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Pope Francis and Scholas Occurrentes' President Jose Maria del Corral, second from left, attend a meeting with members of the Scholas Occurrentes community of young people, an International educational movement created by Pope Francis himself, in Cascais, 25 kilometers south of Lisbon, Thursday, Aug. 3, 2023. Francis will give the final brushstroke to the 3 km mural that the community has been working on and that is the result of the work of more than two thousand people. (AP/Marco Bertorello)

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Cascais, Portugal — August 3, 2023
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From a university campus to a seaside town, Pope Francis challenged young people on Thursday to make the world a more just and inclusive place, as he focused the second day of his Portugal trip on inspiring students to use their privilege to combat global warming and economic inequalities.

Francis received a warm welcome first at the Catholic University in Lisbon, one of Portugal's top institutions of higher learning. He then had a more intimate, informal encounter with young people in the former fishing village of Cascais, where he was serenaded with a mournful performance of the traditional Portuguese fado, meaning fate or destiny.

Francis is in Portugal through the weekend to attend World Youth Day, the big Catholic jamboree that St. John Paul II launched in the 1980s to encourage young Catholics in their faith. The Argentine Jesuit has picked up John Paul's mantle with gusto as he seeks to inspire the next generation to rally behind his key social justice and environmental priorities.

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He's also using his private time in Lisbon to meet with individual groups of pilgrims to offer words of encouragement: A group of Ukrainians who left behind war; Turkish pilgrims who survived February's devastating earthquake; and relatives of a French

catechist who had a fatal fall while on her Youth Day pilgrimage.

In his remarks at the university Thursday morning, Francis urged the students to take risks and reject the temptation to merely perpetuate the status quo — the "present global system of elitism and inequality" — with an attitude of self-preservation.

"An academic degree should not be seen merely as a license to pursue personal well-being, but as a mandate to work for a more just and inclusive — that is, truly progressive — society," he said.

Francis urged the students to instead use the privilege of their education to care for the environment, the poor and marginalized and "redefine what we mean by progress and development."

"Yours can be the generation that takes up this great challenge," he said. "We need to align the tragedy of desertification with that of refugees, the issue of increased migration with that of a declining birth rate, and to see the material dimension of life within the greater purview of the spiritual."



Pope Francis attends a meeting with the students of the Portuguese Catholic University in Lisbon, Thursday, Aug. 3, 2023. (AP/Gregorio Borgia)

Many young Catholics around the world have embraced Francis' core teachings about correcting economic injustices and promoting environmental custodianship, joining church-sponsored foundations and social movements under the banner of the "Economy of Francis" the "Global Compact on Education" and the *Laudato Si*' movement, named for Francis' 2015 encyclical on the environment.

"I think that all the young people feel very close and very friendly even with the pope," said Mathilde Laborinho, who attended the university event. "And it's very nice to see that he comes here and has a little meeting."

After the event, Francis met with another group of students in the popular tourist resort of Cascais at the local branch of his Scolas Occurrentes foundation, a movement he founded years ago to bring young people from different backgrounds and nationalities together. Sitting in a brilliantly-painted common room, Francis chatted informally with the youths who told him of their anxieties and concerns.

Saying the room looked like a "Sistine Chapel painted by you," Francis told them that a life without chaos or crises was like drinking distilled water: tasteless and "gross."

Francis urged them to work through their conflicts with others. "It's important to walk together, resolve crises together and go forward, growing," he said.

As he left, popular singer Cuca Roseta serenaded him with a sentimental, a cappella fado version of "Ave Maria," while along his motorcade route was the three-kilometer long banner that Scolas members had painted in honor of his visit.



Pope Francis attends a meeting with the students of the Portuguese Catholic University in Lisbon, Thursday, Aug. 3, 2023. (AP/Gregorio Borgia)

Francis' visit to Portugal is aimed primarily at young people — he was formally opening World Youth Day later Thursday in Lisbon — but his message about reversing economic inequalities has found resonance here among people of all ages, and many people lined his route, watching from balconies or the street as his motorcade passed.

"It's a big issue and more should be done about it," said Alison Morais, a 42-year-old Brazilian immigrant who works as a store assistant in Cascais. "It's hard to change it but at least people listen to what (the pope) says and it gets the conversation going."

Francis arrived in Lisbon on Wednesday and dove head-on into Portugal's clergy sexual abuse crisis, which has intensified after a panel of experts hired by Portugal's bishops reported in February that priests and other church personnel may have abuse at least 4,815 boys and girls since 1950.

Meeting with the country's bishops at Lisbon's iconic Jeronimos Monastery, Francis blasted the "scandal" of sexual abuse, which he said had marred the face of the church and helped drive the faithful away. He told the bishops that victims must always be welcomed and heard.

After nightfall, after a long day of travel and protocol visits, Francis met for more than an hour with 13 victims at the Vatican embassy, listening to their traumas, the Vatican said.

The encounter, which had been expected since Francis met with survivors on previous trips abroad, was aimed at trying to help the Portuguese hierarchy and faithful come to terms with the church's own legacy of abuse and coverup.

Antonio Morais, 62, who briefly closed his Cascais jewelry store to watch the pope's motorcade pass by on Thursday, said he was glad the pontiff raised the issue as soon as he arrived.

"Unhappily, it happened, and if he didn't speak out about it, it might continue," Morais said. "People are more aware of it now and can speak up when they see something."

[Winfield and Alves reported from Lisbon, Portugal.]

This story appears in the **World Youth Day 2023** feature series. View the full series .