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Audience with the participants in the 46th General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the 46th General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, to whom he addressed the following words:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers, good morning and welcome!

thank the Superior General for his words, also for “*Lolo Kiko*” [Filipino greeting: “Grandfather Francis”], and I wish him and his council well. I am happy to meet you on the occasion of your 46th General Chapter, on the theme: “Building new paths to transform lives”. It is good to understand the Chapter this way, on the move, as a building site of new path, leading to the brothers, especially the poorest. But we know that the “Way”, the truly new way, is Jesus Christ: by following him, by walking with him, our lives are transformed, and we in turn become leaven, salt, and light.

For you, following the charism of Saint John Baptist de la Salle, these “new paths” are first and foremost *pathways of education*, to be achieved in the schools, colleges and universities that you manage in around one hundred countries in which you are present. A great responsibility! With you, I thank the Lord, because educational work is a great gift first and foremost for those who carry it out: it is work that demands a lot, but gives a lot! The constant relationship with educators, with parents, and especially with children and young people is an ever-living source of humanity, even with all the hardships and problems it entails.

In this relationship, on this pathway you take with them, you offer the values of your rich pedagogical tradition: you educate in responsibility, creativity, coexistence, justice, and peace: you educate in the inner life, in being open to the transcendent, in the sense of wonder and contemplation before the mystery of life and creation. You live all of this and you interpret it in Christ, and you translate it fully into humanity. I am reminded of the motto of Saint John Paul II in *Redemptor hominis*: “Man is the way for the Church”. You put this motto into practice in your educational mission. It is your way of realizing what Saint Paul wrote: “Christ is formed in you” (*Gal 4:19*).

To educate in this way is your apostolate, your specific contribution to evangelization: to make humanity grow according to Christ. In this sense, your schools are “Christian”: not because of an external label, but because they take this path.

We are aware that the world is experiencing an educational emergency. The educational pact is broken, and now the state, educators and the family are separated. We must seek a new pact that is communication, working together. This educational emergency is made more acute by the consequences of the pandemic. The two great challenges of our time: the challenge of *fraternity* and the challenge of *caring for the common home*, cannot be answered except through education. Both are primarily *educational challenges*. And thank God, the Christian community is not only aware of this, but has been engaged in this work for some time now, trying to “build new paths to transform” the way of life. And you, brothers, are part of this construction site, indeed, you are in the front line, educating so as to move from a closed world to an open world; from a throwaway culture to a culture of care; from a culture of rejection to a culture of integration; from the pursuit of vested interests to the pursuit of the common good. As educators, you know very well that this transformation must start from the conscience, or it will only be a façade. And you also know that you cannot do this work alone, but by cooperating in an “educational alliance” with families, with communities and ecclesial aggregations, with the educational realities present in the territory.

This, dear brothers, is your field of work. But to be good workers, you must not neglect yourselves! You cannot give to the young what you do not have within yourselves. The Christian educator, in the school of Christ, is first of all a witness, and he is a teacher to the extent that he is a witness. I have nothing to teach you in this, but only, as a brother, I want to remind you: witness. And above all I pray for you, that you may be brothers not only in name but in fact. And for your schools to be Christian not in name but in fact.

Thank you for what you are and what you do! Go forth with the joy of *evangelizing by educating* and of *educating by evangelizing*. I bless you and all your communities. And you, please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
