

Pope Francis says society today needs good, well paid teachers



Pope Francis speaks with a child during a meeting with members of the Italian union of Catholic teachers, managers, educators and trainers (UCIM) at Paul VI audience hall. – AFP

(Vatican Radio) Pope Francis has denounced poor wages for teachers, saying computers can teach content but it takes a good teacher to instill values and hope in young people today and create harmony in society.

Receiving the *Unione Cattolica Italiana Insegnanti, Dirigenti, Educatori, Formatori (UCIIM)* on their 70th anniversary, the Pope addressed them as colleagues, saying he had fond memories of his own days in the classroom, when he too was a teacher.

He then said: “teaching is a *beautiful profession*, ... it’s a pity teachers are badly paid...because it is not just about the time they spend in school, but the time they spend in preparation, the time they spend on each individual student”.

The Pope referred to his own country, where many teachers have to work double shifts “just to be able to earn a decent wage”.

Instead the teaching profession is a great responsibility, he said, likening it to being spiritual parents for students, particularly the most difficult students who can often try a teachers’ patience.

In a society that struggles to find points of reference, the Pope continued young people need a positive reference point in their school.

But, the school can become this only “if it has teachers capable of giving meaning to the school, to study and culture, without reducing everything to the mere transmission of technical knowledge”.

“You must not teach just content, but the values and customs of life. A computer can teach content. Instead there are three things that you must transmit: how to love, how to understand which values and customs create harmony in society. For that we need good teachers!!”

Teachers, he concluded “must aim to build an educational relationship with each student, who must feel welcomed and loved for what he or she is, with all of their limitations and potential. In this direction, your task is now more necessary than ever”.

Below a Vatican Radio translation of the Holy Father’s prepared text:

Dear colleagues,

Allow me to address you as such, given that I too have been a teacher like you and I have fond memories of my days spent in the classroom with students. I cordially greet you all and thank the President for his kind words.

Teaching is *a beautiful profession*, ... it’s a pity teachers are badly paid...because it is not just about the time they spend in school, but the time they spend in preparation, the time they spend on each individual student. I think of my own country, where many teachers have to work double shifts just to be able to get a decent wage. But what state will a teacher be in after a double shift?

It is a beautiful and badly paid job, because it allows us to see the people who are entrusted to our care grow day after day. It is a little like being parents, at least spiritually. It is a great responsibility!

Teaching is a serious commitment that only a mature and balanced personality can take on. Such a commitment can be intimidating, but remember that no teacher is ever alone: They always share their work with other colleagues and the entire educational community to which they belong.

Your association is celebrating 70 years of life: This is a beautiful age! It is only right to celebrate, but also begin to weigh up this lifetime. When you were born, in 1944, Italy was still at war. You have come a long way since then! Schools have come a long way. And Italian schools have moved forward with the help of your Association, which was founded by Professor Nosengo Gesualdo, a religion teacher who felt the need to gather together the secondary teachers of that time, who identified with the Catholic faith, and who with this inspiration worked in the schools.

In all these years you have helped the country to grow, you have helped to reform the school, you have especially contributed to educate generations of young people.

Over the past 70 years Italy has changed, schools have changed, but there are always teachers willing to engage in their profession with that enthusiasm and willingness that faith in the Lord gives us.

As Jesus taught us, the Law and the Prophets are summed up in two commandments: love the Lord your God and love your neighbour (cf. Mt 22,34-40). We can ask ourselves: who is a

teacher's neighbourur? The students! It is with them that he or she spends their days. It is they who await guidance, direction, a response - and, before that, good questions!

UCIIM's tasks include the call to enlighten and motivate a just idea of the school, sometimes overshadowed by discussions and reductive positions. The school is certainly composed of a valid and qualified education, but also of human relations, which for us are welcoming and benevolent relations, to be offered indiscriminately to all. Indeed, the duty of a good teacher - all the more for a Christian teacher - is to love his or her more difficult, weaker, more disadvantaged students with greater intensity. Jesus would say, if you love only those who study, who are well educated, what merit have you? Any teacher can do well with such students. I ask you *to love "difficult" students more ...* and there are some who really try our patience, but we have to love them more. those who do not want to study, those who find themselves in difficult conditions, the disabled and foreigners, who today pose a great challenge for schools.

If a professional association of Christian teachers wants to bear witness to their inspiration today, then it is called to engage in the peripheries of the school, which cannot be abandoned to marginalization, exclusion, ignorance, crime. In a society that struggles to find points of reference, young people need a positive reference point in their school. The school can be this or become this only if it has teachers capable of giving meaning to the school, to study and culture, without reducing everything to the mere transmission of technical knowledge. Instead they must aim to build an educational relationship with each student, who must feel welcomed and loved for what he or she is, with all of their limitations and potential. In this direction, your task is now more necessary than ever.

You must not teach just content, but the values and customs of life. A computer can teach content. Instead there are three things that you must transmit: how to love, how to understand which values and customs create harmony in society. For that we need good teachers!!

The Christian community has many examples of great educators who dedicated themselves to addressing the shortcomings of education systems or to establish schools in their own right. We think, among others, of St. John Bosco, the bicentenary of whose birth we this year. Christian teachers should look to these figures to animate a school from within, regardless of whether it is state-run or not it needs credible educators and witnesses of a mature and complete humanity.

As an Association, you are by nature open to the future, because there are always new generations of young people to whom you may transmit your wealth of knowledge and values. On a professional level it is important to update teaching skills, especially in light of new technologies, but teaching is not just a job: it is a relationship in which each teacher must feel fully involved as a person, to give meaning to the educational task towards their students. Your presence here today is proof that you have the motivation that the school needs. I encourage you to renew your passion for humanity in the process of formation, and to be witnesses of life and hope. I also ask you, please, to pray for me, and I cordially bless you all.

(Emer McCarthy)