

Pontifical Council for Social Communications

Congress of Schools and Departments of Communications in Catholic Universities

May 22-24, 2008

Auditorium Giovanni Paolo II – Pontificia Università Urbaniana

The Identity and the Mission of a Department/School of Communications in a Catholic University

The primary task of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications is to give timely and effective encouragement and support to the many social communication activities carried out by the Church and its members. In that context, it has long admired the extraordinary work being done on communication theory and practice in Catholic universities throughout the world, and it looks to those institutions and their faculties as key co-operators in its own mission.

In order to strengthen and expand that cooperative relationship, the Council is organizing a Congress to be held in Rome in May 2008 at which representatives from communication programs in Catholic universities will be able to reflect together on the fundamental mission of their department or school. A further objective of the Congress will be to give the Council a fuller understanding of the range of activities taking place in these institutions and a greater appreciation of the qualifications, talents and skills of those who work within them.

The Congress programme will allow for the greatest possible degree of interaction among participants, enabling them to share information about the particular concentrations of their various course offerings and the specific challenges presented by the environments within which they operate. The Council hopes as well that these exchanges, and the informal encounters that the Congress will foster, will lead to the formation of ongoing networks of professional support and solidarity in a Catholic Christian framework.

Keynote speakers at the Congress will provide a general framework and background for the discussions, but the more general goal of the Council is for all participants to engage with the basic theme. The Council knows that the self-understanding of a Catholic faculty or school of communications will differ greatly from country to country, depending on the social, economic, political and regulatory contexts within which the universities operate, and through panel discussions and smaller working groups it will make sure that the many voices will be heard. It looks forward particularly to discussions of such relevant considerations as the varying demographic presence of Catholics in different societies and the varying profiles of the student bodies and/or faculty, in terms of religious affiliation or belief.

Notwithstanding the different contextual factors which affect the configuration of university communication programs around the world, it is important to articulate the core elements, in terms of identity and mission, of such a faculty or school in a Catholic university. It is the intention of the Council that a re-discovery and re-affirmation of these elements will strengthen the participants, and the institutions they represent, in their commitment to making the activities and ethos of their faculties and schools fully reflective of that mission and identity.

The opening speech of the Congress will outline the changing world of communications and the challenges that face all those dedicated to the academic formation of future professional communicators. That presentation will be followed by a response from a representative of an academic centre of formation.

The opening speeches will be followed by three thematic sessions that will focus on the specific challenges that exist for Catholic university schools or faculties. Each session will begin with a panel discussion, to be followed by group work and feedback to the panel. The first session will have as its theme the question of what it means to be a Catholic faculty or school of communications in different geographical and ecclesial contexts. The second session will focus on the theme of ethics and communications; it will seek to identify the primary values that all faculties and schools of communications should strive to present to their students and consider how best such values can be communicated. It will also examine the question of how Catholic social teaching and anthropology might contribute to ethical reflection. The third session will ask how the curriculum of a Catholic faculty or school of communications can best present a theory or philosophy of communications that reflects basic Christian teachings on the value and worth of the human person. Consideration will be given to the question of whether a communications program should include some formal presentation of basic theological insights and Church teaching and how the presentation of these materials necessarily reflect particular contextual parameters, such as academic freedom and the make-up of the student body.

The Congress will conclude with a preliminary response from the Council based on its listening to contributions of the participants. That response will likely offer some proposals for development of the Congress themes in ways that would enhance future cooperation between the Council and the different institutions.