

World Congress “Child Dignity in the Digital World”

Welcome address by the Rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University

Your Eminences, Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University it is an honor and pleasure to host the World Congress on “Child Dignity in the Digital World”. This is a continuation of the commitment that this University has been showing since the Symposium “Towards healing and renewal” on the sexual abuses of minors, held in 2012. That symposium took place shortly after the foundation of the Centre for Child Protection of the Institute of Psychology at this University.

The 2012 Symposium was never meant to be an isolated event. In fact, it was the starting point of a sustainable long-term commitment for a safer world. Among other multidisciplinary and international initiatives, the Centre for Child Protection has organized this World Congress on “Child Dignity in the digital world” as a further step in building a network of key-players in the field of safeguarding minors.

We received renewed encouragement and strength in this challenging task from the letter of Pope Francis to the Bishops on the Feast of the Holy Innocents, mentioning the current Holy Innocents are those young people who are deprived by the “new Herods of our times” of their innocence, joy and dignity. Pope Francis called on us to renew “the courage that generates processes capable of acknowledging the reality that many of our children are experiencing today”, and to ensure that children’s dignity is not only respected but, above all, defended. And what is more present and engaging for our children today than the digital world?

Young people live with gains, the benefits, challenges and threats of the digital era. Everywhere they have access to the digital world where their trust and innocence can be easily betrayed.

No country, no institution, no single human being can solve this problem acting alone. We must be allied in this multi-faith and multi-national effort to protect child dignity; we must understand that we are all responsible for each other in the world. It is a world of great complexity in which problems need to be faced from many perspectives, with an interdisciplinary approach; this is indeed the role of a university and its academic and research centres. Moreover, paying close attention to the respective cultural context is fundamental in Ignatian and Jesuit pedagogy, and, thus, this international University is a very fitting place to hold this Congress with experts coming together from all over the world.

For these reasons, I am delighted to welcome world leaders, from academia, business, religion and institutions from civil society to the Pontifical Gregorian University. I am deeply grateful for the leadership of Fr. Hans Zollner SJ, President of the CCP, for the very valuable work of the Steering Committee, as well as for the financial support we have received from different institutions and friends.

I wish you success in your work as you seek to understand the questions that this Congress is addressing, and in building a true ongoing partnership to find solutions, fully convinced that as Pope Francis says “a society can be judged by the way it treats its children”.

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Nuno da Silva Gonçalves S.J.