

Words of Welcome of the President of the International Federation of Catholic Universities

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Your Excellency Msgr. *Vicenzo Zani*, representing the Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education. We rejoice at your presence here, which stresses our belonging to the Church of Rome and the close links that tie our Federation to the Congregation for Catholic Education. It is also a mark of your staunch friendship with our Federation, which rests on our common mission, in the name of Education as a service of the Church within cultures. I would therefore like to thank you warmly for joining us on this occasion, dear Msgr Zani !

Excellencies...,

Dear Rector of the ACU, who do us the honour of welcoming us to your eminent institution..., *dear Greg...* through whom I would like to thank the university community of the ACU, which, today, becomes the world seat of our Federation for a week, after having worked in the shade for three years to prepare our meeting in all its details with such efficiency and generosity.

Dear colleague rectors, professors and representatives of the universities who are here today, I thank you with all my heart for having taken the time to join us at a time when we are witnessing a period of crisis and other problems. I am especially grateful to you for having made the effort to be here today, for nothing is more important than to give body to IFCU by gathering together, since our Federation would be meaningless if it could not count on the participation of its members in its meetings and activities.

Dear guests of honour, ecclesiastical and political authorities of the Australian society.

Prof. Msgr. Guy-Réal Thivierge, dear Secretary-General, dear friend, whom I would like to thank, together with all the team of the Secretariat and of the Center for Coordination of Research who have worked together to organise this Assembly. Thanks to all and each one of you... Barnabé, Loïc, Manon, Montserrat, Nicolas and Phillipe.

To all of you who honour us with your participation, thank you and greetings....

The General Assembly is the supreme authority of the International Federation of Catholic Universities and we are gathered here to give body to this important organ of the life of IFCU. Thank you all for having accepted the invitation to Melbourne, which was launched at our last meeting in São Paulo.

Gathering every three years, the General Assembly is above all a meeting place for the rectors, presidents, professors and representatives of the 220 universities which make up our Federation; it is a place of meeting and friendship, but also a unique opportunity to share «the worries and hopes» of our common mission at the service of the Church which is at the heart of societies and cultures.

This meeting is also a welcome moment to evaluate the work achieved, not only to improve and dynamise our Federation, but also to become aware of the importance of working in networks beyond the frontiers of countries, regions, dioceses or religious families, thus revealing the richness of our Catholicism. We must render grace to God and also thank our partner universities and those who are engaged in the many services, meetings and projects proposed by the Secretariat, the Centre for Coordination of Research, the Regional Associations and the Sectorial Groups. These activities are described in the administrative reports, which were given to you on your arrival. We will come back to them later on.

This major meeting is also an important occasion to reflect and discuss together on the basis of a central theme, not forgetting to put once more the basic question of the identity and mission of our universities, taking into account the challenges and opportunities of a world in constant flux, as the students do every day within our institutions, as shown in the IFCU world survey on the cultures of the young. And if we trust in the Spirit of the voice of these young academics, we should reformulate the theme of our Assembly as a question: If the times are changing, to what extent can this redefine – or not – the major values of humanity, according to the tradition of Christianity and the Catholic Church?

Last, coming from such different backgrounds and meeting around a common mission enables us to keep alive and renew this beautiful tradition that honours IFCU, which is anchored in our present and open to the future. Since the initiative of a small group of universities to create a Federation, in 1924, followed by its recognition by the Holy See in 1949, a long history has been built from all the materials of the world. This heritage is described in «IFCU, a prophetic organisation» which will soon be published and will put in the limelight the builders of a solid tradition. Each generation of participants must now build together the future of IFCU: we must see the signs of the times and accompany our Federation on the road to its first centenary.

The present is extremely stimulating, especially if we consider the period since our last Assembly in Brazil in 2012: the election of Pope Francis in 2013, the 90th anniversary of IFCU in 2014 and, this year, the 50 years of the end of Vatican II and the approval of the *Gravissimum Educationis* Declaration, the 25 years of the Apostolic Exhortation *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*... If the calendar of the Federation usually includes many activities, it has been considerably enriched by these celebrations, of which this General Assembly and the large meeting of Catholic education institutions, which will take place in Rome in November under the aegis of the Congregation, must be stressed. In this commemorative framework and in the context of an «ecclesial spring », we are invited to renew our hopes, revisit our history and dare the aggronamento of our Federation, in communion with the Church, which is at the heart of the world, respecting its first vocation, *Sciat Vt Serviat*, to know in order to serve.

I am very happy to be with you and thank you for your attention. I now declare open the 25th IFCU General Assembly. I very much hope it will be an enriching experience for all!

Me es muy grato estar con Ustedes hoy, muchas gracias por su atención. Declaro abierta la vigésima quinta Asamblea General de la FIUC y deseo que sea para todos una experiencia muy grata!

I am very happy to be with you today, many thanks for your attention. Hoping that Melbourne will remain in your heart and mind an unforgettable experience, I declare open the twenty fifth IFCU General Assembly.