

Isabel Capeloa Gil

President Elect's Message

27th General Assembly of the International Federation of Catholic Universities

Dear colleagues,

Let me start with a word of gratitude for your support to my reelection. I take it as an approval of the transformation work the Board of the Federation has been actively engaged in over the past four years, and therefore I wish to thank my colleagues in the Administration and in the Executive Boards for all their work and advocacy for IFCU. Allow me to particularly mention the outgoing members of the board: Fr. Herminio Dagohoy, past President of Saint Tomás University in the Philippines and Fr. George Nkeze, past President of the Catholic University of Buea in Cameroon, Fr. Prasant Palakapillil, Past Principal of Sacred Heart College in India, Dr. Ignazio Sanchez, Rector of the Pontifical University of Chile, Fr. Khalil Chalfoun, past President of Univ. La Sagesse in Lebanon and Fr. Terry Kersch, past President of St. Joseph's College in Canada. Thank you for your service to IFCU.

A reelection is a continuation, with a twist. It is not a repetition, but a reinvention, and I promise to continue the mission enriched with lessons learned along the way. That means continuing to serve the Church by supporting the development of academically robust universities, driven by excellent and transformative science aimed at the common good. It also means working for ever more inclusive institutions, respectful of the different constituencies they hold and mindful of the diverse stakeholders of the institution. It means support for more efficient governance and championing for equal opportunity within our institutions. It means as well to continue to reject provincialism and parochial university politics and to use the spirit of

the Church's universalism as an inspiration for stronger and innovative networks.

This is no small task. One of the recurring tropes of contemporary thought is that place is inextricably connected to our vision of the world. That, in fact, one thinks where one is. Yet, this attention to place, to the local, must not forego global interconnectedness, that in fact our lives are deeply entwined with the experiences of our sisters and brethren across the globe. The Holy Father reminds us in the Encyclical *Laudato Si* that precisely this sense of globality inevitably “obliges us to think of *one world with a common plan*.” (Laudato Si, 164) and to accept the world as a “sacrament of communion” (Laudato Si, 9). More than a promise, this is the experience and the practice, that a scholar must pursue. Science, research require a mutual recognition and an ability to transform and transcend, in communal and collaborative engagement. Equally, as St. Ignatius of Loyola suggests in one of the *Ejercicios Espirituales*, that is remarkably inspiring in this regard, the discernment that comes from reflection demands the person meditating to be able to see the wide diversity of the world. Let us hear from exercise 106: “El primer punto es ver las personas, las unas y las otras; y primero las de la haz de la tierra, en tanta diversidad, así en trajes como en gestos, unos blancos y otros negros, unos en paz y otros en Guerra, unos llorando y otros riendo, unos sanos, otros enfermos, unos nasciendo y otros muriendo, etc.” With this observation, comes the demand to put oneself into the scene and assume a role in this imaginary situation. The exercise suggests that a necessary stage of discernment is precisely this seeing, imagining and engaging with the other. In the vocabulary of today, it speaks of an engagement with a global community of which universities are part of, and by mission and identity most certainly Catholic universities. Communion, collaboration and cosmopolitanism are the 3Cs of the professional path to knowledge as conceived at universities.

On the short term agenda there are already two important events the Federation has been invited to partner with and spearhead. The first is the ongoing synodal consultation. The Secretariat of the Synod of

Bishops has entrusted IFCU with the creation of a network of universities to produce an interdisciplinary reflection on the results of the continental stage of the synodal consultation. Three different papers taking on different perspectives: theological, canon law and socio-cultural shall be produced within 6 months of the reception of the summary of the continental phase in order to aid the work of the synod. We shall set up three working groups in consultation with the member universities.

Secondly, I'd like to remind members that World Youth Day shall be held next year in Lisbon, from the 1st to the 6th of August. The Catholic University of Portugal is one of the contact points of the celebration and together with IFCU, UCP shall organize a number of side events for university students. The information about how to be engaged with World Youth Day from the perspective of higher education shall also follow shortly.

And finally, also on a celebratory note, IFCU shall start the planning of the centenary celebrations of its founding, due to begin in 2024. As we start the process, propositions and suggestions by members of the Federation are warmly encouraged and they may be addressed to the Secretary General, François Mabilille.

The 27th General Assembly that is today coming to an end has been an extraordinary moment of conviviality, with an edge. We leave mutually enriched by a scholarly dialogue that will support the work of transformation that is required at universities. Universities, and Catholic universities, more specifically, are always in the making. They will never be done with, our task as Presidents, Rectors, Vice-Chancellors is to continue to provide the energy for the development of the ever evolving projects that universities ultimately are.

The experience of our week here at BC and the flawless organization of the General Assembly is due to the extraordinary professionalism of our local hosts. Let me thank Fr. Casey Beaumier, Vice-President of Boston College, and his team for making this a truly unforgettable experience. Thank you for your support, for accommodating last minute changes – that always come about – and

for being such a gracious host. A word of warm thanks to the IFCU Secretariat, the structure that is the life blood of the Federation, first to the Secretary General of IFCU, François Mabile, and to the Paris team Nicolas Vergier, Loic Roche, Montserrat Allon, Philippe Tan and to Corinne Mellul, who gave us a tour de force reflection on the future of universities.

Dear friends, dear colleagues, I am committed to affirm a full dialogue with society, to work to empower the youth in light of the Catholic intellectual tradition and to continue to carry IFCU's role as an acknowledged international voice, advocating for Catholic higher education. I will not say goodbye. Next year we shall hopefully see each other in Rome, at the New Frontiers Forum for University Presidents, as we move in three years time to join our voices in singing and experiencing Guadalajara! God bless you and safe returns.