

FE Y ALEGRÍA INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS  
 Madrid, Spain. 28<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> of September 2018

*We Educate at the Borders,  
 Fe y Alegría, Global Movement*



Address by the Father General of the Society of Jesus  
 Saturday, the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2018. 10.00 AM.  
 Casa San José, El Escorial, Madrid

*Initial greeting and general acknowledgements.*

Sharing the stage with

- Carlos Fritzen, SJ - Coordinator of the FyA International Federation
- Antonio España, SJ - Spanish Provincial
- Dani Villanueva, SJ - Executive Vice President of Entreculturas - FyA Spain

I am happy to be able to attend the inauguration of this Fe y Alegría International Congress. It gives me the opportunity to once again witness the renewed dynamism of this popular education movement. I remember fondly my first visits to the Fe y Alegría School in the Unión Barrio in Petare, Caracas. You could say it was through Fe y Alegría that I began to get to know the barrios. Little did we imagine that that little seed, planted by a group of university students guided by the idea of Fr. José María Vélaz, S.I., in the fertile plot that was the house of Abraham and Patricia Reyes in Catia, Caracas, would produce this magnificent international network that now connects more than a million and a half students in more than three thousand educational centres in twenty-two countries around the world, and which does not have the slightest intention of stopping its growth.

### *Collaborators in the one mission*

Fe y Alegría (*Faith and Joy*) was born of a keen awareness of the needs of children and young people without access to education. It is based on faith in the abilities of all young people; on faith in the effectiveness of education as an instrument for comprehensive personal growth and social transformation. Fe y Alegría continues to evolve because it has a strong identity, a clear mission and it has managed to develop its organisation so as to meet the demands of its educational and social approach. Fe y Alegría learned to *network*; it found that by working in networks it could improve the use of its resources.

Fe y Alegría's education and popular network, supported by more than 43 thousand laypeople and close to nine hundred members of religious orders, of whom one hundred are Jesuits, is a clear indication of how the Church is a body and of how identity is constructed by collaborating in the one mission. The innumerable lay charisms and the charisms of more than one hundred and thirty religious congregations represent an amazing variety that can complement each other and contribute to making this popular education movement a living testimony of collaboration in the mission of reconciliation and justice to which we are called.

Fe y Alegría has become a frontier education network that gives a new look to the Society of Jesus' educational apostolate. One could even say that Fe y Alegría is the most significant international network of quality education for the low income population sectors which the Society of Jesus, in collaboration with so many other congregations and people, provides to the Church and to the world. Fe y Alegría also represents a significant challenge and an enormous shared responsibility. Its history and identity force it to not stand still but rather to accept the challenge of going beyond its own achievements, because it knows that the much that has been done is little in relation to what can be done to continue to create opportunities for quality education for the millions of young people who do not yet have access to it.

José María Vélaz always dared to do more. Like Jesus' parents, with whose names he was baptised, he believed that nothing is impossible for God. He launched the venture that gave rise to this remarkable educational network, made possible thanks to the collaboration of thousands of people in conjunction with a variety of public and private institutions.

Fe y Alegría, together with the Jesuit Refugee Service and the networks of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, form the core of the Society of Jesus' educational service. It is true that each of the networks has specific objectives and even different prophetic aspects. However, with each day that passes, it becomes more difficult to view them as separate entities and the transformative potential of a network of networks of

schools and educational institutions at all levels fighting to change the world becomes clearer.

This insight was expressed at the most recent General Congregations of the Society of Jesus when they mentioned *Fe y Alegría* as an great example of the educational endeavour which promotes justice, operating as a network of networks and made possible because it is open to many forms of collaboration.

I hope that this Congress reflects the message of the recent 36<sup>th</sup> General Congregation which emphasises the importance of close relationships with the poor, invites us to increase and deepen our collaboration through working in networks, and points to discernment as a way of making decisions which leads us to discover new frontiers in the contribution to all the aspects of reconciliation and justice based on education.

*Serving the people without borders: called to a global mission*

Since it came into being, the Society of Jesus has taken the form of an international body called to a mission that knows no national or continental borders. Those who participate in the Society's current mission, Jesuits, members of religious orders, laypeople, are people from many nations who make up the one international and multicultural body. The increase in working in networks has also allowed us to transcend the limits of the apostolic works, of the provinces and the regions. This is why GC 36 (D2, 8) emphasises that working in networks is the best way to operate in order to make the service of the Society more global. The Society feels called to renew its characteristic tension between, on the one hand, putting down roots and inculturating in local communities and, on the other hand, providing a response with a global outlook, which is increasingly coordinated and *networked*, and which helps to make interculturality an enriching aspect of a globalised humanity.

The role of networks such as *Fe y Alegría* is increasingly important because they nourish, cultivate and invigorate our shared mission and allow us to imagine an action which is capable of making a difference at a global level, without losing sight even for a second of the fundamental goal of asserting the right to educational opportunities for the most vulnerable and excluded people. I encourage you to maintain, strengthen and develop this global presence of *Fe y Alegría*, helping to provide each person in the world with access to an education that allows them to freely develop as a human being, overcoming the limitations imposed by vulnerability and poverty which is the result of structural injustice.

The lack of quality education becomes in turn a means of perpetuating discrimination and poverty. In the new era of knowledge, preventing the poorest people from accessing the personal training provided by education means limiting the personal growth of billions of people and limiting the opportunities for citizen participation in the transformation of structures of injustice. The local presence, the direct assistance to people where it is needed, is one of the key elements of Fe y Alegría's work, the other being advocacy at a global level. Fe y Alegría can and must continue to work these two strands and to seek to update how it responds both locally and globally. This Congress is an opportunity to shed light on Fe y Alegría's global vision and impact based on its innovative practices at the local level. At the same time, its local practices can be enhanced and strengthened as its global vision grows. This is a creative tension which is capable of producing results in the transformation of people, communities and society as a whole.

In this regard, I consider the proposal to refresh its working methods by way of changing from the federative programmes to the cloud of networks, seeking greater involvement and participation from countries, promoting communication and, especially, helping to create a new leadership model which is more open, inclusive and dynamic, to be very stimulating and bold. Few organisations have the ability to reinvent themselves and take chances in such a creative manner in the pursuit of an innovative and forward-looking strategic planning. Working in networks is one of the most potent ideas that we have seen in recent decades and it has become a crucial aspect of our working method. We need new ways of structuring the international mission in a coordinated, dynamic, and streamlined fashion, with the participation of Fe y Alegría, in alliance with other actors, persons or institutions that are pursuing similar objectives.

The International Federation of Fe y Alegría experiences the tension between national autonomy and the strengthening of the federative dimension; of the ongoing work for identity and the shared vision; of the sharing of each country's resources and the efforts to bring proposals to the final frontiers of the movement. I encourage you to continue on this path, incorporating an increasing diversity of gender, culture and language in the different places where you sow, cultivate and reap fruits.

### *Fe y Alegría is transformative education*

*The mission of Fe y Alegría is not to make schools the ultimate goal, but rather to transform social structures through education, said Father Vélaz from the beginning. By educating, Fe y Alegría helps to transform both people and social structures. The vocation of Fe y Alegría's Popular Education Movement has always been to fight for*

social justice and this vocation has not only been affirmed with the years of experience but rather it is becoming increasingly complex and targeted.

Fe y Alegría's educational approach is understood only in the context of personal and social transformation. We are not talking about an approach related to content, educational methodology or a type of school; Fe y Alegría is a Popular Education movement with a political intent, which aims to generate proposals for social transformation and to help people, communities and institutions to become a social entity that contributes to the achievement of the Common Good.

Fe y Alegría is formal education and, at the same time, citizenship education and a means of social promotion. It is work with and in the community. It is committed to the transformation of structures in order to improve the living conditions of communities, advocating for human rights and increasing citizenship participation. Fe y Alegría provides an education that lays the foundations for the change aimed at building free, democratic, equal, and peace-promoting societies, in which violence has no place; societies in which every person can fully develop their capacities and live with dignity. Whoever does not understand this will never understand the essence of this movement, the reason for its popular roots and its transformative potential.

Consequently, two of Fe y Alegría's contributions to the Society of Jesus' educational service are: a popular education for global citizenship and work to uphold the right to a quality education. Allow me to share some brief reflections on these.

### *Popular Education for Global Citizenship*

The popular education that Fe y Alegría embodies, strongly rooted in the Gospel, is an education which is designed to help excluded people be able to transform their personal history and to contribute to the transformation of the collective history of their community, their country and the human family. The pressing challenges that our world faces, and which include the socio-environmental and spiritual crisis to which Pope Francis continually alludes, mean that we need to place the challenges of popular education in the global context. What form can a liberating education take in a complex, rapidly changing and interconnected world? Every child, every adolescent and young person who passes through Fe y Alegría's centres needs to understand the complexity of this world and to be prepared to participate actively in its transformation, instead of remaining on the outside as a victim of its grave injustices, fractures and wounds. Each one of them can be part of the solution to the problems based on their own history and by taking on a committed role in the

struggle for justice. This would be the core of a popular education for global citizenship.

The boldness of Fe y Alegría is once more apparent in the Generation 21 Network. This is a process which has its roots in Fe y Alegría's work with adolescents and young people in different places. It used recognition of and listening to the young people themselves as a starting point. The young people of this Network feel part of a movement in which cultural, socioeconomic and geographical barriers are broken down and the border is reimagined as a place for meetings, for personal growth, mutual enrichment and social transformation. The experience of Fe y Alegría's Youth Network shows the importance of being part of a global citizenship that wants to have a say when it comes to the main problems of humanity. The young people of Fe y Alegría, structured in this network, are a symbol of reconciliation and work for justice. It is an educational initiative that helps people to "think and act locally and globally, without dichotomies between the two dimensions, which follows the course of interculturality, viewing the cultural, social and religious diversity of our world as enriching", as I said to the Society's Education Delegates during the International Congress in Rio de Janeiro in October 2017.

Education and our educational institutions are part of the human effort to help the seed of the Kingdom of God to take route in History. Our presence in so many places, cultures and spheres provides us with a unique opportunity to continue to build Fe y Alegría together, as well as the Society's Schools and all the educational programmes inspired by it, these kinds of initiatives. Only by acting together in a coordinated manner can we take on global challenges and go further in our work in the service of reconciliation and justice.

I follow with great interest the seeds that are beginning to germinate in this regard. The Network of Educational Innovation for Social Transformation between Fe y Alegría and EDUCSI, the Society of Jesus' schools in Spain, Educate Magis ... and others. We have enormous potential to "encourage hope in our world by contributing to the education of men and women who are just and true citizens of the world, capable of generating dialogue and reconciliation between peoples and between peoples and the Creation."

### *Public Action at the Heart of the Educational Mission*

It may go without saying, but keep making your voice heard from the borders of exclusion in a prophetic manner and without losing your independence. Fe y Alegría manages public funds and aims to strengthen public education systems. However, it is essential that we do not eschew condemnation when it is necessary to promote the

Common Good. It is imperative that we advocate for, demand and promote the right to a quality education for all people. I encourage you to continue to proclaim that quality is not possible without inclusive, safe schools; schools which welcome and integrate, schools which cater for diversity, which are innovative, contextualised and relevant... This role is not easy, but it is a responsibility of Fe y Alegría to advocate for education as a public good and the strengthening of systems and public policies that guarantee social justice. This role is especially important in the face of trends which are becoming more prevalent. On the one hand, there is privatisation, which reduces education to a market product. At the other extreme, we have statist tendencies which seek to turn education into an instrument of the dominant power.

The work of Fe y Alegría will not be understood if it does not have an impact in a gradual and measurable manner both on the transformation of public education and in the definitions and implementation of public policies that make the right to a quality education a reality, in any part of the world. It is a struggle which is at once local and global. Despite the technical possibilities available to us and all the official declarations stating access to a quality education as a right of every person, the lack of access to it for millions of children continues to be a scandalous reality in today's world. It is a global issue in which we are present in different forms, and in which Fe y Alegría is in fact an actor with its own voice.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge Fe y Alegría's leading role in revitalising the *Global Advocacy Network for the Right to Education* (GIAN). Fe y Alegría is called to become more and more involved with the educational and social networks of the global Society of Jesus. With these links, it can take on a greater leadership role in the necessary and potential public action initiatives to stimulate a global movement for the right to quality education for all. Do it the way you know how, by collaborating among yourselves and with others; continue to seek responsible private support, the involvement of States, advocacy in organisations from the international system and by responding to the needs of local communities. Advocacy for this right as a door and channel to other rights is a strategy of structural impact and an essential complement to the Society of Jesus' educational proposal. Help us to continue joining up with collective initiatives, as well as pluralist ones - ecclesial or from outside the church - in the advocacy for and achievement of this *Education for All*, the framework in which our apostolic work, alongside the other actors, acquires even more significance. You can count on the help of myself and the Worldwide Society of Jesus for this purpose.

*Fe y Alegría and the Reconciliation Mission*

I wish to reiterate that the role of educators and our educational institutions is to help young generations locate themselves in the world and before God so that they can plot their personal and social development contributing to the construction of a better world. Fe y Alegría's Popular Education has at its core the service for reconciliation: it begins with the process of the personal transformation of those who participate in the movement themselves, progresses towards the understanding of the world in which we live and which we make our home, and culminates in the transformative action of the entire educational project which is taken forward.

Reconciliation with yourself, with your own capacities, reasserting your dignity: this is an essential component. Popular Education is more than just a methodology: it involves backing people, their transformation and their growth. Each person is unique and inimitable; the point of reference is their own potential and their capacity to convert to the fraternity that makes them the child of God. I speak not only of the students, but rather of all the people who come into contact with the educational and social project that is the Fe y Alegría movement. Caring for each person and their fraternal relationship with others requires concrete plans and actions. We are all part of humanity, we need to be supported by others and we in turn can support them, to be cared for and to take care of.

At this point I would like to mention the complex issue being broached by the Church, by Pope Francis in particular and by the Society: the protection of minors and the safeguarding of their dignity. We must use all the necessary means to ensure that Fe y Alegría's educational centres are safe spaces for all children. Any case of abuse in the school or family environment is unacceptable. An enormous amount of work needs to be done in order to ensure this. I ask you from my heart not to become demoralised and not to naively think that this type of problem only affects others. I ask you for *zero tolerance* when it comes to abuses of minors or vulnerable people. What joy we will feel if we can contribute effectively to making the children's faces and smiles reflect a safe and trusting environment.

Fe y Alegría can contribute a large amount to the mission of reconciliation and justice because it helps open our eyes to the reality of people who suffer, of the excluded; the reality of those who live in situations of poverty, marginalisation or social, cultural, political, religious, gender or even generational discrimination; because its research contributes to the search for solutions to the problems posed to us by the diverse contexts in which it finds itself; it trains educators and leaders for change that promote fraternal and charitable coexistence; it educates students and their families, teachers and communities who carry the seed of human values that they want to spread to society as a whole. Fe y Alegría is called to create spaces in which the hand of solidarity is extended to the immigrant, to the woman who is



discriminated against, to the boy or girl, to those who believe and those who do not...; in which the eyes and hearts of those who perceive the other as an enemy and not as a brother are opened.

Popular education brought to life in concrete institutions, practices and people can provide hope of transformation in the midst of the high levels of despair that the peoples of Latin America and the world are experiencing. It is a way of giving back hope to those who placed their dream of a better life in self-proclaimed "revolutionary movements" and were disappointed because the promises were not delivered upon. Fe y Alegría is a messenger of trust in the future, sent to heal personal and social wounds, to promote new paths towards a dignified life. Popular Education strives so that the people and communities who suffer from the injustice of our world become agents of transformation. *Saying one's own words and writing one's own history*, as Paulo Freire suggested, is nothing less than exercising the freedom and dignity of sons and daughters of God, in the service of building the kingdom of justice, peace and love. Fe y Alegría's Popular Education contributes to the Society's educational action promoting reconciliation and justice from our world's borders, *where the asphalt ends...*

### *Expanding in other lands*

One of Fe y Alegría's central ideas is that opening up new spaces and replicating modes of action energises and enriches everything we do. Our movement, which has been in existence for more than 60 years, remains dynamic and continues to seek to move into new territories. I am aware of the work that has been carried out in Africa and Madagascar in the last ten years. Fe y Alegría is striving to inculturate the movement in these places also, in keeping with the original charism and with boldness and creativity under local leadership. I get news about the considerable progress from Fe y Alegría in Chad, Madagascar, DR Congo and the developments in Guinea, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria and Liberia... a Fe y Alegría with frameworks of understanding and strategies which are increasingly open to new ideas, increasingly global and tackling not only new geographical areas but also new socio-educational initiatives in areas of greater exclusion: people with disabilities, migrants, refugees, people living on the street, people with unfinished schooling or Amazonian and indigenous peoples...

On my last trip to Cambodia just over a year ago, I was able to witness the first dialogues of what could be the beginning of the movement in Asia. This is a huge continent full of life and of initiatives which can surely benefit from the opportunities that Fe y Alegría offers and which could contribute a lot to the worldview and expand the international reach of the movement.

Fe y Alegría is born of initiative and the local sensibility and this is the case in the new continents where it is emerging. It is up to the International Federation to support with sensitivity and patience the early stages in these new contexts. Fe y Alegría is not an education multinational but rather a network of transformative and quality socio-educational processes, with and for local communities. Supporting the beginnings and development of new initiatives requires being aware of the need to pay attention to the pace and sustainability of each project in order to continue to ensure the organic growth tailored to the actual potential of the local structures. And this while, of course, never ceasing to dream and putting hope in God for whom nothing is impossible.

*Let's move towards the future together*

After the 36<sup>th</sup> General Congregation, the Society of Jesus is in a process of joint discernment with the aim of giving shape and direction to the shared mission over the coming years. Apostolic works, communities, Provinces and Regional Conferences are involved in a process that will lead us to the definition of the Universal Apostolic Preferences. Networks such as Fe y Alegría have a special importance in this dynamic of listening and participation by which the apostolic body of the Society is seeking to read together the *signs of the times*. We need them in order to be able to listen to the dreams of those in classrooms, cloisters and communities where the Spirit moves at ease and our mission is recreated and updated. Networks such as this are key spaces in the discernment of the body of the Society.

It is crucial that Fe y Alegría continues to nourish its internal dynamism and responds creatively to the challenges it is facing. We need to remain one step ahead in a dynamic reality which is changing rapidly. We must prevent the structures from becoming stagnant and rigid. We must prevent internal complexity from making them sluggish or making them lose their flexibility and dynamism. We must not lose sight of the founding idea of Fe y Alegría: all children should have access to a good school. We must remember to focus on those who are most abandoned and in danger of being left behind and not deviate from the radicalism that Fr. Vélaz promoted from the beginning. We need to continue to be a space where thousands of teachers rekindle their vocation for social change and where the convergence of personal decisions becomes a truly transformative movement. Fe y Alegría moves forward in confidence because it maintains its openness to the breath of the Spirit. If you incorporate joint discernment in your everyday working methods, you can develop the sensitivity needed in order to find where it is that the Lord asks you to be. Trust in the entirely good God who will make you the best instrument of his work for the reconciliation of all things in Christ.

The Society of Jesus wishes to move forward into the future with you. It is grateful to God the Father for the gift that is Fe y Alegría and thankful for the many communities in the world who find in Fe y Alegría the concrete means or the model with which to structure their efforts to provide a quality education for excluded people. It is grateful for the many Provinces of the Society that recognise popular education as an essential part of their mission. I would like Fe y Alegría to remain willing and ready to support and encourage new initiatives, respecting the idiosyncrasies of each context, constructing based on subsidiarity, but "networking", linking each project to its global network in a streamlined fashion. I hope Fe y Alegría can continue to build this movement wherever the Spirit inspires educational apostolic responses at the borders.

I end by thanking God for all the work that each and every one of you do and for the inspiration you bring to all of us. Help us learn from your educational experience. It is a treasure to be shared with other institutions of the Society.

I hope that this Congress will be one more step towards understanding your own experience so that our educational tradition can continue to be enriched. I hope that popular education will help all the educational works to create conscious, compassionate and competent people who are committed to the construction of a new world. I hope that, in this context of the globalisation of environmental, social and spiritual crises, they will be able to maintain prophetism and that they shine light on concrete ways of educating and shaping a global citizenship that will change the world and remind us of the true transformative power of education when it is put at the service of the most vulnerable.

Thank you very much.