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ope Francis speaks to a delegation from the the Organization of Catholic Universities of Latin

Pope Francis speaks to a delegation from the the Organization of Catholic Universities of Latin America and the Caribbean during a meeting at the Vatican May 4, 2023. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



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Catholic universities must be outward looking and prepare their students to engage with the world's problems rather than teaching rigid ideas, Pope Francis said.

"We need minds, hearts and hands that are up to the challenge of reality, not the narrowness of ideologies," he told a delegation from the Organization of Catholic Universities of Latin America and the Caribbean May 4 at the Vatican.

"A Catholic university should be missionary with its doors facing out, given that mission is the inspiration, the impetus, the strength and reward of the whole church," he said.

The pope encouraged delegates to help their students become "social poets" who, by learning "the grammar and vocabulary of humanity, have the spark that allows them to imagine the unexpected."

Such a spirit, he said, is common among researchers, who, like missionaries, are "not satisfied with what they have, but go out looking."

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"The researcher has a missionary head and heart," he said. "It is precisely that tension between knowing and not knowing that pushes them forward and protects them from the presumption of knowing everything. They know, and they let themselves be surprised by what they will know."

The researcher and the missionary are also alike in their "shared love for reciprocity," said the pope. "They teach and learn, convinced that everyone has something to teach them."

The university organization is composed of 115 universities around Latin America and the Caribbean and represents some 1.5 million students.

Francis told the delegation that the role of a Catholic university is to "contribute to the formation of Catholic minds, capable of observing not only the object of their interest," but also having a "panoramic view of the mystery of Christ and the world, the mystery of man and woman."

"An overly precise and focused view can become fixed and exclusive," he said. "It has the precision of a radar, but it loses the panorama."

A Catholicism which integrates the mind, the heart and the hands, the pope said, can heal the wounds that afflict a Latin America where "the rich are becoming richer,

and the poor are becoming poorer." Yet he urged them not to be afraid of disorder on the continent, since "it is from precisely there that God makes his most beautiful and creative works."