

USCCB ADDRESS
Baltimore – Nov. 16, 2015
Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, Apostolic Nuncio

Your Eminences, Your Excellency Archbishop Kurtz, my Brother Archbishops and Bishops, Monsignor Jenkins and staff of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

All of us here are still amazed at the incredible recent visit of our Holy Father in the United States. I am very grateful to Cardinal Wuerl, Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop Chaput, Archbishop Kurtz and the members of the Bishops' Conference, and to countless numbers of others for all the time and energy involved in planning out and executing the actual visit. It was truly inspiring to see how well we all worked together. What we have done as one Church united and gathered in the presence of Peter, as a people coming together as one in the Eucharist, we can continue to do and to accomplish.

On every occasion when he spoke, His Holiness gave a significant message that left a deep impression on the minds and hearts of his listeners. At the climax of it all was the Meeting of the Families. In Philadelphia Pope Francis gave a powerful catechesis, especially with relation to the family and its openness to life with all its beauty and potential to form a vibrant and living Church.

Now we find ourselves once again in Baltimore where we can see how the first diocese in the United States has evolved in over two hundred and twenty five years from its creation. At its beginnings this local Church witnessed diocesan meetings and later Provincial Councils which fostered

the evangelical mission for the Church in the United States. Enthusiastic to spread the Gospel message, the bishops decided upon a strategy that would shape the growth and development of the Catholic Church. The main tool of this strategy was education, which was accomplished through the building of parishes with their own schools, together with the dedicated support of women religious. A prime example of this is St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, the great pioneer of American Catholic schools.

These schools became fortresses of solid Catholic formation for all those young people who would take their place in America's future. (By the way, it was at the same time as the beginnings of the Church in Baltimore came about that a prestigious university in Washington was founded under the direction of the Jesuits. While the Church in France was undergoing great suppression through a revolution which removed God from public life, it was this Order in this university that was meant to build up and preserve genuine Catholic teaching to be infused into the culture of America's young society. At almost the same time, also in that very place in Georgetown, the Visitation Sisters also started that great adventure of a Catholic school.)

Referring back to the intention of the bishops in their plans for the future of the Church in America, Catholic schools with their own particular parishes were to be the means for its families to find identity, meaning and nourishment in a new world struggling to come to its own realization through the many changes taking place over the decades and centuries in a rapidly growing country. Education was primary in the Bishops' minds; it was an essential means for the Gospel message to be woven into the very fabric of our people's existence. In so doing, they were following the

consistent path of evangelization traced centuries before by the monastic orders, followed also by the Holy See which founded the first universities of studies in Europe. This path was followed over and over again by the missionary pioneers who founded the Church in sub-Sahara Africa, a continent of great hope for the universal Church.

We are all well aware that we are at a critical point now in the challenges that are brought to family life in our western world. This has been clearly seen in the recent Synod of Bishops. We know that a solid Catholic family is the very first school for learning. Good and faithful parents are always the best of teachers. They form a domestic Church, and they prepare their children for education in our Catholic schools on every level, from primary through University stages.

On this same path the New Evangelization should find renewed strength, just as it did in the first evangelization. That strength, which should be found both in the family and in the schools, will exist only in proportion to its Catholic identity. Again, that strength must be solid and unwavering in its commitment to Truth. If we are to preserve a moral order in our society, we cannot fall prey to the enticements and allurements of a secularized and increasingly pagan civilization.

My brothers in the episcopate, we are well aware of the many challenges we are faced with every day. As faithful shepherds and leaders of the Church, we have a tremendous obligation to watch over and protect families, and parishes and schools for the good of the people. We have received and we have to pass down the authentic teaching of Christ. Like St.

Paul, we are compelled to proclaim the Gospel message, “in season and out of season”. As Pope St. Gregory the Great reminds us in his ‘Pastoral Rule’: “Imprudent silence may leave in error those who could have been taught. Pastors who lack foresight hesitate to say openly what is right because they fear losing the favor of men.”

I encourage you, together with your presbyterate, religious and laity, to continue to do the fine work you are doing in every facet of the Church’s life, for being so patient in your struggles, for persevering in your vision for a tomorrow filled with hope.

I would like to propose two points for your consideration today:

One – the need to give particular attention and care to our Catholic educational institutions so that they would regain the luster of their true identity that has shown forth from them in the past.

Two – that Catholic colleges and universities, renowned for the professional formation of their students, should be encouraged to be faithful to the title of ‘Catholic’ that they bear. In this way, their students can be inspired to take their rightful place in the world, teaching others to work toward being the true Catholic family that God intends them to be. While each college or university has its own particular mission, together they ultimately have the solemn obligation to teach the same doctrine of the universal Church and to define the moral obligations that mark us all as Catholic Christians.

Last year, in addressing a group of university educators from America, the Holy Father expressed his hope that Catholic universities will,

as he said, “continue to offer unambiguous testimony to their foundational Catholic identity, especially in the face of efforts, from whatever quarter, to dilute that indispensable witness.” The Holy Father continued, saying, and I quote: “And this is important: its identity, as it was intended from the beginning. To defend it, to preserve it and to advance it!” (Jan. 30, 2014)

Our students should be taught how to pray and how to become familiar with Christ. They should experience how enriching is the encounter with the poor, with the sick, the elderly, and the immigrant - a reality often excluded from our privileged society. They should also experience, along with the great quality of education, the inspiring devotion to Our Lady, and a love for the missions.

I shall confess with great feeling that this is the education that I gratefully received from the Jesuit Fathers in their secondary school in Milan which greatly helped and confirmed my vocation to the priesthood, and which was further strengthened and affirmed at their Gregorian University in Rome. It came, therefore, so spontaneously from my heart to choose as the date of publication of my assignment to the United States, the feast of those Jesuit saints, the North American Martyrs. I had always desired to visit their Shrine in Auriesville, New York, and I was able to fulfill this desire just a short time before the coming of the Holy Father to the United States, to pray with affection for him as a Jesuit, and for the success of his journey to this country. I also recently visited their first parish—St. Ignatius at Chapel Point in Port Tobacco, Maryland, founded in 1641, the oldest continuously active parish in the original thirteen States.

No doubt that this Order has been the leader of evangelization in North America. I have been told, that also in Florida and California, before the arrival of the Franciscans, the Jesuits started the mission of evangelization. The Society of Jesus has had a long and proud tradition of imparting a rich Catholic faith and a deep love for Christ, which in great part is carried on through their mission of education. It is my hope that, with respect to their great tradition, after the example of our Holy Father, they would take again the lead in re-affirming the Catholic identity of their educational institutions.

Educational leaders should regain firm command of the helm of their institutions through the storms of the present times. The course must always be set by Christ and his Church, never allowing influence and wealth to dictate what might be an improper orientation for a Catholic school or university.

May God give us, as teachers and models in the faith, the grace we need to always be faithful to our own mission to renew the spirit of evangelization in our midst. As we continue on our journey, we know that we are not alone in our endeavors, that the firm support of God's people is with us.

As the end of my mission among you may be approaching, I want to assure you that you will always be, with my sincere gratitude, in my thoughts and prayers.