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“The Sacred Ecumenical Council has considered with care how extremely important education is in the life of man and how its influence ever grows in the social progress of this age. Indeed, the circumstances of our time have made it easier and at once more urgent to educate young people and, what is more, to continue the education of adults. Men are more aware of their own dignity and position; more and more they want to take an active part in social and especially in economic and political life. Enjoying more leisure, as they sometimes do, men find that the remarkable development of technology and scientific investigation and the new means of communication offer them an opportunity of attaining more easily their cultural and spiritual inheritance and of fulfilling one another in the closer ties between groups and even between peoples.”

Dear Participants in the Conference on the 60th Anniversary of *Gravissimum educationis* promoted by Pázmány Péter Catholic University and the Piarist Order in Hungary!

With these words, sixty years ago last October 28, Pope Paul VI and the Council Fathers of Vatican II opened the Declaration *Gravissimum educationis* on Christian Education. The years have passed, but the impact of the Declaration remains. In fact, on the eve of the anniversary Pope Leo XIV signed the Apostolic Letter *Drawing New Maps of Hope*, mindful that “*the Church celebrates a fruitful educational history, but also faces the imperative of updating her offerings in light of the signs of the times*”.² Today’s Conference witnesses to this imperative.

This anniversary offers an opportunity to look back on the visionary teaching of the Council and to assess how the principles outlined in GE continue to guide and shape Catholic education today. The document’s emphasis on the holistic formation of the

¹ Declaration on Christian Education Proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI (28 October 1965): https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html Introduction. Hereafter abbreviated GE.

² Pope Leo XIV, Apostolic Letter *Drawing New Maps of Hope* on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Conciliar Declaration *Gravissimum educationis* (Saint Peter’s Basilica, 27 October 2025): https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/apost_letters/documents/20251027-disegnare-nuove-mappe.html, no. 11.1. Hereafter abbreviated DNMH.

person – intellectual, spiritual, moral, and physical – remains as relevant today as it was in 1965. We stand at the crossroads of a world marked by rapid technological advancements, shifting cultural values, and increasing challenges to the faith. The call of GE is to provide an education that is not only academically rigorous, but also deeply rooted in the teachings of Christ and the Church, one that prepares young people to live as faithful disciples in a complex world:

At its heart, GE presents a vision of education as a means of human flourishing, grounded in the dignity of the human person created in the image of God. Vatican II emphasized that education is not merely a secular endeavor, but a deeply sacred one. The Document contains a fundamental affirmation: “The duty of educating belongs to the Church, not merely because she must be recognized as a human society capable of educating, but especially because she has the responsibility of announcing the way of salvation to all men, of communicating the life of Christ to those who believe, and, in her unfailing solicitude, of assisting men to be able to come to the fullness of this life” [GE, no. 3.]. The role of the Church is not limited to the instruction of children in the faith, but also to ensuring that every student – regardless of background or circumstance – receives a broad and well-rounded education that prepares them for the fullness of life in Christ.

Pope Leo XIV re-enforces this vision in his new document:

“Catholic educational constellations are an inspiring image of how tradition and future can intertwine without contradiction: a living tradition that extends towards new forms of presence and service. Constellations are not reduced to neutral and inert concatenations of different experiences. Instead of chains, let us dare to think of constellations, their intertwining full of wonder and awakening. In them lies the ability to navigate challenges with hope, but also with courageous revision, without losing fidelity to the Gospel. We are aware of the difficulties: hyper-digitalization can fragment attention; the crisis of relationships can wound the psyche; social insecurity and inequalities can extinguish desire. Yet, precisely here, Catholic education can be a beacon: not a nostalgic refuge, but a laboratory of discernment, pedagogical innovation and prophetic witness. Drawing new maps of hope: this is the urgency of the mandate.”(DNMH, no. 11.1.)

In order to “draw new maps of hope”, Pope Leo has asked Catholic educators and educational institutions to focus on three priorities:

“The first regards the inner life. Young people ask for depth; they need spaces for silence, discernment, and dialogue with their conscience and with God. The second regards the digital human: let us educate in a judicious use of technology and of AI, placing the person before the algorithm and harmonizing technical, emotional, social, spiritual and ecological intelligence. The third regards unarmed and disarming peace: let us educate in

non-violent languages, reconciliation, bridges and not walls. 'Blessed are the peacemakers' (Mt 5:9) becomes the method and content of learning.'"(DNMH, no. 10.3.)

Pope Leo is well aware that the world of 2025 is far different from the world of 1965, yet he remains firmly convinced that the principles outlined in GE remain as vital as ever. Today's students face challenges that the Council fathers could scarcely have anticipated: the rapid pace of technological change (AI), a society increasingly marked by secularism and relativism, and a globalized world that presents both extraordinary opportunities and daunting risks. Catholic schools must adapt to these new challenges without losing sight of their essential mission.

This Conference offers the opportunity to renew our commitment to the vision of GE that the idea that education is not simply about preparing students for careers or personal success but about forming them into disciples who will go forth and transform the world with the love of Christ. Catholic schools must remain vibrant centers of faith and learning, places where the pursuit of truth, beauty, and goodness is never separated from the practice of love, charity, and justice. We would do well to recall that the Church's mission in education is ultimately a call to help young people become whom God has created them to be, as we continue to build a culture of education that nurtures both the mind and the soul, equipping students to be true witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ in every aspect of their lives.

Perhaps that is why Pope Leo XIV has declared Saint John Henry Newman Co-Patron of Catholic Education:

"'Religious Truth is not only a portion, but a condition of general knowledge'. These words of Saint John Henry Newman...are an invitation to renew our commitment to knowledge that is as intellectually responsible and rigorous as it is deeply human. We must also be careful not to fall into the trap of an enlightenment of a fides paired exclusively with ratio. We need to emerge from the shallows by recovering an empathic and open vision, and to understand better how humankind understands itself today in order to develop and deepen our teaching. This is why desire and the heart must not be separated from knowledge: it would mean splitting the person. Catholic universities and schools are places where questions are not silenced, and doubt is not banished, but accompanied. The heart, there, dialogue with the heart, and the method is that of listening that recognizes the other as an asset, not a thread. Cor ad cor loquitur was Saint John Henry Newman's cardinal's motto: 'Sincerity of heart, not abundance of words, touches the hearts of men.'"(DNMH, no. 3.1.)

Blessings on your deliberations! May they challenge all of us to remain ever faithful to the noble calling of GE, as well as to respond to Pope Leo XIV and his invitation in DNMH to serve the mission of the Church in the world today.

Thank you for your kind attention!