

“It has been said that ours is the time of ‘humanism’: paradoxically, some of its atheistic and secularistic forms arrive at a point where the human person is diminished and annihilated; other forms of humanism, instead, exalt the individual in such a manner that these forms become a veritable and real idolatry. There are still other forms, however, in line with the truth, which rightly acknowledge the greatness and misery of individuals and manifest, sustain and foster the total dignity of the human person.

The sign and fruit of this trend towards humanism is the growing need for participation, which is undoubtedly one of the distinctive features of present-day humanity, a true ‘sign of the times’ that is developing in various fields and in different ways: above all the growing need for participation regarding women and young people, not only in areas of family and academic life, but also in cultural, economic, social and political areas. To be leading characters in this development, in some ways to be creators of a new, more humane culture, is a requirement both for the individual and for peoples as a whole.”

Pope John Paul II, Christifideles Laici (no. 5)

(Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989) The purpose of the proposed school of solidarity is to teach young Americans about the sacred and supreme dignity of every human person in every phase of development and in every condition. The school would bring the value and meaning of man to the gates of that most private domain, the realm of

conscience. It would be hoped that such a revelation would lead American students to commit themselves, or perhaps to recommit themselves, to lives of selfless service.

The school would be imbued with the spirit of Christian humanism, with particular attention to contemporary Christian anthropology. As an institution, the school could be sponsored by a university or operated as an independent entity. Courses would combine the study of the dignity of man and the consequences of authentic human solidarity with activities aimed at the application and verification of principles. These activities would vary according to the preparation, makeup, and timetable of the participants. Americans might engage in simple construction projects, basic language instruction, sports clinics, and so forth. The common denominator would be the validity of the activity (Is it a good idea?) and active participation of the intended beneficiaries (Do they think it's good for them?).

It is proposed that the school of solidarity be located in Mexico for the sake of economy and efficacy. The economic rationale is self-evident. The grounds for efficacy are closely related to the guiding purpose of the endeavor. The school would seek to have an impact on young Americans. Attending the school in Mexico, students will have to step out of the First World and step into the Third World. The school would not take students to the Mexico of beaches and "La Bamba." Rather, the school would immerse students in the Mexico where most Mexicans live—what might be thought of as the flip side of North America: full of people and full of pathos.

In the very heart of “underdevelopment,” students will experience a powerful impact. They might react like Joseph Conrad’s adventurer Mr. Kurtz in crying, “The horror! The horror!” Everyone has free will, and there is no guarantee that they will not see their Mexican neighbors as a monstrous, inferior species which menaces America’s future. They may return home without discovering the dignity of each person.

But the school of solidarity holds open another possibility. It could lead students to discover the true dignity of man in circumstances where his dignity has been most violated. There, where against all odds man still endures, is where each student must make his choice. If he can see, through a mindset darkly, the flickering image of immortal love, he might be moved to whisper, “The wonder! The wonder!” Before such a discovery, the awestruck student might let down the drawbridge of Fortress America.

In his Encyclical Dilexit Nos, Pope Francis reminded us that social sin consolidates a “structure of sin” within society and is frequently “part of a dominant mindset that considers normal or reasonable what is merely selfishness and indifference. This then gives rise to social alienation.” It then becomes normal to ignore the poor and live as if they do not exist. It then likewise seems reasonable to organize the economy in such a way that sacrifices are demanded of the masses in order to serve the needs of the powerful. Meanwhile, the poor are promised only a few “drops” that trickle down, until the next global crisis brings things back to where they were. A genuine form of alienation is present when we limit ourselves to theoretical excuses instead of seeking to resolve the concrete problems of those who suffer. Saint John Paul II had already observed that, “a society is alienated if its forms of social organization, production and consumption make it more difficult to offer the gift of self and to establish solidarity between people.”

Pope Leo XIV, Dilexit te (96)

(Houston, Texas, 2025) The proposed North American School of Solidarity would challenge students of all ages to envision and incarnate their intracontinental civic responsibilities to foster mutual collaboration and prosperity based upon a shared anthropological, cultural, intellectual, and religious heritage as informed by natural law and Catholic social doctrine. All discourse would be predicated on a radical commitment to dialogue and respect. Participants would earnestly seek to construct an appealing and

vibrant language of hope and trust in a spirit of self-sacrifice for the North American commonwealth.

Programmatically, the North American School of Solidarity would be a think tank offering conferences, courses, research, and white papers aimed at enriching and exploring the common bonds of continental civil society as inherited from Athens, Jerusalem, Rome, and pre-Hispanic America. The school would be a cultural and intellectual endeavor and mecca as opposed to being a public policy forum. Faculty participants would come from North American learning institutions, including Catholic, religious, secular, and indigenous universities. Professors would participate in activities so as to contribute to their field as well as to market themselves on a prestigious intracontinental platform.

Learning activities of the North American School of Solidarity would take place throughout the continent and might include academic calls for papers, conferences, courses, and exchanges. Certificate programs might be offered by topic or customized according to the needs of a client in a variety of languages, including those of the indigenous or First Peoples. Innovative mutual learning programs might be undertaken between schools and universities in person or virtually. As one example, scholars might work to articulate the framework of a North American social compact curriculum or a compendium of common cultural misunderstandings. Conference findings might prove of

use to government and social leaders and their commissions. As another example, qualified Canadians and American adults might seek employment as professors in a variety of subjects at indigenous universities in Mexico with the goal of assisting these communities to become more self-sufficient while they themselves would simultaneously experience significant cultural and educational growth. Conversely, professors from indigenous universities might explore foreign academic study or teaching opportunities with the assistance of the center and their participation in its activities. Credit-bearing courses might be offered for student leadership courses in different countries. Participants might engage in fellowship and travel so as to deepen their intracontinental friendships.

The school's multidisciplinary curriculum would comprise prominent documents and thinkers such as Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Iain Benson, Edmund Burke, Cicero, Fray Bartolome de las Casas, Christopher Dawson, Carlos Llano Cifuentes (Mexico), Denis Diderot, the Federalists, *Gaudium et Spes*, Thomas Hobbes, Robert H. Jackson, Thomas Jefferson, John Locke, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Samuel P. Huntington, Abraham Lincoln, Niccolò Machiavelli, Karl Marx, the Rev. John Courtney Murray, SJ, Friedrich Nietzsche, Michael Novak, Plato, Pope Benedict XVI, Pope John Paul II, Pope Leo XIII, pre-Hispanic philosophical voices, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, Alexis de Tocqueville, and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, among others.

NORTH AMERICAN SCHOOL OF SOLIDARITY (1989 & 2025)

Donors would find the school to be a singularly unique and highly impactful response to the present needs of North American discourse and collaboration. Individual, corporate, and foundation contributions would yield a remarkable return on investment throughout the continent.