



CONGREGATIO
DE INSTITUTIONE CATHOLICA
(DE STUDIORUM INSTITUTIS)

Vatican City, 6 May 2020

Prot. N. 271/2020

Congregation for Catholic Education

Transitional Norms for the Application of the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* in the public health emergency arising from the COVID-19 epidemic

To the Chancellors,
Rectors, Presidents and Deans
of Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties,
and to the Moderators and Directors of other Ecclesiastical institutions of
higher education,
and, for their information,
to the Presidents of Catholic Universities
and the Presidents of Bishops' Conferences

The public health emergency arising from the COVID-19 epidemic compels this Dicastery to impart some normative dispositions regarding the application of Church law in the matter of Ecclesiastical higher education, with reference to the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*. In this way, our Congregation aims to answer the appeals that have arrived from various Ecclesiastical Universities or Faculties, to define the general conditions for continuing and, ultimately, concluding the current academic year.

In particular, where the normal delivery of lectures, as well as examinations with both teachers and students present, prove to be impossible, it seems appropriate to finish the current academic year with education via videoconference and, where necessary, by distance learning. These methods have already performed been adopted due to the pandemic, to safeguard the health of the entire academic community.

In this emergency situation, it seems reasonable that decisions on the means of distance learning should be taken locally, taking into consideration the specific circumstances, including the regulations enacted by the civil authorities. At the same time, we believe it appropriate to guarantee legal certainty for all students and teachers, inasmuch as some measures that have been adopted in the interim by some Ecclesiastical Universities' and Faculties' academic authorities (Chancellors, as well as personal and collegial authorities) could perhaps conflict with the Statutes and/or Plan of Studies approved by this Dicastery. In addition to these juridical questions, let us not forget that the challenges posed by this crisis necessitate an adequate pastoral accompaniment. Therefore, we wish to invite you to maintain and strengthen, according to circumstances, the pastoral care offered in our Universities and Faculties.

To ensure the due application of the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (cf. art. 10), the Congregation for Catholic Education now enacts the following transitory Norms of Application, and then offers guidelines for the next academic year.

A. Transitory Norms for the current academic year

1. Examinations and equivalent tests

Rectors, Presidents and/or Directors are hereby granted the *facultas* to decide how, and in what measure, to use teleconferencing for examinations or equivalent tests, with the necessary proviso that they be held publically and that their minutes be duly signed by the examiners. This *facultas* includes, where necessary, a provisional dispensation should the institute's Statutes not provide for such a possibility. Should the Statutes and/or Plan of Studies not foresee any form of examinations other than physically face-to-face, the Rector, President and/or Director has the *facultas* to derogate from the particular norm regarding examinations. Before coming to a decision on this matter, the Rector, President or Director, where possible, should hear the Academic Senate, the Faculty Council or the competent collegial authority. He/she should also write to the Chancellor to inform him of this act; and he, in his turn, will forward the communication to the Congregation for Catholic Education for its information.

2. *Distance learning*

As regards courses given by distance learning, which have begun notwithstanding art. 33 § 2 of the *Norms of Application* of the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, we inform you that this possibility has legal value only for the current academic year. The Rector, President or Director is to inform the Dicastery, via the Chancellor, of any exemptions to the current norms which have been adopted by the Ecclesiastical University and/or Faculty concerned, being reassured that the Congregation for Catholic Education will publish specific criteria on this matter.

3. *Matriculation documents and procedures*

The Chancellor hereby has the *facultas* to dispense, for a just cause (for example, the State is unable, due to the crisis, to issue the documents that student needs to be admitted to university examinations, such as a high-school leaving certificate), from the norms of the Statutes and/or Plan of Studies concerning the admission and matriculation of students. However, the following provisos apply:

- after the University or Faculty has evaluated and recorded the student's abilities and qualifications, assessing them by means other than the documents foreseen by art. 32 § 1 of *Veritatis Gaudium*, and has concluded that the said student would be capable of undertaking his/her course of studies successfully;
- the student will also be continually evaluated over a determined period (annually or at other intervals), following the norms of the Statutes and/or Plan of Studies concerning admission and matriculation of students (cf. art. 32 of *Veritatis Gaudium*);
- the Congregation for Catholic Education will be informed in writing, giving it the possibility to access the aforementioned evaluation.

4. *The Chancellor's duties*

The Chancellor enjoys the *facultas*, foreseen by current norms, to resolve controversies that arise from the application of these transitory Norms or from the application of the Statutes or the Plans of Studies. Any recourses must be directed to the Chancellor. Any hierarchical recourses against a decision of the Chancellor must be presented to this Dicastery. The relative procedure is regulated by canons 1732-1739 CIC and canons 996-1006 CCEO.

5. Ecclesiastical Faculties present in non-Ecclesiastical Universities

Ecclesiastical Faculties erected or approved by the Holy See in non-Ecclesiastical Universities, which confer both canonical and civil degrees, are bound to follow the prescriptions of the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, while respecting the bilateral and multilateral conventions signed by the Holy See with various nations or with the universities themselves (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, art. 8).

6. Sessions of Faculty Councils and Organs of Governance

An Ecclesiastical Institution's Academic Senate, Faculty Councils or other organs of governance can continue their ordinary and extraordinary activities also by means of teleconferencing, following their Statutes' norms and taking particular care with regard to recording the acts and decisions taken. For circumstances that require a vote to elect a person to an academic office, canon 186 of the Code of Canon Law is to be applied.

7. Updating the database

Institutions in the northern hemisphere now have until 30 June 2020 to complete the annual updating of their entries in the Congregation's database (as foreseen by the *Norms of Application of Veritatis Gaudium*, arts. 16-17).

8. Promulgation and validity of these transitory Norms

These Norms are promulgated on the Congregation for Catholic Education's internet website (www.educatio.va), and will subsequently be issued by letter. They go into immediate effect and last until the end of the current academic year, and replace this Dicastery's Note of 12 March 2020.

B. Guiding principles for the next academic year

With a view to moving beyond the current epidemiological emergency, Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties are to plan the next academic year with all indications and means necessary to be able to teach in the ordinary way, with the lectures held in the presence of students and teachers, in accordance with the Norms of the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*.

Choosing to do this, we are aware of the task entrusted to Ecclesiastical academic institutions to be places of dialogue and of communion, which know that "this is where the specific mission entrusted

to the programme of ecclesiastical studies comes into play” (*Veritatis Gaudium*, Foreword, 4c). Thus, teaching and research must develop in an environment where students and teachers carry out their activities in contact with others, in communion and sharing.

This is the way to feel and be part of a true community of study, research and formation, which works to form the students, in the various disciplines, to a high level of competence, preparing them appropriately to face their duties “in conformity with the principles of the evangelizing mission of the Church” (*Veritatis Gaudium*, art. 11 § 1).

Therefore, distance learning is no alternative to this methodology, and can be used only in part, and for particular situations, and always with the previous authorization of the Congregation for Catholic Education (cf. *Norms of Application* of the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, art. 33 § 2).

This Congregation will take care to communicate, in case of real need and urgency, further regulations should these be necessary due to the possible protraction of the COVID-19 pandemic’s effects.

While available to offer any further clarifications you may require, we thank you for your esteemed cooperation, and we express our unity with you in prayer as well as our sentiments of highest esteem, remaining

Yours most devotedly in Our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Giuseppe Card. Versaldi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Giuseppe" being the most prominent part.

Giuseppe Cardinal VERSALDI (Prefect)

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ A. Vincenzo Zani". The signature is cursive and includes a small cross symbol at the beginning.

Archbishop A. Vincenzo ZANI (Secretary)