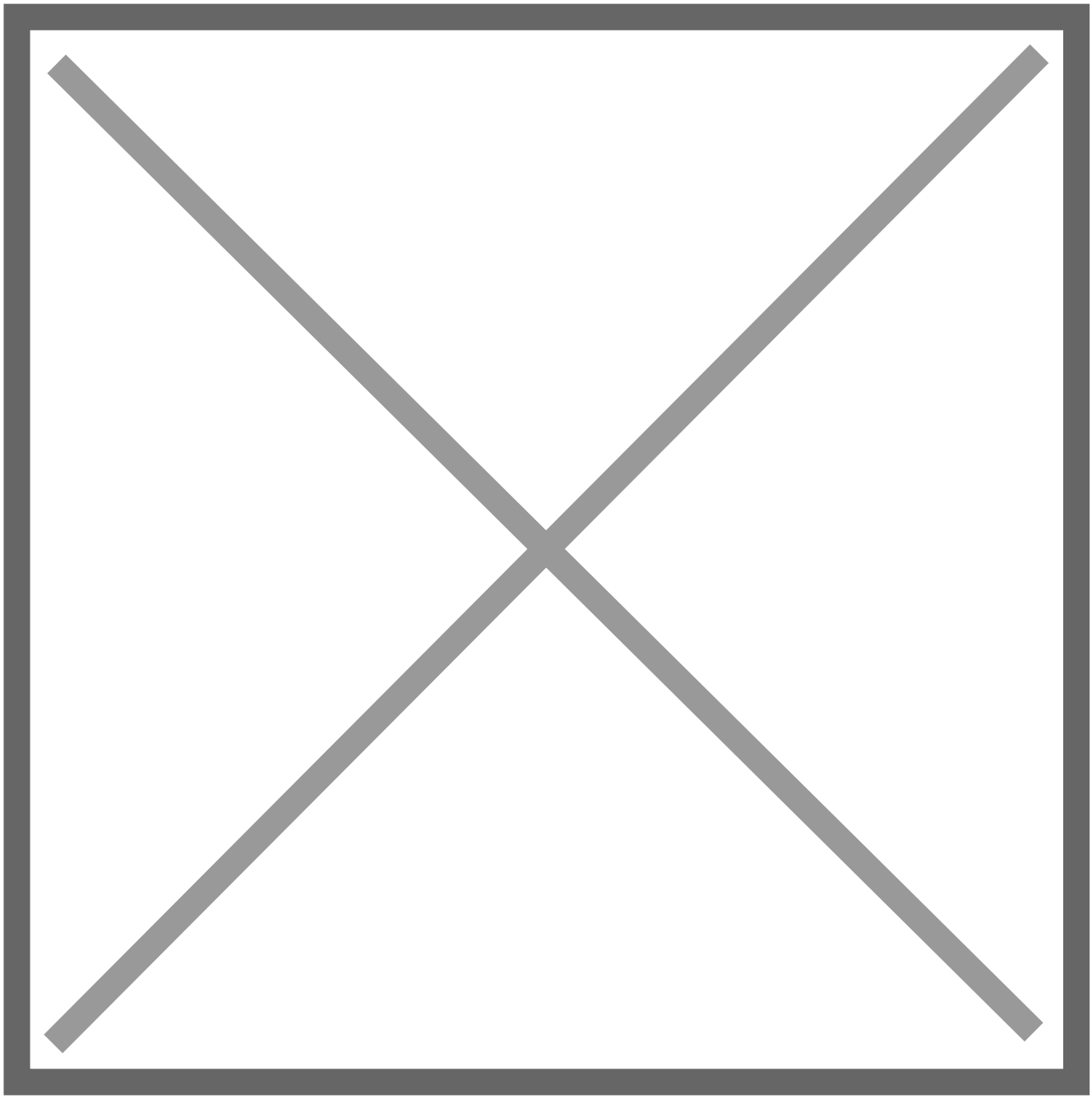
Vatican
Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis is pictured in screenshot speaking in an Oct. 15, 2020, video message to participants of the Global Compact on Education. (CNS screenshot/Vatican Media)

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Vatican City — October 15, 2020

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As the coronavirus pandemic continues to highlight the inequalities that exist in the world, humanity must change course and commit to an educational alliance that ensures a brighter future for young people, Pope Francis said.

A superficial approach to education that relies solely on "standardized test results, functionality and bureaucracy" and that "confuses education with instruction" must be left behind, the pope said in an Oct. 15 video message to participants at a meeting on the Global Compact on Education.

"The value of our educational practices will be measured not simply by the results of standardized tests, but by the ability to affect the heart of society and to help give birth to a new culture," he said. "A different world is possible, and we are called to learn how to build it."

The pope launched the Global Compact on Education in 2019 and invited representatives from the world's religions, international organizations and humanitarian groups as well as educators, economists, scientists, policymakers, people from the world of art, culture and sports, and young people to come to the Vatican in May.

However, the event was canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic and, instead, a mostly virtual event, sponsored by the Congregation for Catholic Education, was held at Rome's Pontifical Lateran University.

The Vatican said Oct. 8 that the initiative "will respond to the appeal" made by the pope in which he called for a global educational alliance to face the urgent challenges facing humanity and the Earth.

"Never before has there been such need to unite our 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," the pope had said in his 2019 appeal.

In his video message to participants, the pope said that "we could never have imagined the situation that has developed" since he first called for the alliance.

"The (COVID-19) crisis has accelerated and magnified many of the issues and needs that we had identified and has uncovered numerous others as well," he said. "Concerns about health care are now accompanied by economic and social concerns. Educational systems worldwide have felt the effects of the pandemic at every level."

While online educational platforms have helped during the pandemic, they also "brought to light a marked disparity in education and technological opportunities" that has left many young people behind, he said.

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"Recent statistics from international agencies have led some to speak, perhaps somewhat hastily, of an 'educational catastrophe,' inasmuch as some 10 million children were forced to leave school as a result of the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus," the pope said.

Without a new cultural model that ensures "that the dignity of the human person is respected and protected," he said, health care measures will "prove inadequate."

"We are experiencing a comprehensive crisis that cannot be reduced or limited to any single sector," he said. "It affects everything. The pandemic has led us to realize that what is really in crisis is our way of understanding reality and of relating to one another."

Education must be "transformative" and must offer a new hope that "can shatter the determinism and fatalism that the selfishness of the strong, the conformism of the weak and the ideology of the utopians would convince us is the only way forward," he said.

The poverty and confusion wrought by the pandemic have created a situation that requires a radical decision and opens a path for "a global pact on education for and with future generations," the pope said.

"The ability to create harmony: that is what is needed today," he said.

The pope highlighted seven concrete commitments needed to defend the rights of future generations to education, including: rejecting a throwaway culture, listening to the voices of young people, encouraging the participation of girls and young women in education, elevating the role of the family, accepting of the marginalized, and promoting an integral ecology and care for the environment.

"The goal of this educational investment, grounded in a network of humane and open relationships, is to ensure that everyone has access to a quality education consonant with the dignity of the human person and our common vocation to fraternity," Pope Francis said.

"It is time to look to the future with courage and hope," he said. "May we be sustained by the conviction that education bears within itself a seed of hope: the hope of peace and justice; the hope of beauty and goodness; the hope of social harmony."