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Pope Leo XIV, flanked by Cardinal Jose Tolentino de Mendonca, right, shows the apostolic letter on education before celebrating a Mass for the opening of the academic year of the Pontifical University and for the Jubilee of the Educational World in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, Monday, Oct. 27, 2025. (AP/Alessandra Tarantino)

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Pope Leo XIV urged Catholic teachers on Tuesday to focus less on pre-professional outcomes and more on educating students to have rich spiritual lives and use technology in ways that keep human dignity front and center.

Leo issued a set of marching orders to Catholic educators during a special Holy Year celebration that has brought thousands of teachers, students and administrators to Rome.

The brief text, which Leo signed Monday at a Mass for the Jubilee pilgrims, is an update to a 1965 Vatican document laying out the priorities for Catholic educators that was adopted during the Second Vatican Council, the 1960s meetings that modernized the church.

The Catholic Church is one of the world's leading players in education, operating more than 225,000 primary and secondary schools and enrolling some 2.5 million students at Catholic universities around the globe, according to Vatican statistics. Leo was educated by the Augustinians and is a member of the Augustinian religious order, which places a special emphasis on St. Augustine’s search for truth and the command "Tolle, lege" ("Take up and read").

In the text, Leo repeated that parents are the primary educators for their children and that Catholic schools must cooperate with them, not take their place. And he said Catholic teachers must themselves be models for their students.

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"Educators are called to a responsibility that goes beyond their work contract: their witness is worth as much as their lessons," he wrote, calling for ongoing training for Catholic teachers in both academic and spiritual fields.

He didn't mention issues such as teachers' private lives or sexual orientation, avoiding the polemics over cases where gay teachers have been fired by Catholic schools in the United States.

Leo said Catholic education isn't measured in efficiencies or output but rather "in dignity, justice and the capacity to serve the common good."

Such a vision, he said, "goes against a purely mercantilist approach that often forces education today to be measured in terms of functionality and practical utility."

He cited priorities Pope Francis had listed for Catholic educators, which emphasized inclusion, ecology and the common good, and added three more: He said Catholic educators should emphasize the interior spiritual life of students, use a "disarmed and disarming" language that eschews violence, and promotes a responsible use of technology, including artificial intelligence, that keeps human dignity foremost.

"The Catholic school is a place where faith, culture and life cross paths," he wrote. "It's not just an institution, but a living environment in which the Christian vision permeates every discipline and every interaction."

This story appears in the **2025 Holy Year** feature series. View the full series.