Christ Our Hope
Apostolic Journey to The Catholic University of America
A Chronicle of the 2008 Papal Visit to The Catholic University of America
A Gentle and Generous Teacher

At a certain point in our lives, when we gather up our cherished memories, I suspect that many of us single out at least one shiny recollection of a favorite teacher. Someone who was gentle yet wise, whose kindness touched us even as his thoughtfulness and clarity engaged and then challenged us. Just such a teacher was His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI when he came to The Catholic University of America on April 17, 2008, to speak to Catholic educational leaders gathered from all over the country.

The Holy Father’s speech was masterful. “How beautiful are the footsteps of those who bring good news,” he said at the beginning of his address, meaning it as a compliment to the audience. But those words fit no one so well as the speaker himself. From the moment he bounded off the plane to begin his pastoral visit to the United States, he captivated his audiences with his sprightliness, warmth of spirit and simple humanity. For the college and university presidents and diocesan education leaders gathered in the Edward J. Pryzbyla University Center’s Great Room, he served up an address that was at once profound and beautifully balanced, a marvelous blend of gratitude, encouragement and guidance. The themes that he presented — Catholic education as an encounter with Jesus Christ, the sacrifices required to offer Catholic education at every level, the dialogue between faith and reason, Catholic identity and mission, academic freedom and responsibility — have all been much on the minds of Catholic educators in the United States. He invited us to reflect even more deeply upon what it means to be faithful to the Church and its teachings in our Catholic institutions while remaining open to the ways that truth reveals itself and obliges us to charity in the exchange of ideas.

The mood in the room following the Holy Father’s address was uplifted, like the afterglow of an invigorating intellectual pep rally. Copies of his embargoed speech, meant for the media covering the event, were snatched up by university presidents eager to digest what they had heard. As for the 60 student volunteers in the room, one administrator described them as “mesmerized” by the Holy Father and his address.

The same was true of our students outside. Hours earlier, when the Pope celebrated Mass at the baseball stadium in Washington, hundreds of Catholic University students watched it live on a Jumbotron on the lawn next to the Pryzbyla Center. One person who was on the lawn said, “You could hear a pin drop, it was so quiet.” Seven hours later, as the Holy Father prepared to leave campus, the crowd on the lawn had swelled to thousands, the morning silence replaced by voices of students singing the hymn Regina caeli to the Pontiff.

April 17, 2008, brought us a moment and an address that will live in many minds and hearts for decades to come.

President, The Catholic University of America
In August 2007, Very Rev. David M. O’Connell, C.M., president of The Catholic University of America, learned from the Embassy of the Apostolic Nunciature of the Holy See in Washington, D.C., that Pope Benedict XVI would deliver an important address on Catholic education on CUA’s campus in April. Within a short time, the buzz on campus began—and the planning. After all, this was CUA’s first papal visit in almost 30 years. And times had changed.

**Making Hope Visible**

For one thing, media had become ubiquitous, operating on a 24-hour news cycle. A theme and an identity were needed for the papal visit to ensure that it was seen and heard above the din of ever-changing news coverage.

In a meeting with senior organizers of the Pope’s visit, Father O’Connell volunteered CUA’s publications services to design the official logo for the visit. With guidance from visit organizers, Donna Hobson, director of publications at CUA, developed a logo that conveyed the spirit of the Pope and the upcoming visit. Hobson had several criteria, she says. “I wanted to incorporate the papal colors — yellow and white — and my vision was to show a welcoming, arms-open, smiling Pope Benedict.” The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops submitted her design to the Vatican. It was a go!

The logo provided a handy graphic for news outlets and other organizations broadcasting stories about the visit. It also appeared on flags, posters, T-shirts and printed matter relating to the visit. In fact, it seemed that wherever and whenever the papal visit was mentioned, Hobson’s logo was the backdrop.

**Meanwhile, the Campus Prepares**

The papal visit to CUA’s leafy and open campus presented challenges, particularly in the post-September 11 world. How to offer some public opportunities for papal viewing without overrunning the campus or compromising security? What about the inevitable urgent media demands? How to accommodate students, faculty and staff who would want a glimpse of the Holy Father on their campus? Adding to the complexity of planning were the Pontiff’s visit to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, adjacent to campus, as well as his post-CUA visit to the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center, directly across from campus.

Well aware of the complexity of the undertaking that awaited the university, Father O’Connell assembled an 18-member organizing committee in November that drew on the talents of faculty and staff from student life, campus ministry, facilities, public safety, public affairs and other offices.

Approximately four months after the organizing committee was formed, nearly 400 CUA volunteers had been recruited to execute the numerous tasks necessary for the success of the Holy Father’s visit. Countless other members of the Catholic University community participated in this extraordinary visit, some in extraordinary ways. The pages that follow chronicle their preparations as well as the journey of the Holy Father to The Catholic University Of America on April 17, 2008.

FROM THE HOPE TO THE POPE:

**Pope Benedict XVI and CUA**
CUA’s architecture students are known on campus as the ones who keep the lights on all night in the Edward M. Crough Center for Architectural Studies as they work on architectural drawings or models. For five days in January, they burned the midnight oil in the Crough Center for a project with unparalleled religious significance: The Archdiocese of Washington and CUA’s School of Architecture and Planning challenged the school’s undergraduate and graduate students to design the altar, papal chair, pulpit and lectern to be used during the Mass celebrated by Pope Benedict XVI at Nationals Park, the capital city’s new baseball stadium. Students had five days, from Jan. 18 to Jan. 23, to design, draw and make scale models of their ideas. More than 50 students working in 21 teams submitted designs. Four jurors — including Monsignor Barry Knestout, moderator of the curia and vicar of administration for the Archdiocese of Washington who holds a degree in architecture and oversaw the planning for the sanctuary at the papal Mass — chose the design by John-Paul Mikolajczyk of Staten Island, N.Y., and Ryan Mullen of Manchester, N.H., both master’s degree candidates. Senior architecture majors Rachel Bailey of Napa, Calif., and Victoria Engelstad of Bradley Beach, N.J., assisted with the design of the airy yet sturdy furnishings. Mikolajczyk and Mullen spent most of their spring break in March with CUA’s fabrication lab supervisor, Ryan McKibben, and Deacon Dave Cahoon of St. Joseph’s Carpentry Shop in Poolesville, Md., to make the models reality. Cahoon coordinated the fabrication of the altar with EJ Enterprises in Glen Burnie, Md.; Bruce Machine and Tool, near Ft. McHenry, Md.; and Black Rose Forge in Rockville, Md. He also built the base of the chair and the pulpit. Most Rev. Donald W. Wuerl, archbishop of Washington and chancellor of Catholic University, captured everyone’s feelings about the project’s importance and visibility, saying, “It’s very exciting — knowing this work you designed and were so focused on doing the best you can do — all those people are going to be looking at this and you’ll be able to say, ‘He’s standing at my altar.’ ”
In an event broadcast worldwide, about 100 Catholic University students gave up the first morning of their spring break in March to take part in the Sixth European Day for University Students with Pope Benedict XVI presiding via satellite from Vatican City.

On March 1, CUA students recited the rosary with the Holy Father and university students linked by satellite from Toledo, Spain; Aparecida, Brazil; Loja, Ecuador; Naples, Italy; Havana, Cuba; Mexico City, Mexico; Avignon, France; Bucharest, Romania; and Minsk, Belarus.

For CUA students the experience, though very meaningful, was a prelude, not a culmination: In a little over a month, they’d be seeing the Pope in person on their very own campus. So, although Pope Benedict received greetings from each of the locations, only CUA students could proclaim “46 Days and Counting. See You Soon!”

In return, the Holy Father said, “Dear university students of Washington, D.C., I send warm greetings to you! With the help of God, I will be in your city in April. With your assistance, may America remain faithful to its Christian roots and to its high ideals of freedom in truth and justice.”

CUA students introduced the fifth mystery of the rosary and led the recitation of the Hail Marys. Most Rev. Donald W. Wuerl, archbishop of Washington and chancellor of Catholic University, offered a prayer at the end of the mystery. Assisting Archbishop Wuerl were Very Rev. David M. O’Connell, C.M., president of CUA, and Most Rev. Pietro Sambi, apostolic nuncio to the United States. At the conclusion of the service, all participants received the Pope’s apostolic blessing.

Eternal Word Television Network filmed the recitation at CUA as university participants viewed the Pope and those in the other countries on a large television set up in Caldwell Chapel. EWTN also broadcast the event to its viewers.
A CHAIR FIT FOR A POPE

When the winners of the CUA papal furnishings design contest were chosen in late January, junior Siobhan Steen of Paris, France, who had also submitted an entry, was disappointed.

But not for long.

A few days later, Steen, along with her teammates Javid Farazad of Bethesda, Md., Doug Pettit of North Branford, Conn., and Christopher Fullam of Reading, Pa., were notified by architecture Dean Randall Ott that their design had been chosen for a different papal purpose: Pope Benedict XVI’s chair for his speech in the Pryzbyla Center. Steen, Farazad and Fullam are undergraduates in the School of Architecture and Planning. Pettit is a candidate in the school’s master’s program.

Father David O’Connell, university president, had suggested using one of the other contest designs for the Pryzbyla Center speech. He was particularly attracted to the chair design by Steen and her colleagues, Ott noted, and so several days later, the dean approached the four students with the news.

“It was the opportunity of a lifetime to combine our skills and create something for one of the most influential men on the planet,” Steen said. “There was no way any of us could have passed up this experience.”

The designers used horizontal planes to represent how humans are bound to Earth, but those planes transform into vertical lines stretching upward to represent the purity and grace of heaven.

“The design of these furnishings grew from our knowledge of the Pope as the intermediary between a grounded humanity and the holy realm of heaven,” Steen said. “This concept illustrates how His Holiness exists on an illuminated horizon between the human and the divine.”

The students constructed the chair with the help of Jefferson Millwork & Design Inc. in Sterling, Va., which oversaw the fabrication and donated materials and services.

Ott called the group’s entry a “very solid and dignified design that was very human in its scale and would give adequate focus to the Pope while he sat to offer his address.”
Peter Osgood, a senior majoring in biology from Penn Yan, N.Y., was one of 125 CUA students who entered a university-sponsored papal essay contest. Vying for the honor of a personal introduction to Pope Benedict XVI when the Pontiff visited the university, the students each wrote 500-word essays on the topic “How Catholic Education Has Changed My Life.” Osgood’s was chosen the winner. The essay is reprinted below.

For many years, St. Michael’s School has been the only Catholic school in my small rural town — and for as long as I can recall — my father has called it the best kept secret of our region. Though my parents enrolled me at St. Michael’s for the entirety of my elementary education, I never fully understood my father’s sentiment until much later.

I remember vividly how each school day began in prayer. It was here that we brought to mind those in need, gave thanks for our many gifts and asked for help in all of our challenges. This truly set the tone for our learning throughout the rest of the day. Our classrooms were focused on building quality persons who could push themselves — and one another — to achieve great things. Yet we were also shown how to be caring and supportive friends, in the true spirit of the Gospel. While my parents were endlessly pleased with the rigorous and thorough education I was receiving, I know they were more proud of the individual I was becoming. I did not have the privilege of a Catholic education throughout my middle and high school years, yet the true value of my time at St. Michael’s was just beginning to make itself known. I remember my parents reading the newspapers constantly to see how each member of my St. Michael’s class was performing. They watched eagerly as all of my friends continued to excel in academics, sports, music, service, and leadership roles. As I began to reflect on our observations, I too, gradually came to realize what kind of foundation we had each been provided and this was a source of great pride. We had been given the tools to succeed in so many ways and, perhaps more important, we had been given a solid grounding in faith that made each of our struggles and victories more meaningful and truly worth our best efforts.

When it came time to apply to colleges, I felt a longing to return to the Catholic education system, knowing that I wanted my faith to again be a central part of my learning. Though I applied to many schools, Catholic University seemed like the ideal fit, through which I might explore the world in a diverse environment, take on the rigors of a university-level program and further delve into my faith life with friends, ministers and educators alike. What I found was an undeniable passion for learning and a faith community that embodied a true spirit of ministry — one that was willing to meet people at whatever stage they were at and walk with them on their individual journeys. My Catholic education thus gave me a chance to better develop myself as a student, leader, worker and disciple. Such education cannot there-fore remain a “best kept secret,” but will inevitably be shown in the words and deeds of each of its students.

Leo Nestor, Justine Bayard Ward
Professor of Music and director of choral activities and the Institute of Sacred Music at CUA’s Benjamin T. Rome School of Music, offers the following reflection on the specially chosen choir’s experience preparing and performing for the Pope.

By far the most arduous task was to select 17 singers from the entire school of music. That accomplished, each of the five two-hour rehearsals became music making at the highest level in which the singers’ skills, coupled with their meticulous preparation and their innate incorporation of performance recommendations into the musical fabric, rendered each rehearsal a joy. This was by far the finest choral experience of both the students and my CUA years.

The selection of the repertoire was a simple task: a celebratory work to welcome the Holy Father (Laudes regiae: Christus vincit in a newly composed setting) and the classic Tu es Petrus (You are Peter) text in a setting by Palestrina. During the rehearsals we anticipated that the clamor of the crowd would eclipse the musical offering. There were two great surprises of the day. The first, that these presidents of Catholic universities and educators became silent during the two preludes, which were added at the last moment. As the Holy Father reached the dais and Father O’Connell prepared to welcome him, the final invocations of the Christus vincit were heard by all, as was most of the Tu es Petrus at the conclusion. So many of our guests stayed afterwards to tell the students how beautifully they had sung. The second surprise, that the singers were seated no more than 30 feet from Pope Benedict. They were able to see at close range those remarkably gentle and discerning eyes. As the singers left the Pryz, they were applauded by their classmates who had gathered on the lawn for the video feed. It was only then that we realized that we had represented CUA’s entire student population in our singing.

Note: The Choir of Seventeen gathered during the week following the Pope’s visit to record the works they had sung. Look for the recording on the Benjamin T. Rome School of Music Web site in fall 2008.
A More Beautiful Campus Welcomes the Pope

With 193 acres, CUA’s is the largest campus in Washington, D.C., and surely the greenest and most bucolic. But even the best-looking campuses can use some sprucing up when company’s coming. Carl Petchik, executive director of facilities operations, and Kevin M. Petersen, director of facilities maintenance and operations, answered the call. Petchik and Petersen assigned 75 of their crew to projects that couldn’t wait. They ranged from long-planned beautification that involved digging and planting or erecting new signage to the more prosaic — reconfiguring parking areas, undertaking major cleaning projects, installing new carpet and painting. And that was all prior to the Pope’s visit. The facilities crew was also responsible for numerous major tasks associated with the visit itself, everything from meal delivery to dumpster removal to final safety and security inspections along the Pope’s on-campus route to the extensive clean-up after the thousands of faithful departed.
When 13 satellite trucks are parked on campus, Today Show national correspondent Natalie Morales (right) takes over a gallery in the library, more than 20 outdoor media platforms sprout up on the university mall, and a specially equipped center opens for 18 hours each day to meet the needs of television, radio and print journalists, you know you’re hosting a media extravaganza. All of those things took place at CUA the week of Pope Benedict XVI’s visit. Once the official Vatican announcement of the Pope’s itinerary broke in February, media interest quickly grew. Media submitted more than 4,000 requests for press credentials for CUA’s campus and eventually many faculty experts, students and staff took their turns in front of the microphones.

Ryan Mullen and John-Paul Mikolajczyk, the student designers of the Nationals Park papal Mass furnishings, were quickly dubbed “The Altar Boys” by media outlets that couldn’t seem to get enough of them. They spoke to Maryland Public Television, Fox 5, NBC 4, WUSA9, The Washington Times, Catholic Standard, News Channel 8, even “Good Morning America,” where they were joined by Peter Osgood, the papal essay contest winner. Osgood added stints on broadcast outfits CNN, WAMU-FM, Channel 8, WUSA9, CBC, Bloomberg, WJLA-TV and Sirius Radio. He went on to do interviews in print in the National Catholic Register, the Finger Lakes Times and the Chicago Tribune.

Many other CUA students spoke to the press, handling questions about everything from their faith to their dream conversations with the Pope, to what the papal visit meant to them. Most in demand by far was Father David O’Connell, Catholic University’s president. He was interviewed by U.S. newspapers and magazines, including The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report. He spoke to various Catholic media outlets and German and French media, as well as local, regional and national TV and radio outlets. During the week of the Holy Father’s visit alone, he was on the air in CNN’s studios on three different days. Throughout, he kept up a dizzying pace, giving 30 separate interviews in 30 days.
Universities often host prestigious guests. But when your guest is the Pope and you are a student at a Catholic university — in this case, the national university of the Catholic Church — the visit takes on special significance.

Students wanted to communicate their excitement to the Pope, so many made banners and posters: “CUA Welcomes the Pope!” “The Pope Is Hope!” and “CUA Loves Our Papa!” Others practiced cheering “C-U-A Loves the Pope,” complete with Village People “YMCA”-style arm movements forming the letters of the university.

Hundreds of students volunteered to direct pedestrian traffic, check IDs and tickets, seat invited guests, and answer questions on the day of the Pope’s visit. On the evening of April 14, candles in hand. 300 students circled the campus, praying at five outdoor sites to prepare themselves spiritually for the papal visit.

April 17 dawned warm and sunny. Thousands of students filled the lawn between the Pryzbyla Center and CUA’s Columbus School of Law. Many had spent the night praying and singing in an all-night vigil in CUA’s St. Vincent’s Chapel. All were excited at the prospect of seeing the Pope and witnessing history.

Said Jessica DePrizio, a 2002 CUA graduate who is now associate campus minister for liturgy and worship, “Students recognized this as a historic event for our Church, for our country and for our campus, and they were excited to have been able to witness it firsthand.”

“Students recognized this as a historic event for our Church, for our country and for our campus ...”
— Jessica DePrizio, Class of 2002

Many Ways to Celebrate
“Are you ready to rock the Pope?” a Catholic University student asked about 3,000 of his fellow students assembled on the lawn of CUA’s Columbus School of Law April 17. The answer was an emphatic yes.

At 10 a.m., the students began gathering on the grass to watch a live broadcast of the Pope’s Washington, D.C., Mass at Nationals Park on a 23-foot-wide Jumbotron, mingle with friends and eagerly await the arrival on campus of Pope Benedict XVI.

Students, many wearing sports jerseys emblazoned with the name Benedict and the number 16, took part in a seven-hour papal pep rally as they waited for the pontiff’s arrival at 5 p.m.

Two student a cappella groups, RedLine and Take Note, performed. Student videos on Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI and the feature film "Sister Act" were screened. The university’s chaplain, Rev. Robert Schlageter, O.F.M. Conv., led students in cheers of "CUA Loves the Pope."

Just before 5 p.m. the rumble of motorcycles could be heard and students crowded to barriers along the edge of the lawn, eager to see the Pope. A cheer went up as the motorcade arrived and grew louder as the Holy Father emerged from a limousine.

Students chanted “Benedict! Benedict!” as the Pontiff walked up the stairs to the Pryzbyla Center. At the top of the steps, the Pope turned and faced the students, who cheered and continued to shout his name.

Lauren Bilich, a sophomore from Sayville, N.Y., majoring in social work and theology, said, “That the head of the Church chose to visit us reaffirms why I chose to study at Catholic University.”
Welcoming Remarks by the President of the Catholic University of America

April 17, 2008

Your Holiness,

We greet you with great joy and welcome you to The Catholic University of America. Established by Pope Leo XIII and sponsored by the Bishops of the United States, this national university of the Catholic Church in our country provides a most fitting platform for you to address the leaders of Catholic educational institutions here from every level of their service to the Church in the United States: Catholic universities and colleges as well as Catholic primary and secondary schools. We are profoundly humbled and deeply grateful that you have asked to spend some time with us during your historic, apostolic visit to our country.

Your own experiences as a university professor create a special bond between us, Your Holiness. It is not, however, simply a matter of a shared academic profession that joins us today but, rather, it is a shared vision of truth, a shared conviction of faith, and a shared sense of hope that leads us once more, as Catholic educators, to an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ who is the Truth, who calls us to faith, who strengthens us in hope and, finally, redeems us in love.

Now, more than ever, Catholic education must be a light for our contemporary culture, bringing the light of Christ’s Gospel to a world so often falsely illuminated by lights contrary to his own. Catholic education embraces and presents the common good as the foundation of an enlightened society. Catholic education enables the young to combat the moral relativism that has, unfortunately, given rise to selfishness, unbridled individualism and a humanity of isolation where Catholic education is lacking.

Faith, reason and service are the hallmarks of true Catholic education. What is believed in the heart must be accessible and intelligible to the mind so that both faith and reason can lead to the witness of a life lived in true charity. This trinity of faith, reason and service can then be, as it were, an authentic mirror of the Triune God and his intentions for humankind.

And, so, Your Holiness, we offer you the love and support of the Catholic institutions and academic communities we lead. And we pledge our fidelity to the Church and to you in the sacred trust that is ours as the leaders of Catholic education throughout these United States. Welcome, Your Holiness, to The Catholic University of America.

Very Reverend David M. O’Connell, C.M., J.C.D.

President and Rector
Your Eminences,
Dear Brother Bishops,
Distinguished Professors, Teachers and Educators,
“How beautiful are the footsteps of those who bring good news” (Rom 10:15-17).
With these words of Isaiah quoted by Saint Paul, I warmly greet each of you —
bearers of wisdom — and through you the
staff, students and families of the many
and varied institutions of learning that
you represent. It is my great pleasure to
meet you and to share with you some
thoughts regarding the nature and
identity of Catholic education today. I
especially wish to thank Father David
O’Connell, President and Rector of The
Catholic University of America. Your
kind words of welcome are much
appreciated. Please extend my heartfelt
gratitude to the entire community —
faculty, staff and students — of this
University.

Education is integral to the mission of the
Church to proclaim the Good News. First
and foremost every Catholic educational
institution is a place to encounter the
living God who in Jesus Christ reveals
his transforming love and truth (cf. Spe
Salvi, 4). This relationship elicits a desire
to grow in the knowledge and under-
standing of Christ and his teaching. In
this way those who meet him are drawn
by the very power of the Gospel to lead a
new life characterized by all that is
beautiful, good, and true; a life of Christian
witness nurtured and strengthened within
the community of our Lord’s disciples,
the Church.

The dynamic between personal encounter,
knowledge and Christian witness is integral
to the diaconia of truth which the Church
exercises in the midst of humanity. God’s
revelation offers every generation the
opportunity to discover the ultimate truth
about its own life and the goal of history.
This task is never easy; it involves the
entire Christian community and motivates
each generation of Christian educators to
ensure that the power of God’s truth
permeates every dimension of the
institutions they serve. In this way, Christ’s
Good News is set to work, guiding both
teacher and student towards the objective
truth which, in transcending the particular
and the subjective, points to the universal
and absolute that enables us to proclaim
with confidence the hope which does not
disappoint (cf. Rom 5:5). Set against
personal struggles, moral confusion and
fragmentation of knowledge, the noble
goals of scholarship and education,
found on the unity of truth and in service
of the person and the community, become
an especially powerful instrument of hope.

Dear friends, the history of this nation
includes many examples of the Church’s
commitment in this regard. The Catholic
community here has in fact made education
one of its highest priorities. This undertak-
ing has not come without great sacrifice.
Tower ing figures, like Saint Elizabeth
Ann Seton and other founders and
foundresses, with great tenacity and
foresight, laid the foundations of what is
now a remarkable network of parochial
schools contributing to the spiritual well-
being of the Church and the nation. Some,
like Saint Katharine Drexel, devoted their
lives to educating those whom others had
neglected — in her case, African Americans
and Native Americans. Countless dedicated
Religious Sisters, Brothers, and Priests
working together, with selfless parents have,
through Catholic schools, helped generations of
immigrants to rise from poverty and take
their place in mainstream society.

This sacrifice continues today. It is an
outstanding apostolate of hope, seeking to
address the material, intellectual and
spiritual needs of over three million children and students. It also provides a
highly commendable opportunity for the
entire Catholic community to contribute
generously to the financial needs of our
institutions. Their long-term sustainability
must be assured. Indeed, everything
possible must be done, in cooperation
with the wider community, to ensure that
they are accessible to people of all social
and economic strata. No child should be
denied his or her right to an education in
faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a
nation.

Some today question the Church’s
involvement in education, wondering
whether her resources might be better
placed elsewhere. Certainly in a nation
such as this, the State provides ample
opportunities for education and attracts
committed and generous men and women
to this honorable profession. It is timely,
then, to reflect on what is particular to
our Catholic institutions. How do they
contribute to the good of society through
the Church’s primary mission of
evangelization?

All the Church’s activities stem from her
awareness that she is the bearer of a
message which has its origin in God
himself: in his goodness and wisdom,
Church choose to reveal himself and to
make known the hidden purpose of his will (cf.
Eph 1:9; Dei Verbum, 2). God’s desire to
make himself known, and the innate desire
of all human beings to know the truth,
provide the context for human inquiry
into the meaning of life. This unique
encounter is sustained within our
Christian community: the one who seeks
the truth becomes the one who lives by
faith (cf. Fides et Ratio, 31). It can be
described as a move from “I” to “we”;

Encountering God in Catholic Education
Address by His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI
leading the individual to be numbered among God’s people.

This same dynamic of communal identity — to whom do I belong? — verifies the ethos of our Catholic institutions. A university or school’s Catholic identity is not simply a question of the number of Catholic students. It is a question of conviction — do we really believe that only in the mystery of the Word made flesh does the mystery of man truly become clear (cf. Gaudium et Spes, 22)? Are we ready to commit our entire self — intellect and will, mind and heart — to God? Do we accept the truth Christ reveals? Is the faith tangible in our universities and schools? Is it given fervent expression liturgically, sacramentally, through prayer, acts of charity, a concern for justice, and respect for God’s creation? Only in this way do we really bear witness to the meaning of who we are and what we uphold.

From this perspective one can recognize that the contemporary “crisis of truth” is rooted in a “crisis of faith”. Only through faith can we freely give our assent to God’s testimony and acknowledge him as the transcendent guarantor of the truth he reveals. Again, we see why fostering personal intimacy with Jesus Christ and communal witness to his loving truth is indispensable in Catholic institutions of learning. Yet we all know, and observe with concern, the difficulty or reluctance many people have today in entrusting themselves to God. It is a complex phenomenon and one which I ponder continually. While God. It is a complex phenomenon and one which I ponder continually. While

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faith has been granted the vision of the Logos, God’s creative Reason, which in the Incarnation, is revealed as Goodness itself. Far from being just a communication of factual data — “informative” — the loving truth of the Gospel is creative and life-changing — “performative” (cf. Spe Salvi, 2). With confidence, Christian educators can liberate the young from the limits of positivism and awaken receptivity to the truth, to God and his goodness. In this way you will also help to form their conscience which, enriched by faith, opens a sure path to inner peace and to respect for others.

It comes as no surprise, then, that not just our own ecclesial communities but society in general has high expectations of Catholic educators. This places upon you a responsibility and offers an opportunity. More and more people — parents in particular — recognize the need for excellence in the human formation of their children. As Mater et Magistra, the Church shares their concern. When nothing beyond the individual is recognized as definitive, the ultimate criterion of judgment becomes the self and the satisfaction of the individual’s immediate wishes. The objectivity and perspective, which can only come through a recognition of the essential transcendent dimension of the human person, can be lost. Within such a relativistic horizon the goals of education are inevitably curtailed. Slowly, a lowering of standards occurs. We observe today a timidity in the face of the category of the good and an aimless pursuit of novelty parading as the realization of freedom. We witness an assumption that every experience is of equal worth and a reluctance to admit imperfection and mistakes. And particularly disturbing, is the reduction of the precious and delicate area of education in sexuality to management of “risk”, benefit of any reference to the beauty of conjugal love.

How might Christian educators respond? These harmful developments point to the particular urgency of what we might call “intellectual charity”. This aspect of charity calls the educator to recognize that the profound responsibility to lead the young to truth is nothing less than an act of love. Indeed, the dignity of education lies in fostering the true perfection and happiness of those to be educated. In practice “intellectual charity” upholds the essential unity of knowledge against the fragmentation which ensues when reason is detached from the pursuit of truth. It guides the young towards the deep satisfaction of exercising freedom in relation to truth, and it strives to articulate the relationship between faith and all aspects of family and civic life. Once their passion for the fullness and unity of truth has been awakened, young people will surely relish the discovery that the question of what they can know opens up the vast adventure of what they ought to do. Here they will experience “in what” and “in whom” it is possible to hope, and be inspired to contribute to society in a way that engenders hope in others.

Dear friends, I wish to conclude by focusing our attention specifically on the paramount importance of your own professionalism and witness within our Catholic universities and schools. First, let me thank you for your dedication and generosity. I know from my own days as a professor, and I have heard from your Bishops and officials of the Congregation for Catholic Education, that the reputation of Catholic institutes of learning in this country is largely due to yourselves and your predecessors. Your selfless contributions — from outstanding research to the dedication of those working in inner-city schools — serve both your country and the Church. For this I express my profound gratitude.

In regard to faculty members at Catholic colleges universities, I wish to reaffirm the great value of academic freedom. In virtue of this freedom you are called to search for the truth wherever careful analysis of evidence leads you. Yet it is also the case that any appeal to the principle of academic freedom in order to justify positions that contradict the faith and the teaching of the Church would obstruct or even betray the university’s identity and mission; a mission at the heart of the Church’s munus docendi and not somehow autonomous or independent of it.

Teachers and administrators, whether in universities or schools, have the duty and privilege to ensure that students receive instruction in Catholic doctrine and practice. This requires that public witness to the way of Christ, as found in the Gospel and upheld by the Church’s Magisterium, shapes all aspects of an institution’s life, both inside and outside the classroom. Divergence from this vision weakens Catholic identity and, far from advancing freedom, inevitably leads to confusion, whether moral, intellectual or spiritual.

I wish also to express a particular word of encouragement to both lay and Religious teachers of catechesis who strive to ensure that young people become daily more appreciative of the gift of faith. Religious education is a challenging apostolate, yet there are many signs of a desire among young people to learn about the faith and practice it with vigor. If this awakening is to grow, teachers require a clear and precise understanding of the specific nature and role of Catholic education. They must also be ready to lead the commitment made by the entire school community to assist our young people, and their families, to experience the harmony between faith, life and culture.

Here I wish to make a special appeal to Religious Brothers, Sisters and Priests: do not abandon the school apostolate; indeed, renew your commitment to schools especially those in poorer areas. In places where there are many hollow promises which lure young people away from the path of truth and genuine freedom, the consecrated person’s witness to the evangelical counsels is an irreplaceable gift. I encourage the Religious present to bring renewed enthusiasm to the promotion of vocations. Know that your witness to the ideal of consecration and mission among the young is a source of great inspiration in faith for them and their families.

To all of you I say: bear witness to hope. Nourish your witness with prayer. Account for the hope that characterizes your lives (cf. 1 Pet 3:15) by living the truth which you propose to your students. Help them to know and love the One you have encountered, whose truth and goodness you have experienced with joy. With Saint Augustine, let us say: “we who speak and you who listen acknowledge ourselves as fellow disciples of a single teacher” (Sermons, 23:2). With these sentiments of communion, I gladly impart to you, your colleagues and students, and to your families, my Apostolic Blessing.
Shortly before Pope Benedict XVI’s address, a small group of individuals was introduced to the Holy Father by Very Rev. David M. O’Connell.

Dr. Thomas Powell, president of Mount St. Mary’s University in Emmitsburg, Md., represented the full body of Catholic college and university presidents in attendance at the papal address. He was chosen to meet the Pope because the university he leads and the Archdiocese of Baltimore in which the university is located are celebrating their bicentennial anniversaries.

Dr. Catherine Hickey, secretary for education of the Archdiocese of New York, represented the full body of Catholic educational leaders in all the archdioceses and dioceses of the United States. She was chosen, in particular, to represent Catholic schools from the five archdioceses celebrating their bicentennial anniversary, including her own native New York.

Raymond Hillenbrand of Rapid City, S.D., represented the Board of Trustees of The Catholic University of America and all of those who contributed generously to support the Holy Father’s visit to the university campus.

Dr. William Wagner, professor of law in the Columbus School of Law of The Catholic University of America, represented the faculties of the university. He is also the director of the Center for Law, Philosophy and Culture, and organized CUA’s recent international symposium on the natural moral law, requested by Pope Benedict.

Dr. Jean De Groot, associate dean and associate professor of philosophy in the School of Philosophy of The Catholic University of America, represented the three ecclesiastical faculties of the university: canon law, theology and religious studies, and philosophy.

Carl Petchik, executive director of facilities operations of The Catholic University of America, represented the university staff and the regional councils of the Knights of Columbus.

Shannon McAlister, doctoral student in the School of Theology and Religious Studies, represented all graduate, professional and doctoral students of the university.

Peter Osgood, graduating senior, was the winner of the essay contest for writing an outstanding entry, “How Catholic Education Has Changed My Life.” He represented all the undergraduate students of the university.

Very Rev. Michael Carroll, C.M., was recently elected the Provincial Superior of the Eastern Province of the Congregation of the Mission of St. Vincent de Paul. It is from within his province that the presidents of St. John’s University, De Paul University, Niagara University and The Catholic University of America have come. He represented members of consecrated life involved in the work of education.

“When I met the Pope, he smiled and offered words of affirmation. When I told him people had asked me to give him their love, his face was beaming and he replied with gratitude. I felt deeply touched by the kindness and warmth of the Holy Father.”

— Shannon McAlister
The Holy Father Departs

As the late-afternoon shadows fell, the Pope boarded the Popemobile for one last turn around CUA’s campus. Behind the Pryzbyla Center, ecstatic crowds of students cheered and waved farewell. As he slowly rounded the final turn, passing between CUA’s mall and the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, thousands of people on campus showed their affection and captured the moment for posterity.
Gifts To and From The Pope

In gratitude for Catholic University’s hospitality during his April 17 visit to campus, Pope Benedict XVI presented Father David O’Connell, the university president, with a museum-grade reproduction of the ancient Bodmer Papyrus VIII, which has special significance for the Catholic Church.

The gift presented to Father O’Connell is a facsimile of the oldest Greek manuscript of the Letters of St. Peter, which was once the final part of an ancient codex. The document was written sometime in the third century.

The box in which the text rests is identified with Pope Benedict’s coat of arms. The original papyrus has been in the Vatican Library ever since Swiss collector Martin Bodmer presented Pope Paul VI with his collections of early Christian papyri in June 1969.

Pope Benedict XVI received several gifts from Father O’Connell, including a framed photograph of McMahon Hall, the second oldest building on campus, and a commemorative medal of the Pope’s visit. In addition, in a private meeting before the papal address, Father O’Connell presented the Holy Father with a white silk zucchetto, or skullcap.

It is customary that if the Pope is presented with a new zucchetto at a scheduled meeting, he will exchange the one he is wearing for the one offered. The Pope’s original zucchetto will be displayed, along with the chair he sat in during his address, at various locations on campus before being stored in CUA’s archives.
Frank Persico, vice president for university relations and chief of staff, has had a long career with Catholic University, as a student, a staff member and an administrator. He has been present for two papal visits to CUA: Pope John Paul II’s in 1979, for which he served as an usher, and Pope Benedict XVI’s in 2008, for which he oversaw all of the logistics. Following are some of his reflections on the two visits.

First — and this made a big difference in planning — in 1979, the Pope was still very accessible. It was before the attempt on John Paul’s life and, obviously, pre-9/11. Although I’m sure there was security for the Pope in 1979, in 2008 our campus was swarming with Secret Service agents.

This emphasis on ensuring the Pope’s safety — and differences in the number of people who could witness Benedict’s speech (approximately 600 vs. seating for 2,000 when John Paul came) — challenged us to find the best way for our students to see the Pope, something they wanted very much to do. In 1979, many of the faculty and their families were invited to the speech. CUA students lined the steps to the old gym, where John Paul II’s speech took place, to cheer the Pope. They filled the sidewalks and the street. One of my favorite photos shows the students almost touching the Pope, one giving him a flower. But not everyone had a front row seat. This year, we invited students to the lawn between the law school and the Pryzbyla Center, which offered a virtually unobstructed view of the Pope as he was driven up to the Pryzbyla Center and entered the building. And they had an even better view as he exited in the famous Popemobile.

Just as in 1979, we transformed a campus setting into a venue befitting a Pope and papal address. In fact, if you compare photographs from the two events, you’ll see similarities in the color schemes and decorating. That was no accident. For both visits, we used archways in order to maintain the symmetry of the Holy Father’s crest. Our central colors were papal gold and white. One major change this year was the chair that the Pope sat in to deliver his speech. In 1979, we had only seven weeks to prepare, so our chair was “off the rack,” purchased from a local furniture store. In 2008, we had four months to ready the campus. That gave us the latitude to challenge students to design papal furnishings. The papal chair, by the way, was built at no charge by Jefferson Millwork & Design Inc. in Sterling, Va. They told us that it was an honor to be involved.

One other thing common to both visits — they went off like clockwork. For that, we felt doubly blessed.

A day of grace… that’s how I would describe our Holy Father’s visit. His presence reminded us of the universality of the Church and of the special place our university has in the heart of the Church.

University Chaplain and Director of Campus Ministry

Seeing Pope Benedict at CUA was simply incredible. The way in which everyone on campus worked together to prepare for this inspirational experience was yet another illustration of how unique CUA is as a community.

— Elizabeth Palmissano
Class of 2009

It was an honor and privilege to attend the meeting with Pope Benedict XVI and Catholic educators. I found his talk to be challenging, direct and prophetic.

— Dr. Richard McCarron
Secretary for Catholic Education
Philadelphia

I was honored to be introduced to the Holy Father, a wonderful opportunity for which I am very grateful. There are memories and stories that I will have and share for the rest of my life.

— Brandon Pettit, staff member
University Center, Student Programs and Events at Catholic University

Seeing the Pope was incredible. It took an institution that seemed far away and remote and made it real and personal. Having him on campus made it even more special.

— Elizabeth Bonner
Class of 2008

The Holy Father left me inspired and renewed. This Pope of hope raised the bar for Catholic higher education and challenged us to be authentically Christ-centered and rooted in the heart of the Church.

— Jim Towey
President
Saint Vincent College
SPECIAL THANKS

To all who made the 2008 Papal Visit to CUA a success:

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- Archdiocese of Washington
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- United States Secret Service
- Metropolitan Police Department
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