contributed to add importance to the Congress.

The participants had the honour and satisfaction of being received by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI on the third day of the Congress. His words sustained and further encouraged the pastoral care of international students by affirming the gifts they represent due to the diversity of their cultural origin, both for the good of the Church and humanity, as well as the opportunities they meet in the host country, for their own intellectual, human and spiritual growth.

II. THEME

The theme of the event was “*International Students and Meeting of Cultures*”.

The word “culture”, as defined by the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, is understood to indicate “everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities”. It “has necessarily a historical and social aspect” and “also often assumes a sociological and ethnological sense”. Therefore we speak of “a plurality of cultures”.¹

The term “international students” used in this context embraces at least 2 categories of university migrant students (tertiary education): those who freely leave their native countries to study for prestige, for personal satisfaction or else to explore new cultures, and those who leave due to internal socio-political difficulties.

The interventions of the speakers, coming from diverse areas of competence, contributed to enlighten the participants and enhance their knowledge on the subject of *meeting of cultures* in relation to the Gospel, education, the process of evangelization in schools and universities, its impact on the faith and values of the modern youth, the urgency and demands of a specific pastoral care for international students and the possible model/s of young *leadership* in the modern globalized world.

III. CONCLUSIONS

We, the participants of this III World Congress on the Pastoral Care of International students:

A. *being inspired by the Word of God that:*

1. the youth have a very special vocation today in the world as young Jeremiah was called by God to be His prophet to the nations: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you; I appointed you as prophet to the nations" (*Jeremiah 1:5*);
2. once appropriately instructed, they should not have fear but uprightness as Saint Paul advises his young disciple Timothy: "Let no one disregard you because you are young, but be an example to all the believers in the way you speak and behave, and in your love, your faith and your purity" (*1 Timothy 4:12*); and
3. be ready to become bridge-builders among cultures and mediators among peoples like the Apostle Andrew, who, with Philip, serves as interpreter and mediator of a group of Greeks in dialogue with Jesus their Master (cf. *John 12:20-22*),

B. *being guided by the Magisterial Teachings of the Church that:*

1. "Man comes to a true and full humanity only through culture...";¹
2. "All the sons and daughters of the Church should (then) be aware of their mission and discover how the dynamism of the Gospel can penetrate and regenerate the dominant mentalities and values which inspire each of the cultures as well as the opinions and the attitudes which flow from them".¹ "It (Gospel) is a word of hope and salvation for the people of all races and cultures, of all ages and eras".¹
3. "Pastoral ministry is that activity of the University which offers the members of the university community an opportunity to integrate religious and moral principles with their academic study and non-academic activities, *thus integrating faith with life*";¹
4. "The meeting of cultures in universities must, then, be encouraged and supported having human and Christian principles, the universal values, as its foundation so as to bring up a new generation capable of dialogue and discernment, committed to spreading respect and cooperation for peace and development".¹

C. *having grasped from the human point of view that:*

1. intellectual research, spiritual thirst and passion for venturing in search of a better future are some of the principal characteristics of the young student generation;
2. being an international student is in fact a positive achievement in life and gives human satisfaction and pride, providing a wider and deeper quality to their personal human development;
3. meeting among university students helps them discover and appreciate the treasure hidden in one another. This represents a positive factor for human, cultural and spiritual enrichment;
4. with the proper intellectual, cultural and spiritual formation, international students can manifest the potential and capacity to become authentic actors and protagonists of a better world; a world of a new generation of dialogue and discernment, of respect and collaboration, of cultural and spiritual bridges, of peace and development,

D. *having understood from the socio-political and economic point of view that:*

1. modern advancements in science and technology are largely influencing and affecting the socio-political behaviours of people, especially of the young generation;
2. in line with such developments, tertiary education systems are undergoing rapid reforms, gaining greater importance in national, social and economic programmes, thus promoting a competitive *knowledge economy market*;
3. international students have become a rapidly growing and complex reality, marking an increase from about 1.68 million in 1999 to some 3.7 million in 2009/10 period, which is projected to rise to 7.2 million by 2025;¹
4. international student mobility has been historically concentrated in the OECD region (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), which mostly includes countries with ancient Christian traditions. Currently some 77% of international students pursue studies in OECD region countries. But 52% of this international student mobility reportedly arrive from China, India and Korea. At the same time, the situation in OECD is slowly changing, either because of economic difficulties and / or high cost of living and strict travel regulations in the region or because of encouraging low-cost programmes and easy travel regulations elsewhere. As a result many students are being gradually attracted towards countries of other religious and cultural traditions, such as China, Malaysia, Singapore and India;¹

5. situation in countries with a minority of Christians poses difficulties and challenges to the pastoral care of university students either due to the lack of religious freedom or due to the lack of prepared chaplains and pastoral agents,

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

WE COMMIT OURSELVES, therefore, as participants of the III World Congress on the Pastoral Care of International Students, to undertake the following *plan of action*:

1. to urge all bishops and Episcopal Conferences to give equal importance, among priorities in (their) diocesan and national pastoral programmes, to university pastoral care and to provide adequate finances as well as integral formation for chaplains and pastoral agents, fittingly chosen, with due attention to the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic community in universities;
2. to advocate for greater investment in education, through Catholic universities and Catholic higher education institutions, in order to contribute to the integral formation of mentalities, attitudes, morals and values of future generations;
3. to strengthen and invigorate programmes of theological and doctrinal formation for Catholic international students as part of their integral formation, especially in view of helping them live with clarity, certainty and commitment, their Christian vocation and become leading evangelizers and missionaries of the modern society;
4. to give very special attention to the high potential and capacity of international students to become dynamic promoters and protagonists of world peace and progress;
5. to empower international students to share their gifts with the host community and also to be open to learning from it;
6. to promote a mentality of openness and mutual respect in the field of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue in all universities/higher education institutions, through programmes of *comparative study of religions*, cultural study circles and related celebrations (ecumenical, inter-religious, multiethnic and multicultural);
7. to lobby for the freedom of pastoral activities in favour of Catholic university/higher education students in countries with a minority of Christians;
8. to improve university pastoral care, also by expanding appropriate parochial structures for the university community to celebrate sacramental life, with particular consideration given to cultural diversity and its vital role in the development of the society today;
9. to promote programmes of initial welcome as well as programmes preparing the students' return to their countries of origin, facilitated by coordinated activities between the Church in the host country and the Church in the country of origin;

10. to advocate active solidarity with international students in need, regardless of faiths and religions, in partnership with relevant charitable agencies and institutions;
11. to encourage establishment of scholarship-organizations in order to promote more exchange-programmes, benefiting, on the one hand, less-advantaged international students and, on the other hand, inter-cultural exchange,
12. to develop a net-working to share information on pastoral activities in different universities around the world in order to strengthen and to further enhance the current university pastoral ministry to international students.