

OPENING ADDRESS

Beatriz Acosta Mesa odn
Superior General

Good morning. My greeting is also directed to all of those, who, although not present here, helped to make this International Education Congress possible. An encounter of this caliber requires the collaboration of many people; this is an opportune time, in the name of the universal Company, to recognize, appreciate and give thanks to the people in charge of its preparation, as well as for those who throughout these days will do everything in their power to make it a success.

Therefore, we begin this day with feelings of gratitude and mutually expressing a desire for the best with the conviction that it is a grace and a gift to be here meeting together. Let us dedicate a few seconds in this opening to look around, to see by the diversity of faces what it is that unites us and what it is that makes us different, in order to discover more deeply the reason why we have come to this Congress.

I also invite us all to look upon and to see another person, who, as the gospel of the today's liturgy says: "he went through all the cities and villages, teaching, preaching and healing..." (Mt. 9:33). Three words that express well the commitment entailed in being an educator. The presence of Jesus living among us is a light that helps us understand deeply a humanist education: the act of total giving of oneself, of unconditional love so that others may have life and have it in abundance; truly believing that we are not alone in this endeavor and united to so many others and others who, from different creeds and ideologies, work untiringly to offer an educational program that responds to the challenges of our world. We have wanted, as a Company, to celebrate these 400 years of history with the objective of renewing ourselves and renewing our mission of education, to continue seeking and opening pathways for the future.

This international Congress of Education, like the one that we will celebrate in Mexico, is a key moment in the reflection process which we initiated in September, 2005, which was organized in three phases:

Phase one, in which we emphasized a deepening in our understanding of the challenges that the 21st Century brings to the Company in our mission of education. This deepening has helped us gain greater awareness and understanding of the historical moment in which we are called to live, and to indicate some points of emphasis and lines of action that are to be a distinctive feature of our educational style today. All of this has been reflected in the Document that gathers the material pondered upon in this first stage and has paved the way for the second.

The *second phase* has made it possible for us to discover, in concrete practice educational practices, how we are responding today to the new challenges that society and the world present to us.

This Congress has attempted to gather the work accomplished up to now and to take it one step further: to share and to give further consideration to some of the educational experiences that are responding to real challenges in the different

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contexts, and to identify and exchange ways to continue looking together for suitable and creative responses.

In some of the countries in which we are present as Company, Congresses along this line are being celebrated, or have already taken place. We thought that what differentiates this one and the next one that we will celebrate in Mexico, from the previous ones, is its **universality**. A universality that gathers the diversity of peoples, cultures, traditions, sensitivities... and that also shows us how the educational charism of Jeanne de Lestonnac has been incarnated in each one of these realities. It is also very enriching experience.

As we enter the 21st Century, in which the interrelation, interconnection, interdependence... have a greater influence in the shaping of our reality, we believe that the search for educational responses to the challenges of today happens through the prism of universality.

As we begin this Congress, the call to be educators is to deepen in the fundamental elements of our educational style, to recognize that which identifies us and to discover or to renew those bonds which unite us and in which we are rooted through a common Project.

We are also called to open ourselves up to what is different and to learn from it. A lesson taken from history is the mutual influence between diverse cultures: "cultures perish in isolation and prosper in communication"¹, and a lesson from our unfinished humanity is that when we exclude, we impoverish and when we include, we enrich. The search for creative responses to the new challenges requires that we set in motion all the means that are within our power to join together with these diverse realities, to fortify our bonds in order to share our strengths and to strengthen us in our weaknesses.

We have to widen the limits of our mind and our heart, to overcome our prejudices, to defy borders, to increase our capacity to receive and to give.

The **humanism**, inspired by the values of Jesus of Nazareth and his Kingdom have been the foundation of the Project of Jeanne de Lestonnac and has given life and energy to the search for valid answers to the needs of men and women at every historical moment. The challenge that is placed before us in a humanist education today in this plural world is to find new ways to continue believing in the value of each person and his/her integral growth. It also supposes that we venture in creating new paths that allow us to globalize our solidarity, with justice, with liberty with freedom, with peace... As a Company we believe that we have much to contribute in this sense, that we must take greater advantage of the resources at our disposal by the very fact of our universal character.

The **challenges chosen** for consideration in the Congress: faith and inter-religious dialogue, education and inclusion, integral and integrating education, comprise the constituent elements of the educational Project of the Company. To reflect on them from different contexts and platforms, from different and complementary outlooks, is an opportunity to jointly look into educational practices that open new horizons of response.



The challenge regarding young people, of connecting with their world and their projects refers to the Company's preferential option to this mission. We believe that the search for creative responses is, in this case, a priority.

The **methodology** used throughout the Congress unites theory and praxis. Also let us unite feeling and thought, reason and heart, let us prepare ourselves to teach, to learn and to enjoy in the full meaning of the word.

We are sure that at the end of these days we will have obtained the **proposed objective**: to share experiences, to open channels of dialogue, to experience mutual interchange, mutual reflection, with complementarity that we may seek and specify the direction of our efforts in the coming years.

The **conclusions** which we arrive at in this Congress and the one in Mexico, will be the groundwork for the work of the third and last phase of this education reflection: specify lines of action in each reality and carry out a greater inter-relationship between the different contexts and educational opportunities in which we are present. What we have experienced will help us project the celebration of these 400 years into time, creating a new impetus in the commitment to our educational mission as a valid response for today's world.

I would like to close by calling to mind Jeanne de Lestonnac, a woman who during her entire life and in all of her work always affirmed the value of education as a "means that contributes to the good of the person, to the public good and to the glory of God"². In today's words we would say that it makes us more human, better persons; that it contributes to the transformation of society, of the world, it helps us discover greater meaning to life, it helps us open ourselves up to the transcendent. Jeanne de Lestonnac wanted the service of education to be the fundamental purpose of the Institute, desiring that "we never omit it and we always do it better"³. Encouraged by this desire and by the testimony of so many people who throughout these four centuries have known how to make it a reality, we live these days with responsibility, commitment and renewed enthusiasm. To everyone, we thank you once again for your participation in this Congress.

Barcelona, July 10, 2007

¹ Fuentes C. En esto creo. Seix Barral, Barcelona, 2002

² Foundational Documents 1605-1638. Formula for the Classes or Schools, Chap. III,1. p. 142

³ Idem.

