

**REMARKS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
 APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
 CATHOLIC DISTANCE UNIVERSITY GALA
 NATIONAL SHRINE OF SAINT JOHN PAUL II, WASHINGTON, DC
 NOVEMBER 16, 2019**

Your Excellency Archbishop Broglio, Your Excellencies, Reverend Fathers, President Mount, friends, alumni, and benefactors of Catholic Distance University, Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis and express his gratitude for all that Catholic Distance University does to advance the truth of the Gospel through the education and formation it offers. I also wish to express my personal gratitude for the Founders Award which you have bestowed upon me this evening.

Catholic Distance University plays a vital role in taking up the challenge of the new evangelization by providing an authentically Catholic, high quality education in a flexible and affordable way, making use of the latest technology and an exceptional faculty to form the hearts and minds of men and women who promote the mission of the Church by engaging culture, using both reason and faith.

Founded in 1983 to offer opportunities for education and faith formation to those at the peripheries, today Catholic Distance University stands as a premier institution in offering graduate and undergraduate degrees and certificates in theology and scripture, as well as providing quality formation for catechists and lay leaders in the Church.

I was pleased to learn that the motto of CDU is *Gaudium de Veritate*, Joy from the Truth, a phrase which appears in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Jesus identified Himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). Pope Benedict XVI has written, and Pope Francis continues to repeat it:

“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea; rather it is the encounter with an event, with a Person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” (POPE BENEDICT XVI, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *Deus Caritas Est*, 25 DECEMBER 2005, 1)

In a Catholic context, to draw joy from the Truth is to say that one has encountered the Person of Jesus Christ, who opens up new horizons for us. The Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, which governs Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties and which was promulgated by Pope Francis in 2017 begins:

“The joy of truth expresses the restlessness of the human heart until it encounters and dwells within God’s Light and shares that Light with all people. For truth is not an abstract idea, but is Jesus himself, the Word of God in whom is the Life that is the Light of man (cf. Jn 1:4), the Son of God who is also the Son of Man. He alone, ‘in revealing the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals humanity to itself and brings to light its very high calling’.” (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION *VERITATIS GAUDIUM*, 8 DECEMBER 2017, 1)

Study, which is an integral part of the mission of evangelization undertaken by Catholic Distance University and its faculty and students, is at its heart a search for and encounter with the Truth. Education ought to help a person grow in his or her humanity; it should be “integrated with personal and community life, with missionary commitment, with fraternal charity and sharing with the poor, with care of the

interior life in relationship with the Lord.” (POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE PONTIFICAL GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY, 10 APRIL 2014)

However, the world is changing rapidly, and our young people are especially being affected by the digital environment, as the Holy Father noted in his recent exhortation following the Synod on Youth:

“The digital environment is characteristic of the contemporary world. Broad swathes of humanity are immersed in it in an ordinary and continuous manner. It is no longer merely a question of ‘using’ instruments of communication, but of living in a highly digitalized culture that has had a profound impact on ideas of time and space, on our self-understanding, our understanding of others and the world, and our ability to communicate, learn, be informed and enter into relationships with others. An approach to reality that privileges images over listening and reading has influenced the way people learn and the development of their critical sense.” (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *CHRISTUS VIVIT*, 25 MARCH 2019, 86)

Catholic Distance University, at the frontier of online education, is uniquely positioned to evangelize in this digital environment. Its faculty and alumni utilize technology and the new media to form minds and hearts of new generations to be missionary disciples – to think critically and to engage others in real relationships, not merely virtual ones. Catholic Distance University understands that academic content is not enough; formation – especially formation for service and leadership in the Church – is one of the desired outcomes of its programs.

To form another is to help the person to be a better person: a conscious subject, free and responsible, open to the good, the true and beautiful; capable of entering into deep relationships with others - *of being with others and for others*. As Pope Benedict XVI says:

“Education is not and must never be considered something purely utilitarian. It is about forming the human person, equipping him or her to live life to the full – in short it is about imparting wisdom.” (BENEDICT XVI, ADDRESS TO TEACHERS AND RELIGIOUS, ST. MARY’S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, TWICKENHAM, 17 SEPTEMBER 2010)

Yet, what seems obvious to those of us of an older generation (or those of us who are “technologically-challenged”) about the need for balance in our use of technology is not always obvious to our young people, who engage others in the public square, who dialogue with others and exchange information in a digital environment, and who utilize technology for political and social activities. So often technology, even in education, is used for political activity and economic gain. As such, there is a temptation to educate for efficiency and productivity, without concern for formation of character.

As Catholics, we want to educate the religious sense within a person. We understand that “it is not healthy to confuse communication with mere virtual contact” (cf. *Christus vivit*, 88). In addition to exposing young people to addiction, isolation and loss of contact with reality, to the dark web and human trafficking, and to pornography, technology and digital spaces, for all their value, can also cause people to grow blind “to the vulnerability of another human being and to prevent us from our own self-reflection.” (cf. *Christus vivit*, 90)

All of us – including faculty, alumni, and benefactors – who support Catholic Distance University must use the wisdom of the experience gained since 1983 and the wisdom of our Tradition to help our society, but especially our young people, to rediscover what it is to be human. Pope Francis has said:

“This is one of the challenges of our time: transmitting knowledge and offering a key for vital comprehension, not a heap of notions unconnected to one another. There is need of a true evangelical hermeneutic for better understanding life, the world, and humanity.”
(POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE PONTIFICAL GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY, 10 APRIL 2014)

Educators constantly ask students questions; they hope that their students will learn the right answers to the questions. As Catholics, amid the many challenges of our day – increasing secularism, relativism, individualism, an obsession with technology, and extreme poverty and marginalization, to name a few – we want to lead others to discover that Christ is the answer.

Christ is the answer, but sometimes the task of educators is also to help others to think critically so that they ask the right questions. If we don't perceive the question (of our humanity), how can we understand the answer? This is the challenge – modern people have lost a sense of their own humanity and with it a sense of the Infinite, a sense of Mystery.

Ministers of the Gospel, Catholic educators and catechists, and parents, by their witness and by their efforts of accompanying young people, assist them in discovering their own humanity by provoking questions: What is the meaning of existence? Why is there pain and death? Why is life worth living? What is True? Good? Beautiful? What does reality consist of and for what is it made?

The men and women of our day must be guided to engage reality – to engage life and to ask these questions. It is not for us to pre-determine the questions or their answers. They must engage reality. Unless they ask these sorts of questions, they will never encounter the answer: Christ, the Redeemer of Man, who is the center of the universe and of history (cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *REDEMPTOR HOMINIS* 4 MARCH 1979, 1) and who “in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, *fully reveals man to himself* and brings to light his most high calling” (cf. *REDEMPTOR HOMINIS*, 8).

The essential content of all the education and formation provided by Catholic Distance University is the person of Christ. He changes everything – makes all things new – for our young people, our Church, and our world. I am truly grateful to all at Catholic Distance University who work to make Christ more widely known and loved. For this reason, I am truly honored to accept the Founders Award. Thank you.