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Pope to students: Freedom to express yourself necessary for growth

Pope Francis on Friday inaugurated the new Vatican headquarters of Scholas Occurrentes, a pontifical organization involved in education in 190 countries around the world. Five South American "first ladies" were also present for the event.

By Vatican News

Representatives from Scholas Occurrentes from around the world welcomed Pope Francis to the new premises of the organization in Rome. The young formators – present either in person or via video-link – hailed from Japan, Argentina, the United States, Haiti,



Israel, Mozambique, Mexico, Spain, and Italy.

The Pope himself opened the doors to the new centre, after being greeted with songs and best wishes to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.

Scholas Occurrentes: creating freedom

The inauguration of the new seat of the organization also provided an occasion for the launch of the programs for the next year of the Foundation, which is involved in education and formation in 190 countries, and brings together more than 500,000 institutions worldwide.

Among the participants in the day's events were professional athletes, artists, and business people, as well as a delegation of "First Ladies" of South America – the latter members of the "Alma Association", which has chosen to support the initiatives of the pontifical foundation.

After hearing from several testimonies from children involved in Scholas Occurrentes, Pope Francis was able to offer his own thoughts, speaking off-the-cuff. "Scholas Occurrentes does not proselytize, but creates freedom", the Pope said, "because it gambles on what each person has in their heart, which is the capacity to grow and to build their own future".

Poetry and creativity

Pope Francis praised the ability of Scholas Occurrentes to help young people express themselves freely, within a group that is able to accompany them and assist them on their journey. He spoke of a kind of positive "lack of inhibition" in expressing what is held deep inside – a freedom that he said can be conveyed by the word "poetry". Poetry does not mean "alienating oneself in things that fly high"; rather, "it is creativity". Human beings are "either creative, or they remain children, they do not grow", the Pope said.

A new centre in Los Angeles

The Holy Father also took part, via video-link, in the inauguration of another new Scholas Occurrentes centre in the city of Los Angeles, with the city's Archbishop, José Gomez, and mayor, Eric Garcetti, both present in California for the event. The Los Angeles centre is the fourteenth in the world; last month, another centre was opened in Japan.

Next year, Scholas Occurrentes will undertake a number of initiatives, including a worldwide event, set for 14 May, on the theme "Rebuilding the Global Educational Pact", which aims at re-launching a dialogue between the generations for a more open and inclusive education for children.