

UNIVERSITY MINISTRY IN EUROPE

Working document

THE STRUCTURE AND IMPORTANCE OF UNIVERSITY MINISTRY

- 'Europe has suffered so many political, social, economic, and cultural changes that it has placed the problem of evangelisation in a completely new perspective. One could also say that Europe, which has been moulded by the complex events of the last century, has issued the most radical challenge to Christianity and the Church that history has ever known. At the same time it reveals today new and creative possibilities for the proclamation and embodiment of the Gospel' (JOHN PAUL II, *Speech to the European Bishops' Conference*, 11 October 1985).
- The proclamation of Jesus Christ must also reach contemporary European culture. The evangelisation of culture must show that in today's Europe too it is possible to live the Gospel fully as a path that gives meaning to existence. To this end [...] what is needed is a calm critical assessment of the current cultural situation of Europe and an evaluation of the emerging trends and the more significant contemporary events and situations in the light of the centrality of Christ and of Christian anthropology. Today too, in recalling Christianity's contributions to culture throughout the history of Europe, there is a need to demonstrate the Gospel approach, both theoretical and practical, to reality and to man himself. Furthermore, considering the great importance of the sciences and technological achievements in European culture and society, the Church, through both her institutes of study and in her practical pastoral initiatives, is called to be constructive in her approach to scientific knowledge and its applications, pointing out the insufficiency and inadequacy of notions inspired by a scientism which recognises only experimental knowledge as objectively valid, and presenting ethical criteria which man possesses as inscribed in his very nature. [...] In particular, greater recognition is due to the contribution made by Christians who conduct research and teach in universities: in their "service to thought" they hand down to the next generation the values of an intellectual tradition enriched by two thousand years of humanistic and Christian experience. Convinced of the importance of academic institutions, I also ask the various local Churches to promote an adequate *pastoral care of the university community*, favouring whatever corresponds to present cultural needs. (JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 59).

- **A new evangelisation** is unthinkable without a clear and specific pastoral strategy aimed at the world of culture.
- The contemporary cultural situation and the increase in the number of students (and proportionally, in the number of teachers), has transformed the University into an environment which has a specific pastoral ministry. The university ministry, which is neatly incorporated into the framework of an organic ministry capable of joining the pastoral care of the communities with the reality of its environments, 'is part of the mission of the Church within the University, and is also a constitutive element of a Catholic University itself, both in its structure and in its life' (Cf JOHN PAUL II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities, 15 August 1990, 38).
- The **cultural dimension** cuts across pastoral ministry and defines it. Under this profile, the common vocation and mission of the evangelisation of culture and the cultural assimilation of the faith ought to be stressed first, before distinguishing different ages and situations.
- The university ministry is the form of pastoral care that is specific to the university environment.
- As far as the students are concerned, university ministry defines itself within the ambit of youth ministry, but it does not limit itself to it.
- **The ecclesiastical community is an adequate subject for university ministry**, both in its organic structure and in its different facets: 'It is desirable that Christian communities, priests, religious, and the faithful all pay greater attention to students and university lecturers, as well as to the apostolate of the university chaplaincies' (PCUCU III, 4).
- **University ministry cuts across all of the ecclesiastical activities.** The cultural dimension plays a fundamental role in the pastoral care of the community. The capacity to interpret human events, with the clarity of evangelical discernment, is essential in youth and adult catechesis, where existential questions become more acute, and the confrontation between the snares of false doctrine and mistrust prove more consistent. University ministry offers the incentive for a faith that is attentive to the profound questions and needs of contemporary man, and is always ready to justify faith (cf. 1 Peter 3, 15).
- **University ministry respects the specific character of the university institution** and it takes place in the conviction that the Christian faith not only spreads through 'profane' countries, but that it is also of great help in the fulfilment of the authentic aims of the university. To put this another way: 'The Church addresses people with full respect for their freedom. Her mission does not restrict freedom but rather promotes it. The Church proposes; she imposes nothing. She respects individuals and cultures, and she honours the sanctuary of conscience (*Redemptoris Missio*, 39).
- **University life is a privileged place of the understanding of faith.** According to the Catholic doctrine, faith is not a pure paradox: it is only as an intellectually reasonable act that it is worthy of God and man: 'Faith therefore has no fear of reason, but seeks it out and has trust in it' (JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et ratio*, 43).
- **Faith is capable of generating culture:** it lives in the world of culture, even if it does not limit itself to it. One could say that 'the essential function of a culture is to give to human beings a place in which they can truly live, in which they can really feel themselves "at home" [...] what is decisive is the way in which man understands himself, and the way in which faith shapes his destiny, whilst offering him stability' (J. LADRIÈRE, *The Risks of Rationality: The Challenge of Science and the Technology of Cultures*, Turin, SEI 1978, 114.115):

- ‘If Christian faith is a *fides quaerens intellectum*, human intellect is a *intellectus quaerens fidem*, an intellect which, in order to discover proper belief in itself, must remain open, confident in a truth that is greater than itself. This truth made human is Jesus, the Christ, the Word of eternal life’, who is involved in every true form of humanism, (JOHN PAUL II, 18.04.1982, *Speech to the University of Bologna*).
- ‘The awareness of the boundaries of science is a tremendous opportunity for our present age. In fact, this points towards one of the greatest duties of culture: to integrate knowledge, in the sense of creating a synthesis in which the impressive totality of scientific knowledge would find its meaning within the framework of a complete vision of man and the universe, the *ordo rerum*. The dialogue between theology, the natural sciences, and the human sciences reveals itself more necessary and urgent than ever’ (JOHN PAUL II, 13.06.1984, *Speech to the University of Fribourg, Switzerland*).
- ‘The creative centre of every authentic culture is based on its approach to the mystery of God [...] it is from this point that a new culture must be built’ (JOHN PAUL II, *Speech to the Ecclesiastical Conference in Palermo*, n.4).
- ‘The Church is fully aware of a pastoral urgency that calls for an absolutely special concern for culture in those circumstances where the development of a culture becomes disassociated not only from Christian faith but even from human values, as well as in those situations where science and technology are powerless in giving an adequate response to the pressing questions of truth and well-being that burn in people’s hearts’ (JOHN PAUL II, *Christifideles Laici*, 44).
- The demonstration of truth is the most distinguished form of evangelical charity. If it is true, in fact, that ‘modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers’ (PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41), and that the testimony of Christian life is the first, irreplaceable form of mission, it is just as true that ‘it is not enough [for man] to be loved or to love. He needs to know and to understand: man needs truth’ (C.E.I., *Evangelisation and the Testimony of Charity*, 10).
- University pastoral ministry contributes to the creation of a **new humanism**: ‘Man in the full truth of his existence, of his personal being and also of his community and social being [...] this man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission: *he is the primary and fundamental way for the Church*, the way traced out by Christ himself, the way that leads invariably through the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption’ (JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptor hominis*, 14).
- The University is called to play a key role in the development of culture. It is exposed to two competing risks: to put up with the dominant cultural influences in a passive manner, or to take on a marginal role in relation to them [...] The University and, in a broader sense, university culture, is of great importance. In this environment, vital issues are at stake and profound cultural changes with far-reaching consequences can generate new challenges. The Church cannot fail to embrace them in its mission to announce the Gospel message’ (CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, PONTIFICAL CATHOLIC COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY, PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE, *The Presence of the Church in the University and in University Culture*, 22 May 1994, p.9 n.6).
- To this end, ‘**cultural laboratories**’ need to be set up: ‘You, my dear friends who are involved in scientific research, must make universities “cultural laboratories” in which theology, philosophy, human sciences and natural sciences may engage in constructive dialogue, looking to the moral law as an intrinsic requirement of research and a condition for its full value in seeking out the truth’ (JOHN PAUL II, *Address to University Professors of All Nations*, Saturday 9 September 2000).

The intention of the 'laboratories' is to:

- Reopen opportunities for discovering the truth, as a characteristic and integral part of the University.
- Contemplate the perfection of the human person and the good of society.
- Develop a complete form of culture through open and frank dialogue, in tandem with the multifaceted tradition of Christian faith: 'Christian Culture' is an expression that contains a wealth of meanings.

WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF AN ORGANIC PASTORAL MINISTRY

1. PARISH AND UNIVERSITY MINISTRY

The overall perspective

The parish, as the most evident sign of the Church in a particular location, profoundly experiences the effects of the specific social and cultural situation. The image of the parish as the natural centre of the life of a community is an image that belongs to the past. The Pope has prophetically called for the parish 'to look for its identity outside its own structure' (*To the Parishes of Rome*, Lent 1986).

This entails **a demanding and much-needed recovery of its image**, in such a way that communities become places of great spiritual and human importance, as well as of knowledge and understanding. In short, places where life is cultivated and the senses are illuminated.

This task falls in the first instance to those working in both the university sector and in cultural milieux, together with ecclesiastical communities (parishes, etc.), whose image needs to be redressed urgently by a society that relegates these communities to a subculture. It is therefore a problem that ought not to be placed outside of ordinary pastoral ministry, but should remain at its very heart.

The priorities

1. To reconfigure, by means of a pastoral plan and with active initiatives, the relationship between pastoral ministry and culture (the 'cultural' image of a parish).
2. To overcome once and for all the limitation of university pastoral ministry to the pastoral care of the university students, in order to restore its authentic identity.
3. To establish and embrace university ministry as a privileged means of primary evangelisation.
4. To define in concrete terms the relationship between the institutions that are operating in a given area (e.g., parish) and those that were directly within the ambit of the university (chaplancies and university parishes).
5. To delineate, within the context of Christian church vocations, the specific vocation of university members (lecturers and students) towards the cultural assimilation of faith and the evangelisation of culture.

Requirements

To achieve this, it is necessary to develop:

1. The mature conviction that the ecclesiastical community is an adequate resource to carry out university pastoral ministry, both in its integral structure and in its different forms.

2. The perception that no parish can play a significant role unless it vigorously regains the high cultural profile that it had in the past, even whilst using methods in a completely different context (out of service to the Gospel, certainly, and not through any form of barely concealed pride or vain conceit).
3. The persuasion that the capacity of the Gospel to inspire and animate culture does not take place automatically, but requires patient and persistent work in the field of ordinary ministry.
4. The development (in terms of appreciation, support, and availability of people and of structures) of the arduous, urgent and complex work of the cultural assimilation of faith, in the following ways:
 - Cultural dialogue: a clear and respectful debate, as an initial step in the journey towards the truth
 - Cultural discernment: an acknowledgement of the richness of cultural and historical trends
 - Cultural development: the creative and dynamic production of different forms of culture, in accordance with Christian belief, which bear witness to the revolutionary power of the Gospel.

2. UNIVERSITY MINISTRY AND YOUTH MINISTRY

- *Youth ministry* is an expression that indicates, appropriately enough, the initiatives of the Church with regard to young people (and their ‘world’), which considers them as important protagonists in their own right. In this way, the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Saviour of mankind, is brought to them, and the new life that lies in Him is communicated to them. Furthermore, they may be able to form their own body, enriched as they are by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and they may know how to walk through life as the people of God, living like His children, and loving Him in their fellow men and giving thanks to Him.
- As far as the student context is concerned, university ministry is a specific form of youth ministry; it is not simply established as a subdivision of it. We cannot legitimately refer to University ministry as the mere care and formation of students on campus without taking into consideration the specific cultural context. One could say that university ministry, which is not confined to youth ministry, defines itself as such every time that it centres around young people.
- Youth ministry develops, in a harmonious and co-ordinated way, the forms of university ministry, such that it centres on the students, and on their personal formation (an analogous situation in terms of the relationship between adult ministry and university ministry in that it is directed towards the permanent formation of teachers).

3. THE CHAPLAINCY AS AN ECCLESIASTICAL PRESENCE IN THE UNIVERSITY

- The Chaplaincy is a significant locus within the University, and it operates according to the specific context of each institution: ‘The Chaplaincy – every University Chaplaincy –

follows its own pastoral journey, intensifying the apostolic dedication that has always characterised it: it is a place of the spirit, where believers in Christ can linger in prayer, and find nourishment, direction, and support. The Chaplaincy is a gymnasium of Christian virtues, where the baptismal life grows and is developed, and expresses itself with apostolic ardour; it is an open and welcoming house for all those who, listening to the Lord speaking within them, seek out the truth and serve their fellow men every day with a knowledge that is not satisfied with narrow, pragmatic points of view. Within the context of a declining modernity, the Chaplaincy markedly becomes a living, creative centre of the Christian animation of culture: in its frank and respectful dialogue, in its clear and committed approach, (cf. 1 Peter 3, 15), and in its witness, which both examines and convinces' (JOHN PAUL II, *Speech to the European Chaplains*, 1 May 1998).

- The University Chaplaincy is called to expand and integrate the traditional function of the spiritual care of individuals, becoming an authentic pastoral and cultural centre: 'From this perspective, chaplaincies – which have always accompanied the life of the university community with their spiritual care – are enriched. They become more fully authentic pastoral centres of cultural and spiritual animation' (JOHN PAUL II, *Homily at the Mass for the Students of the Roman Universities*, 12 December 1996). Such a task requires a closer, more developed collaboration between teachers and students, who are called to demonstrate in a very concrete way the fruitful bond between faith and knowledge that constitutes the original source of their spirituality. By participating in constructive dialogue between different members of the University, and by way of its expertise in providing a personalised form of spiritual care, the Chaplaincy responds to the need to keep alive in a cultural sense the work of God and the testimony of faith. Furthermore, the Chaplaincy also nourishes the fundamental idea of hope that offers words which give 'sense and meaning to its entire existence, and which provides the necessary motivation for the daily task of transforming this into a reality, in order that it satisfy God's plan' (TMA 46).
- 'Laboratories of faith' need to be set up in the Chaplaincy, to provide a deeper understanding of Christian Truth in relation to each person's personal vocation and to act as a much-needed testimony in the cultural world.

4. UNIVERSITY MINISTRY IN PRACTICE

- The university ministry and the chaplaincy work together with the pastoral institutions and, in particular, with the colleges, which constitute precise locations where the Christian community puts into action in a significant way the fruitful union between the teaching of faith and the cultural ministry. The colleges are also called to renew their own image and their valuable ecclesiastical and social service, for the preparation of professional people and scholars. In this way, they may discover how to stimulate the various areas of human activity with the transforming power of the Gospel.
- The university ministry welcomes and values those associations, movements, and groups of the faithful who are present and who work in the university environment, whatever their various jobs, and relies on their availability and willingness to maintain collaborative relationships.

5. THE FORMATION OF TEACHERS

This initiative is a necessary and urgent one, and though it is demanding, it is certainly required. Within a common framework (a fundamental training programme for those involved in ministry work), formation must identify the characteristics and qualities (charisms) that need to be fostered, with a view to undertaking particular tasks and responsibilities. Amongst the qualifications that are required, the following should be highlighted:

- An attitude that seeks to welcome and to engage in dialogue
- A Christian vision of culture and society
- A knowledge and ability to communicate that is motivated by the fundamental doctrines of the faith (primary evangelisation)
- A sensitive Christian pedagogy
- A knowledge of and respect for the University
- A profound sense of the Church as the spiritual community of the faithful.