

Notre Dame University – Louaize

**Address of Fr. Walid Moussa
President of Notre Dame University – Louaize**

In Celebrating the 22nd Anniversary of NDU - Founders' Day

**“The University Academic Covenant in the Light of the Church’s Teachings and
Lebanon’s Uniqueness”**

May 7, 2009

Dear Friends,

Today, as Maronite Order of the Holy Virgin Mary, we commemorate thirty years of academic vocation, and as Notre Dame University – Louaize, we celebrate the twenty two year autonomy of the steady and developed initiative that began in 1987 in the service of higher education in Lebanon.

First, I would like to acknowledge all those who have contributed to the foundation and advancement of this University, primarily, members of the Order, faculty, staff, and students. I am also indebted to our Lebanese society as a whole, which despite difficult circumstances was able to overcome predicament and track modernity which reflects the true character of Lebanon.

On this same day, the 7th of May last year, Lebanon as a country and people stood at a turning point between unity and shatter, peace and violence, love and hatred. Those were difficult and fateful moments.

Veering away from tension and anxiety, we must have wondered: How could a country, within hours, fall apart or be transformed into several constituencies? Could one people, as a result of discord and differences of opinion, become divided into several nations? What then, is our role, as people responsible for shaping and educating our future generations?

Is the structure of Lebanon so fragile, supple, and lacking in resistance that it falls apart in every crisis because of different attitudes and views?

These questions are really worrisome; however, they need to be posed, analyzed, and addressed.

Dear friends,

During my three year presidency, my annual addresses spoke of the following mottos:

Belonging amid Globalization and Fundamentalism (2006);

From Affiliation to Belonging (2007); and

From Belonging to Developing (2008)

This year, and due to national circumstances, the Church in Lebanon issued a charter entitled: Charter of Political Processes in the Light of the Church's Teachings and Uniqueness of Lebanon. The main motto behind this charter was the cataleptic shattering of our political society, negatively reflected in public speeches, and more so in our educational discourse at universities and schools. Under these circumstances, it was crucial for the Church to face this deteriorating situation and direct the compass of the political processes toward reason and sense of right, on the basis of freedom, democracy, recognition of the other, and respect of diversity.

Since the publication of this charter, we, at Notre Dame University, have embarked on drafting the University's academic covenant to be adopted in our institution, and which would constitute the basis of all university activities in Lebanon, that is if our colleagues in sister institutions deem it useful, even with some modification in principles or details.

As in the Charter of Political Processes, we have realized the University educational pledge to be also based on two principles: the teachings of the Church and the uniqueness of Lebanon.

Dear friends,

In the light of the Church's teachings, we have based our work on the following three main references:

The Broad Teachings of the Church, with reference to the encyclical letter of Pope Leo XIII, who confirmed, "The Church, by its nature and institutions, is truly a mother and a tutor."

Following this declaration, Pope John XXIII for his part said, "The teachings of Christ take Man in his entire dimensions, soul and body, mind and will, inviting him to rise above the changing circumstances of his interim existence."

Moreover, the Vatican Council II called on universities and institutions "to strive toward excellence in pedagogy and the pursuit of knowledge in such a way that they not only advance the internal renewal of the Church, but also preserve and enhance its beneficent influence upon today's world, especially the intellectual world."

Pope John Paul II also stressed this issue when he said, “The university is a center for creativity and the spreading of knowledge for the good of humanity. It should be dedicated to research, teaching, and educating students.”

The second reference is the Apostolic Exhortation, A New Hope for Lebanon, which in its sixth chapter stresses the following:

Education is real if it touches the entirety of Man and enhances his/her human nature.

There is a real need to identify the concepts of knowledge in higher education and to establish a prospect for education.

Young men and women should constitute a real wealth for their country and a renewing force in Church and society.

The third reference is the Maronite Patriarchal Synod, which stresses that proper and valuable higher education should not be a luxury or be limited to the fortunate, but is the right of everyone. It also highlights the importance of guaranteeing quality education and democracy, going outside purely confessional considerations for the broader interest of the nation, thus enabling the civilized Lebanese to play a guiding role in neighboring countries and the entire East.

As for the special character of Lebanon, we highlighted the following factors:

Lebanon’s geography with its present borders, natural diversity, and location between land and sea;

Lebanon’s history with its different civilizations that have existed on its territory;

Lebanon’s multi-confessional and multi-cultural society;

Lebanon’s tenet of liberty consecrated in its constitution;

Lebanon’s conviviality, without which no one is legitimate.

Accordingly, we have tried, dear friends, to draft a synthesis of our academic covenant, based on the following guides:

1- Developing Man as a Person, and training him to acquire knowledge, throughout his life, and motivating him to build his life on the basis of truth, good, and beauty. It is to be

noted that certain values upon which we were raised, and which we have inherited from our fathers and grandfathers, have begun to decline and disappear. Globalization has invaded the East and West to the extent where we have begun to lose our historic characters. Thus, the values that should be deeply rooted in the personality of our students are far more important than any imported information required by the curriculum. Our role today is to encourage students to experience these values so they can understand the true person within them and the true relationship they have with others. It is not enough to say that this generation is weird, rather we should work to instill in these young people the spirit of love, honor, service, and respect ... (Most of the young nowadays show no respect, no love, no belonging; all they express is their haste, craziness, partying all night, and indifference).

2- Developing Man as a Member of Society and training him through university and social life to conduct himself well with others, mainly the Administration, professors, and fellow students.

I sometimes wonder about the reasons for the clashes between us and students. Who is the responsible party? Is it a conflict between generations or a psychological aloofness? One third of the Lebanese population studies at universities and schools; how can we fill this gap and build bridges between us and them? We are responsible for establishing dialogue, instilling trust, and encouraging participation. We cannot ask students to be democratic and respect the opinion of others if we do not respect their ideas and do not give them the freedom of thought and the courage to express themselves. Therefore, it is essential to reconsider our choices of teaching methodologies and professors in order to offer university students the opportunity to enjoy a healthy and uncomplicated social life, which reflects on their behavior and conduct in society. This could also transform them into constructive and productive members of society, instead of their being chaotic, destructive, and rebellious.

3- Developing Man as a Citizen: Every student has been granted, upon being enrolled in university at the age of 18, the right to vote and participate in national life. This is a confirmation of his/her role and capacity to play this role. Then, how can we best prepare this student so that his/her national participation is the fruit of his/her personal

experience, choice, and decision, and not merely one of instinctive, family, and sectarian drive? We are all invited, both universities and schools, to make students aware and to prepare them toward dialogue, cooperation, and participation. This requires from us, in Lebanon, a methodology based on purging memories of hatred and revulsion to promote in our students respect for others and rejection of confessionalism; this will eventually lead to sound harmony between Christians and Muslims, and a renewed vision of both Arab and Muslim worlds. We call upon universities administrations to provide students with the possibility of taking part in decision-making at the university, especially in matters that concern them; which will provide them with a just and balanced social and university life.

4- Developing Man as an Educated Person: The university is no more an institution that only grants degrees, and education is no more a tool to simply obtain a degree. In fact, education has become, due to modernity, globalization, and technology, a means to build a cultivated, independent, and open personality that relies on scientific research in order to find answers to worrying questions that haunt the existence of the young. Therefore, we deem it crucial to reconsider the mechanism of spreading knowledge, stimulating dialogue and research, and strengthening the relationship with the modern media to help students interact with various global cultures. This does not mean ignoring heritage and history. We have to admit that our students are experts at computers and the Internet; still, most of them are naïve and even ignorant when it comes to the history, geography, rules and regulations, and different civilizations of their country. Hence, our role consists of filling this gap, or else our students are threatened, at any time, to fall into the trap of division and the temptation of seeking another country.

5- Developing Man as a Soul: We live in a country of different religions and faith. Therefore, our role is to revive spiritual life without being fanatical and reclusive. We, as a university with Catholic roots, are invited to revive the spirituality of our students, both Christians and Muslims, by focusing on the dimensions of faith that call for peace, love, and good. Blind fanaticism is a result of ignorance, and we should admit that many of our students know nothing about their religion and are not even aware of other religious realities. And we have to admit, as parents and institutions, that we are the ones responsible for this situation - not students.

6- Developing Man as a Producer who plays an efficient economic role in society. This cannot be achieved in the absence of experience, training, exercising, and interacting with modern machines and technologies. The fall of rigid communism and fierce capitalism has proved that the economy is a shared process which takes into consideration the human right to a certain living standard. We are then invited, along with employers and production centers, to create new fields of study that offer the opportunity for specialized talents and manpower to efficiently utilize their capacities for comprehensive human and social development.

7- Developing Man as a Body: The body constitutes a part of our humanity; it is neither something to be ashamed of, nor a heavy burden to bear or a simple added-value to boast about. Our life is burdened with more concerns and time is very scarce. As a result, we put sports aside and discourage our children and students to enjoy natural beauty, green meadows, and high mountains. Added to that, sports have become a part of political and confessional conflicts to the point that the expression “sporting spirit” has been used as a term of mockery and sarcasm. We are indeed invited to spread awareness among our youth of the needs of their bodies, so they can start to respect their own bodies and those of others, by providing them with real education about the body, health, procreation, sports, and preserving the environment.

Dear friends,

These are some of the foundations, which our university, as well as other universities, are invited to build upon. The challenge is difficult but necessary to rebuild our lives and future. Our views are in harmony with the requirements of globalization, in terms of accessing it and investing in it rather than using it as a tool to destroy identity and personal traits.

Human development also rhymes with respecting the environment and improving the quality of life by focusing on public health and safety. Let us admit, once again, that we all work in politics, in the folkloric and reactionary meaning of the word, more than we work for our health, the safety of our children, and the preservation of our future generations from environmental pollution, drugs, and infectious diseases. In short, we are taken by appearances and forget about the essence.

Today, dear friends, I am emitting this call in the midst of a tormenting political situation. Elections are just a passing stage; do not make them the end of the world. These are mere superficial issues. Let us face the fundamental ones, so we can build a strong and eternal country for all its children. Otherwise, the 7th of May will just be another day that will pass by.

One final word to the NDU family; I would like to thank you all, and to acknowledge Abbot Semaan Abou Abdo, Superior General of the Order of the Holy Virgin Mary, General Assistants, the Board of Trustees, and Friends of NDU for their permanent support of this institution. I would also like to thank the administrative body, professors, staff members, and students of NDU, whom I would like to invite to take part in a workshop during which we will analyze, discuss, criticize, and modify the University academic covenant, so it can be put into effect by the next academic year.

As for you, dear friends, I would like to thank you and ask you to bear witness to our work because your care, honesty, and guidance will help develop this university so it can become, indeed, the University of the Third Millennium, a constructive university, and one of goals and hard work.

Welcome once again, and happy anniversary NDU.

Long live NDU, Long live Lebanon.