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Audience with participants in the meeting of University Chaplains and Pastoral Workers

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the meeting of university chaplains and pastoral workers organized by the Dicastery for Culture and Education, from 23 to 24 November 2024, on the theme: "Towards a polyhedric vision".

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Brothers and sisters, good morning!

I greet Cardinal Tolentino, the Superiors and Officials of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, and all of you: university chaplains and pastoral workers. It is good that you are here for this Conference that you have organized. Your presence makes heard the voices of students, teachers of various disciplines, and all those whose work, often hidden, contributes to the good functioning of your educational institutions, and serves the cultures, local Churches, and different peoples, including the many young men and women, among them refugees and the poor, for whom the right to study – sadly – still remains an inaccessible privilege.

You have chosen as the theme for your proceedings: "*Towards a Polyhedric Vision*". I like the figure of the polyhedron, for it is very expressive; as you know, it is close to my heart. I used that figure at the beginning of my pontificate, when I observed that pastoral ministry must not take as its "model the sphere... where every point is equidistant from the centre and there are no differences" between one point and another, but rather "the polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 236). In this way, the Gospel becomes incarnate and finds harmonious expression in different ways in different people's lives, like a single melody that recurs in various tonalities. Today I would like to propose to you three approaches that I consider important to your service: *to appreciate differences, to accompany with care, and to act courageously*.

To appreciate differences. The polyhedron is not a straightforward geometric figure. Unlike the sphere, which is smooth and easy to handle, it is angular and also sharp: it has an edge, as reality itself can have at times. Yet this complexity is at the basis of its beauty, since it allows the figure to reflect light with different tones and gradations, depending on the angle of each facet. One facet casts a definable light, another more muted, and yet another a chiaroscuro. Not only that, but with its multiple sides, a polyhedron can also produce a variety of shades. Having a polyhedral vision, then, implies training our eyes to grasp and appreciate all these nuances. For that matter, the origin of the marvellous polyhedra of the mineral world, such as quartz crystals, is the result of a very long history, marked by complex geological processes taking place over hundreds of millions of years. This patient, hospitable and creative process makes us think of God's way of doing things. As the prophet Isaiah reminds us, he creates the brightness of the sun, but does not despise the flickering light of "a dimly burning wick" (*Is42:3*). As all these images suggest, the work of education is a true mission, in which individuals and situations are accepted, with all their lights and shadows – their shadows too – with a kind of "parental" love. And this facilitates in a unique way the growth of those seeds that God has sown within each person. Each person must be accompanied as he or she is, and that is the starting point of all dialogue, journey and progress.

This brings us to the second point: *to accompany with care.* Believing in the vitality of the seeds that God sows also means caring for what is silently growing and coming to light in the at times confused thoughts, desires and affections of the young people entrusted to you. Do not be afraid to assume this responsibility. Your attitude has to be more than just apologetic, dealing with questions and answers, prohibitions: do not be afraid to confront those realities. If we remove the edges and erase the shadows in a geometric solid, we reduce it to a flat figure, without breadth or depth. Today we see certain ideological currents within the Church, in which people end up being reduced to a figure that is flat, without nuance. But if we wisely value a person for who he or she is, we can make that person into a work of art. The Lord himself teaches us the art of caring. He, who created the world from the formless abyss and rose to life from the darkness of death, teaches us how to draw out the best from his creatures, by caring for whatever is most fragile and imperfect in them. In the educational challenges that you encounter every day in contact with individuals, cultures, situations, affections and thoughts that are greatly diverse and at times problematic, do not grow discouraged. Care for all of them, without seeking immediate results, but in the sure hope that, when you accompany young people and pray for them, miracles spring up. Uniformity does not make them flourish; they flourish precisely in the differences that represent their richness.

And now, the third point: *to act courageously.* Dear friends, nurturing the joy of the Gospel in the university environment is an indeed exciting yet demanding undertaking, and one that requires courage. This is the virtue found at the beginning of every endeavour, from the "Fiat lux" of creation to the "Fiat" of Mary, and even to the smallest "yes" we say in the course of our daily lives. Courage enables us to bridge even the deepest chasms, like the fear, indecision and alibis that prevent us from acting and that encourage a lack of commitment. We have heard the parable of the "unfaithful servant" who did not invest the capital that the Master had given him, but buried it so as not to risk losing it. The worst thing an educator can do is refuse to take risks. Where there are no risks, there are no fruits: this is a rule. When, in the midst of inner struggles, a person makes a decision that is daring and creative, that takes courage: a courage that goes straight to the heart of the matter, focusing on what is essential and overcoming every initial hesitation. The courage that distinguished the first disciples, and the virtue of the "poor in spirit" (*Mt 5:3*), who, recognizing their need for mercy, fearlessly implore the grace they need. It is the courage of those who, despite their poverty, cherish great dreams. To cherish great dreams: young people have to dream, and you have to do all that you can to help them dream and aspire to the measure of Christ: to the height, breadth and depth of his love (cf. *Eph 3:17-19*). It is my hope that, in life and in your ministry, you will always cultivate the bold confidence of those who believe. And who gives us the courage to move forward? The Holy Spirit, the "great hidden one" in the Church. He gives us strength and courage: we need to ask the Spirit to give us this courage.

Before I conclude, I would like to tell you another reason why I am happy that we are meeting. I have been told that some of you, either individually or through the universities with which you are associated, have contributed financially so that others with fewer possibilities could attend this Conference. Thank you, it is a fine thing. It is good that gestures such as these are becoming more and more frequent, inspired by a desire to assist, whenever possible, those in greater need, with the modesty characteristic of Christian charity. A Christian, in giving, always remains modest, giving quietly, discreetly, never offending. Show generosity of heart by giving, and show discretion in the way you do so. This is very fine, indeed. Remember too that we need one another

and consequently always have something valuable to give. I thank you for your presence, and I ask you to greet the students entrusted to your care, as well as the academic authorities and the staff of your universities and your local Churches. I accompany you with my prayers and I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me. Thank you.
