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**PONTIFICIA COMISIÓN
PARA AMÉRICA LATINA**

BUILDING BRIDGES INITIATIVE

BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS SOUTH ASIA: A SYNODAL ENCOUNTER BETWEEN POPE FRANCIS AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Building Bridges Across South Asia brings together students from across South Asia for small group dialogue, reflections, and shared discernment around their shared social concerns. Student representatives from each group will dialogue with Pope Francis via Zoom on September 26, 2023 at 3 p.m. (Rome). The livestream of the encounter hosted on YouTube will be accessible in three languages: English, Spanish, and Hindi.

When: **September 26, 2023**
 3:00 p.m. Rome (GMT +2)

Website: www.luc.edu/buildingbridges

Organized/Hosted By:

[Loyola University Chicago](http://www.luc.edu)

- Institute of Pastoral Studies
- Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage
- Office of Global and Community Engagement

Collaborators: [The Pontifical Commission for Latin America](http://www.vatican.va) at the Holy See

Organizers:

Dr. Peter Jones (Loyola University Chicago)

Dr. Emilce Cuda (Pontifical Commission for Latin America)

Media Inquiries: Matthew McDermott -- mbedugnis@luc.edu

University Partners in South Asia:

- Loyola Hall Research and Spirituality Centre (Lahore, Pakistan)
- Christ University (Bengaluru, India)
- St. Xavier's College (Kathmandu, Nepal)
- St. Stephen's College (Delhi, India)
- Loyola College (Autonomous) (Chennai, India)
- St. Joseph's University (Bengaluru, India)

Structure

Working with university partners across South Asia, professors are convening and accompanying university and college students from across the region in 12 Working Groups. The students comprising those groups come from dozens of states, provinces, and union territories throughout three countries: Pakistan, Nepal, and India (shown on the map). Participating students are studying diverse fields, including Psychology, Commerce, Physics, Law, Computer Science, Chemistry, Philosophy, Economics, and more.



The Encounter

One student representative from each group will join a meeting with Pope Francis via Zoom. The encounter will be interpreted and captioned live in English, Hindi, and Spanish. These livestreams will be accessible through the Building Bridges Initiative website: www.luc.edu/buildingbridges.

ABOUT THE BUILDING BRIDGES INITIATIVE

Inspired by the call of Pope Francis to synodality, Loyola University Chicago launched the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), a student-centered and university-organized series of events. The initial event in February 2022, Building Bridges North-South, emerged organically from a collaboration between Loyola and the Pontifical Commission for Latin America and that collaboration continues in support of successive events.

Through the initiative, we facilitate the creation of student groups across large geographic regions, accompany those students as they engage in listening, dialogue, and discernment around shared social concerns, and then invite student representatives of those groups to a live-streamed dialogue with Pope Francis where they can share with him their group's experiences and hopes.

Following the first historic encounter between the Pope and university students, the second encounter Building Bridges Across Africa involved students from across Sub-Saharan Africa in November 2022. The initiative in Africa was organized through special additional collaborations with the Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network and DePaul University's Center for World Catholicism & Intercultural Theology.

Values and Priorities:

- 1) The title of the event, “Building Bridges,” refers to the gaps between peoples and cultures in South Asia. To close these gaps we need bridges: sites of authentic encounter, mutual concern and discernment, and shared leadership and work. The goal of this event and the initiative in which takes shape is to:
 - a. Facilitate authentic encounters and constructive dialogue between university students across the region.
 - b. Empower these students and support their agency to build durable bridges and relationships that lead to mutual understanding, compassion, and shared wisdom
 - c. Use these bridges and relationships to discern and work together now and in the future on concrete solutions and projects for environmental sustainability, economic justice, and integral human development.

- 2) We proceed in a synodal manner: “[Encounter, listen, discern.](#)” As Pope Francis has cautioned and exhorted, lest we “[descend into useless and unproductive discussions,](#)” we discern to act.
 - a. **Note:** This event is adjacent to, but not an official part of the Synod 2021-2024. The Building Bridges Initiative is an expression of synodality and an intentional embodiment on the part of Roman Catholic institutions of higher education to respond to the call of Pope Francis to be a synodal Church.

- 3) We make a Preferential Option with students, centering the experiences, perspectives, wisdom, and voices of diverse participants. We also make a Preferential Option for those at the peripheries and margins, those in liminal and interstitial spaces and moments, those with experiences of unemployment, poverty, violence, and environmental contamination, and those who are immersed in, study, and work for justice in these areas. This initiative seeks to lift up those who occupy the margins of society and rarely experience the freedom and access to the platform needed to offer their insights, vision, and hope.

- 4) We desire to hear everyone, though only some will talk directly to Pope Francis. The goal, however, is for all students to be represented. Those students who do speak to the Holy Father will share the wisdom of their group and convey the spirit of their group’s work, commentary, questions, and hopes.

- 5) The primary synodal encounter is not between students and the Pope, it is among the students themselves. This encounter is the foundation for the building of bridges. The meeting and dialogue with Pope Francis can strengthen, affirm, and guide but is not foundational in the same manner.