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Audience with participants in the General Assembly of the World Union of Catholic Teachers (UMEC-WUCT)

This morning the Holy Father Francis received in audience, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the participants in the General Assembly of the World Union of Catholic Teachers (UMEC-WUCT).

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank the President for his kind words of greeting and I thank all of you who belong to the World Union of Catholic Teachers (WUCT). I greet with gratitude Cardinal Farrell, Archbishop Dollmann who is your Ecclesiastical Assistant, the other Bishops present and the Secretary of the Dicastery for Culture and Education.

You have gathered these days in Rome for your General Assembly, which will also elect the new International Council. I thank the members of the outgoing Executive Committee for their faithful and generous service over these past years. I am confident that the work they have done, selflessly and with great dedication, will bear abundant fruit in the future: work aimed at bearing fruits.

You have passed through unsettling times in your recent history, and even moments of doubt and discouragement. At times, it might have seemed as though circumstances were no longer conducive to continuing, that it is all finished. But thank God, even in the midst of those storms, you persevered! You trusted in God and in the support of the Church and you remained committed, in a spirit of faith and Christian hope. Be assured: seeds sown in hope take root and always grow!

Like many other Catholic associations, WUCT too is faced with the challenge of generational change, which

particularly affects leadership. I encourage you to take a positive view of this. Reality is never static; it is always dynamic. This naturally applies also to ecclesial associations, which grow and develop as times change, and every epoch presents them with a new mission. Renewal within your organization and in the roles of major responsibility should be seen as beginning a new mission, as an opportunity for renewed vigour in your efforts to serve and support new generations of Catholic teachers, both those who work in Catholic schools and those who work in interdenominational or secular institutions.

Your Union aims to encourage and motivate all these teachers to be fully aware of their important mission as educators and witnesses of the faith, as individuals or within groups of colleagues. To this end, you envision yourselves as a professional network, as brothers and sisters in the faith who in the spirit of friendship, acceptance, mutual acquaintance and shared spiritual growth, put yourselves at the service of all Catholic teachers, to help them maintain their identity and carry out their mission. I would say that in this regard you are “co-workers of the Pope”, for the mission of the Successor of Peter is precisely that of confirming and sustaining our brothers and sisters in the faith (cf. *Lk 22:32*). In this way, you make present in the academic world the Church’s service of supporting Catholic teachers in the faith, so that they can carry out their work and bear witness in the best way possible, in situations that are often complex on the relational and institutional levels.

The presence of Christian educators in school communities is vitally important. And the “style” they choose to adopt is likewise crucial. Indeed, Christian educators are called to be at once both fully human and fully Christian. There is no humanism without Christianity. And there is no Christianity without humanism. They must not be spiritualistic, spacy and “other-worldly”. They must be rooted in the present, in their own time and culture. It is important that on a personal level they be resourceful, open and capable of establishing genuine relationships with students and understanding their deepest needs, questions, fears and dreams. It is also important that they be capable of testifying – above all by their lives but also by their words – that the Christian faith embraces all of human experience, that it brings light and truth to every area of existence, without excluding anything, without clipping the wings of young people’s dreams, without impoverishing their aspirations. Indeed, in the tradition of the Church, the education of the young has always had as its goal not only the teaching of concepts but the integral formation of each human person in all his or her dimensions (cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 48).

In the fulfilment of this educational mission, WUCT members are called to support teachers of all ages and in all working conditions. This includes both teachers with long experience who feel gratified but also face certain challenges, and a generation of young teachers who have no lack of enthusiasm and energy, but also the frailties and uncertainties that often mark the first years of teaching. All these teachers – seen from a Christian perspective that they themselves may not always fully appreciate – are in a position to leave a mark, for better or for worse, on the lives of the children, adolescents and young people who are entrusted to them for a significant period of time. A great responsibility! And a great opportunity to guide them, with wisdom and respect, along the paths of the world and of life, helping to open their minds to the true, the beautiful and the good. All of us know from personal experience how important it is to have good teachers and wise educators in our formative years!

Dear friends, in your apostolate you rightly take into account that the art of educating must be constantly cultivated and nurtured, for it is not something acquired once and for all. And if this is the case for a variety of professions that require ongoing professional development, teaching has this unique characteristic, that you do not work with *objects* but with *subjects*! Education has to do with human beings, and at an early stage of their development. Children change from year to year, and sometimes from month to month. Moreover, the young people of one generation differ from those of the next. Educators, then, must continually reassess their own motivations and their methods. They cannot be rigid. Rigidity destroys education. In approaching different groups of pupils and students, they are called to start afresh each year, to renew their capacity for empathy and communication. Your task in this regard is to help teachers maintain their desire to grow together with their students, to find the most effective ways of transmitting the joy of learning and the desire for truth, by employing language and cultural forms suited to the young people of today.

In this regard, I would like to emphasise one thing. I said: “Language suited to today’s cultural forms”. Yes, but beware of ideological colonization. It is one thing to follow the culture of the moment, to speak the language of the moment, but it is another thing to allow yourself to be colonized ideologically. Please, be careful to form

teachers in a way that enables them to discern a novelty that helps them to grow and an ideology, an ideological colonization. Today, ideological colonization is destroying the human personality and it can be disastrous when it is applied in education.

I would like to make one final request of you, one very close to my heart. Your Union can help raise awareness among Catholic teachers of the Global Compact on Education. As you know, this initiative, which has had the support of many educational institutions, aims “to unite efforts in a broad educational alliance, to form mature individuals capable of overcoming division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity” (*Message for the Launch of the Global Compact on Education*, 12 September 2019). I am confident that you will involve teachers who are members of WUCT in this project, which aims to focus on the individual, in all his or her dignity and beauty, and on families as the primary educators of their children.

Dear brothers and sisters, I encourage you to look to the future with hope and to give new impetus to the Union of Catholic Teachers. A noble task and an important mission await you in the world of education and schooling. May Our Lady and all the saints who themselves were educators accompany and inspire you. I too am at your side in this challenge – not as a saint but as a companion in the struggle. I cordially bless you, and I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you!
