

## Pope Francis connects ACU to global education network

The Holy Father Pope Francis was the key guest during the overnight announcement of an agreement between Australian Catholic University (ACU) and Fundación Scholas Occurrentes (Scholas) that will enable universal teachings of encounter to enrich education programs and promote interdisciplinary research and practice.

The partnership agreement and launch of Scholas in Oceania was part of the global event “A well to continue being born – Scholas and creativity”, a celebration of the creative power of young people, on Thursday 20 May. The partnership connects ACU to the global Scholas network established in Argentina by Fr Jorge Bergoglio before he became Pope Francis. With this new partnership the network now spans all six continents.

A face-to-face and virtual event, with the Pope visiting the new Scholas headquarters in Rome, the occasion was used to announce the opening of other chapters in addition to Australia, such as Washington, in the United States, Valencia, in Spain, and the beginning of educational experiences in the El Impenetrable region, in the province of Chaco, Argentina.

From the Vatican, the Australian Ambassador to the Holy See Chiara Porro presented Pope Francis with a t-shirt with the Scholas logo and the Australian flag, which was signed by the Pontiff and will be delivered soon to the new Scholas community, when the foundation's activities begin.

Attending in Australia were ACU Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Zlatko Skrbis, ACU Executive Dean of Theology and Philosophy Professor Dermot Nestor, Jacqui Rémond, Laudato Si animator within the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy who has been instrumental in establishing the connection with Scholas, and four students.

During the ceremony, ACU alumna Ms Theresa Ardler offered a traditional Welcome to Country to Pope Francis and Scholas while ACU students Deanna Uremovic, Lachlan Sibir and Ayman Hill presented earth sourced from each of ACU's eight Australian campuses. The gesture paid homage to the “well of continuous birth”, which creates a space for seeds to grow. This is a tradition that Fr Jorge Bergoglio established for Scholas in 2001 to signify emergence from a difficult social environment, and to signal the prospects for renewed courage and hope. Ms Clare Stevenson, a Wiradjuri woman and Year 11 student boarding at Loreto Normanhurst, offered her hopes for the future to the Holy Father.

His Holiness (in Rome) took the opportunity to listen to past, present and future university students (at ACU's North Sydney campus), and he offered them encouragement, inspiration and promise for the future.

ACU Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Zlatko Skrbis said the announcement of the partnership during Laudato Si' Week and as Catholic organisations gave renewed focus to their commitment to care for our common home was a sign of the Holy Spirit at work amongst us and on our behalf.

“We must never lose sight of our role to safeguard creation and pass it on to future generations. Through this agreement ACU plans to offer experiences and education for academics and practitioners to share knowledge and wisdom about our relationship with God's ongoing work of creation – in our context this includes ‘salt-water country’ that connects us in our region of Oceania. We hope to achieve and enhance this through understanding the traditional ways people have cared for Oceania and how integral ecological research and practice can create pathways for greater protection of our island homes throughout the region.

“Joining with Scholas enables education and research pathways at ACU that are a direct response to Pope Francis' call for ‘Universities of Meaning’ that respond to the health, social, cultural and ecological crises of today.”

The partnership between ACU and SCHOLAS commits to foster education and promotes collaboration amongst the university's students on issues related to citizen awareness and politics, value cooperation and solidarity.

The collaboration will include training and advice, research, technology transfers, consulting, programming, technical assistance projects, and internships. It will focus on improving education and achieving educational inclusion for underprivileged sectors through art, sports and technology.

To watch the event as it happened, visit the link: <https://youtu.be/RWQHBR8hva8?t=3704>

## About ACU

Australian Catholic University (ACU) is a public Catholic university, open to all, with campuses in Australia and one in Rome. An ACU education builds on the Catholic understanding of faith and reason working together in pursuit of knowledge, and promotion of human dignity and the common good. As a young university, ACU is making a serious impact. Ranked in the top two per cent of universities worldwide\* and in the top 10 Catholic universities \*\*, it is also first in Australia for graduate employment\*\*\*. It is a member of the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities.

\* *Times Higher Education* World University Rankings 2021. Percentage calculated as ACU's world rank as a proportion of the total number of universities in the world: *International Handbook of Universities 2019*, Palgrave MacMillan.

\*\* International Federation of Catholic Universities members ranked on *Times Higher Education* World University Rankings 2021

\*\*\* Graduate Outcomes Survey – Longitudinal 2020, full-time employment

## About Scholas

Fundación Scholas Occurrentes is a private institution, driven by Pope Francis, building a link between technology, art and sports in order to promote and improve education and achieve the integration of communities, with a focus on underprivileged sectors, so that they may have everything they need to develop their vital project in line with their culture, faith, cross-cultural universal values and respect for their surroundings.

Scholas achieves this through:

- Promoting awareness campaigns on human values,
- Developing their own programs for the integration of children and youth in their communities and in the world,
- Supporting vulnerable educational projects, and
- Encouraging and facilitating the connection between schools and educational networks from different cultures and faiths around the world.

## Media contacts

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