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### Challenges and opportunities for Spanish Catholic universities today: a source of inspiration

The [Spanish Bishops' Conference](#) initiated a broad and inclusive process of reflection in October 2023, in which it proposed to the entire educational community in Spain to travel together a path of dialogue and collaborative work to make visible the specific contribution of the Church to the challenges posed by education in the current era (see the "[Panels of experience and participation](#)" carried out, in Spanish).

The Congress entitled "[The Church in the field of Education: Presence and Commitment](#)", which took place on 24 February 2024 in Madrid, Spain, was the culmination of this process. The 1200 representatives who came from the 9 educational fields in which the Church is active in education at national level helped to renew its presence and commitment to education.

This huge event, to which [Pope Francis dedicated a special message](#), was enlightened by the [interventions of Cardinal Tolentino de Mendonça](#), Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, the Spanish Bishops' Conference authorities, several delegates of the Spanish Church and other Bishops' conferences, as well as speakers from the Catholic education sector, among which [CIRAD-IFCU](#) was honoured to be included.

All the experiences and reflections gathered prior to the congress were debated and fed with the invited speakers' input, and consequently reviewed by working groups. The priorities identified for Catholic Universities in Spain were summarised as follows:

1. To promote in the university field both the **Culture of Encounter**, without fear of opening up to dialogue at all levels, interdisciplinarity, technological innovations, dialogue between cultures, etc., and the **Culture of Care** generated as an expression of our own identity, which is our added value when fostering **integral education** of future generations, by placing them always be at the centre, recognising their demands and attending to their needs, while helping them to generate **critical consciousness**.
2. To coordinate efforts among the Church's entities, developing links and **networks of collaboration**, local, national as well as international, which make us speak with a single voice in the arenas where decisions are made, seeking excellence in research

and teaching, in the sincere and open search for truth and in the joyful, active and hopeful participation in university structures.

3. To promote the **Global Educational Pact** from local spaces of closeness and connection, by contributing the richness of Christian humanism to society as a whole, while integrating diversity, pluralism and dialogue in contemporary society, based on the richness of our **identity**.

IFCU hopes that these reflections, which were not intended to end the congress, but rather to invite Spanish Catholic universities to continue their arduous and necessary work in society, will be a source of inspiration for the big family of Catholic universities as a whole, regardless of their location, language, culture or charism, as well as for Bishops' Conferences everywhere else.

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*Congress website (in Spanish):*

<https://haciaelcongreso2024.educacionyculturacee.es>

*Synthesis of the CIRAD-IFCU intervention (in Spanish):*

<https://haciaelcongreso2024.educacionyculturacee.es/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/UniversidadSintesisMAIom.pdf>

*Synthesis of the challenges and opportunities identified for each of the 9 educational fields (in Spanish):*

<https://haciaelcongreso2024.educacionyculturacee.es/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/SintesisAmbitos24F.pdf>