



DICASTERIUM
DE CULTURA ET EDUCATIONE

Letter for World Children's Day 2024

From the Vatican, 6 February 2024

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

The Holy Father surprised us last 8 December, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, when he announced the celebration of the first “World Children’s Day”, to take place in Rome on 25 and 26 May 2024. Indeed, surprises inspire unexpected energies, opening up unseen imaginations. We are continually in awe of the touching enchantment of children, but also hurt by the suffering of the young who, in many parts of the world, experience the pointless slaughter of war, hunger, and thirst, the persistent weariness caused by the recent pandemic, the sorrow of misunderstanding and the amputation of their future.

We still have a lively recollection of the joy experienced last 6 November, when in the Paul VI Hall, Pope Francis met with thousands of boys and girls from six to twelve years of age, mostly from Italy, together with groups from most parts of the world. It was like watching a wellspring, whose lively stream revived the earth and the Church with hope. Therefore, the Holy Father wished for the meeting of children with the Pope to become a moment that effectively embraces the entire Church on a regular basis.

His Holiness has charged the Dicastery for Culture and Education with the organization of the first *World Children’s Day*, at the same time entrusting Fr. Enzo Fortunato with the task of coordinating the event, availing himself of all the collaborations and contributions deemed necessary. Certainly, as a new event, prepared in a short time, the first Day will resemble the rehearsal of a concert rather than the concert itself, a seed rather than a tree. The Day will be celebrated at a dual level: universal, based in Rome, where hopefully the national delegations will also be present; and diocesan, leaving the creative organization to the individual local Churches.

Why does the Pope want to meet children? To proclaim the joy of the Gospel to them. Children have the right to meet Christ! Christ in full. The Christ who resurrected a girl, asking her parents to give her something to eat (*Mk 5:21-43*); who reawakened a boy from the dead, restoring him to his mother (*Lk 7:11-17*). The Christ who placed a child at the centre, showing him to adults as a criterion for entering the Kingdom (*Mk 9:33.37*). But also, the Christ who says to children: “Rise and walk” (*Mk 2:9-12*), “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden” (*Mt 11:28*), “Your sins are forgiven” (*Mt 9:2*), “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (*Jn 14:6*). The Christ who speaks, to children too, of the need to pass through the narrow door and bear the cross, behind him, every day (*Mt 7: 13-14; Lk 9:23*).

The Pope wishes to meet boys and girls to listen to the Gospel that stirs them, in the early season of life. One of the extraordinary characteristics of children is their disruptive newness. Their

every birth is an event: a new life, a new person, a new presence arrives, so intense as to renew the identity of the surrounding people. When a child arrives, a man and a woman become “father” and “mother”, “grandfather”, “grandmother”, “brother”, “sister”. Children are the most beautiful and lively comment – written in flesh, blood and spirit – of the passage of Revelation where Christ affirms “Behold, I make all things new” (*Rev 21:5*). Certainly, it is the Word of God, full of majesty, to utter these words: and yet that breathtaking mystery is “made flesh” in the tangible newness brought and revealed by the Child born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth.

For this reason, the Holy Father has chosen, as the theme of the first *World Children's Day*, these very words: “I make all things new” (*Rev 21:5*). It is an invitation to become like children, to act like them in grasping the novelties inspired by the Spirit of Christ in every man and every woman, in history and in the Church.

Therefore, I recommend the participation of the greatest number possible of boys and girls, both at universal and diocesan level; those who are better off and who enjoy good health should not deprive themselves of the wealth that only the poorest and weakest children can bring!

José Tolentino Cardinal de Mendonça

Prefect