

Zenon Cardinal Grocholewski

Message for the Education Congress -

***Congregatio Jesu* and the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

Rome, Italy 19-23 October 2008

It is my pleasure to send this message to the participants of the Education Congress of the international network of schools sponsored by the *Congregatio Jesu* and the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary taking place in Rome from 19-23 October 2008. I express my cordial greetings to the many professors and educators present at this meeting and wish to share my profound appreciation for their dedication to the teaching apostolate in Catholic schools,

The occasion of the 400th anniversary of the foundation of your Congregation by Mary Ward in 1609 is a timely one in which to hold a Congress on Education. Your Congregation has selected the theme "With Mary Ward—Educating Together in Church and World" for its Education Congress. Allow me to offer you my reflections on this topic especially regarding Catholic education in light of the many challenges faced in contemporary society.

Mary Ward was a pioneer in Catholic education, responding to various needs within a fragmented world. Her inspiration to found an active religious community devoted to Christian education was met with both praise and opposition. The present day crisis of values, extreme pluralism, rapid structural changes, technical innovation; globalisation of the economy, along with a growing marginalization of the Christian faith, gives rise to the Church's renewed reliance on the charism of Mary Ward to help face such challenges with enthusiastic leadership. Education becomes particularly difficult in contemporary society since, due to these innovations, the scope of education has broadened, becoming more complex and specialized and, therefore, demanding courageous initiatives (cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, 1-3J).

We are encouraged by the fact that, within these past 400 years, the Mary Ward Sisters have carried on a long tradition of Christian education in which the Catholic identity in schools is upheld, both through the pedagogical methods and in the lives of the teachers and students. Your endeavours to support Catholic education over these years is to be commended.

This Education Congress has chosen Rome for its venue as a means to recall the roots of the Catholic faith and to deepen your understanding of the goal of your Institute and apostolate. In your pilgrimage, you will frequent places where the first Christian community was spirited to spread the message of the Gospel. As witnesses of the faith, they became the Church's first teachers of Christianity through their very lives.

Catholic schools express the great importance the Church gives to the formation of the whole person by integrating academic preparation with moral development and by providing an atmosphere of communion where the faith, based on the Gospel values, can be freely proposed and received.

The "prime responsibility for creating this unique Christian school climate rests with the teachers, as individuals and as a community" (Congregation for Catholic Education, *Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 26).

Teaching has an extraordinary moral depth and is one of man's most excellent and creative activities, for the teacher does not write on inanimate material, but on the very spirits of human beings" (Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, 19).

Furthermore, teachers in Catholic schools bring about this communion through the exchange of various gifts. The shared educational mission is enriched by the mutual differences that both the lay faithful and consecrated persons bring, thereby giving different expressions of the same charism. When there is a mutual respect and reciprocity of these gifts in the school setting, relationships among the teachers in themselves bear fruitful witness to a life of communion (cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools*, 34-37). Through an ongoing interchange between educators and students, young people gain courage to be living witnesses of the Catholic faith and to contribute constructively to shaping the future of society.

With full support, I join with you in your endeavour to uphold the gift of Catholic education and to mirror the person of Christ as your foundress Mary Ward. May God continue to bless you and, through your efforts, may those under your care come to a growing awareness of the value of their personal dignity and faith.

Zenon Cardinal Grocholewski
Prefect
Congregation for Catholic Education