Inaugural lecture by the Superior General of the Society of Jesus and Chancellor of the University of Deusto, R.P. Arturo Sosa, SJ at the opening ceremony of the 2026-2027 academic year of the University of Deusto, in the Paraninfo (Bilbao campus), on September 24, 2026, at 4:00 p.m.

Knowledge that serves, wisdom that opens up the future

Father Provincial of the Society of Jesus in Spain,
President of the Governing Council of the University of Deusto,
Your Excellency the Rector of the University of Deusto,
Your Excellency the President of the Basque Government,
Most Reverend Bishops,
The Honourable Minister of Science, Universities and Innovation of the Basque Government,
Academic Authorities,
Members of the University community
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

1. Celebrating at Deusto: a question about the mission of Jesuit universities

As Chancellor of this University, it is a source of deep joy and gratitude for me to be in Bilbao today, in the Basque Country, at this University of Deusto, to inaugurate the 2026-2027 academic year and to open together the celebration of its 140 years of history. Deusto was born in 1886, in a period of profound social, economic and cultural transformations. Since then, this University has sought to serve society through training, research and commitment to its development, faithful to the educational tradition of the Society of Jesus.

Celebrating 140 years should not, however, be an exercise in satisfied contemplation of the past. A university that belongs to the Ignatian tradition does not contemplate its history as a monument, but as a memory that becomes a source of maturity and wisdom. It does not celebrate in order to occupy a position of prestige. It does so in order to recognize the gift it has received and to ask itself what new processes it is called to initiate. Pope Francis reminded us that "time is greater than space": that what is truly fruitful is not to conquer places of power, but to initiate processes that mature, summon others and open up a future [cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, nn. 222-225]. This insight is especially appropriate for a university. The university lives on long processes: on questions that are transmitted, on knowledge that is contrasted and on people who grow.

For this reason, I would like this celebration of Deusto to be something more than a local commemoration. From this place so significant for the Society of Jesus, near

Loiola and in a city that has been able to transform itself without losing its memory, I propose a reflection that will help all the universities entrusted to the Society of Jesus and, more broadly, all those who share our university mission. Deusto is the occasion today, but the question that brings us together is broader. In continuity with my words pronounced at the assembly of the International Association of Jesuit Universities (IAJU), held last year in Bogotá, I would like to dwell on a double question: what does it mean to be a Jesuit university in this change of era?

This question is not rhetorical. It touches the core of our mission. A Jesuit university does not exist only to transmit skills, produce publications, obtain recognition or adapt quickly to the transformations of the environment. All this may be necessary, but it is not enough. The university exists to seek truth, to understand reality in its complexity and to put knowledge at the service of progress (*utilitas*), reconciliation (*iustitia*), human dignity (*humanitas*) and openness to transcendence (*fides*). When knowledge is opened to this horizon, it ceases to be merely the accumulation of information or technical capacity: it begins to become wisdom and service. That is the horizon from which I would like to speak today.

2. The contemporary crisis of knowledge

We live in a world wounded by wars, forced displacements, growing inequalities, deteriorating democracy, ecological crisis and profound loneliness. We cannot inaugurate a university course as if none of this challenged our classrooms, faculties, research groups, services, and governing bodies. Along with these visible wounds there is another, more silent one, which directly affects the university mission as understood by the Society and, with it, by the Church: we are experiencing a crisis of knowledge.

On the one hand, knowledge is despised. Truth becomes suspect or irrelevant; facts are subordinated to primary emotions; lies become an instrument of social and political manipulation; disinformation circulates at a speed that exceeds the capacity for deliberation; complex thinking is replaced by simple slogans. The university is then faced with an irreplaceable task: to safeguard respect for facts, to train in the rigor of argumentation, to teach how to distinguish between evidence and opinion, and to sustain the intellectual patience required to understand what cannot be reduced to a headline or an immediate reaction.

On the other hand, knowledge can be captured for the benefit of a few. It is not despised, but concentrated as power. Data, algorithms, technological capabilities, regimes of ownership and access to knowledge, communication platforms and artificial intelligence systems become strategic resources that can serve the common good, but also reinforce inequality, condition freedom, orient desire, commercialise care and produce new forms of dependence. Pope Leo XIV's recent encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas* has expressed it clearly: technology is not neutral, because it takes on the face of those who conceive, finance, regulate and use it. And when few actors have the capacity to guide these processes, the question of justice, participation and human dignity becomes inescapable.

These two pathologies—the contempt for truth and the capture of knowledge—threaten the university in different but converging ways. The first deteriorates the cultural conditions of democracy and coexistence. The second reduces knowledge to a competitive advantage, to an instrument of domination or to private property closed in on itself. In the face of both, the university with a Jesuit identity is called to affirm with humility and firmness that truth is a common good, that human intelligence does not reach its fullness in domination but in service, and that knowledge only becomes fully human when it is shared, contrasted, open to criticism, oriented towards the life of all, especially those who suffer most, and dares to ask questions about the definitive meaning of human existence.

This affirmation has consequences for our way of researching, teaching, leading and relating to society. It is not enough to defend science in an abstract way. We must ask ourselves what kind of science, what kind of technology, what kind of innovation and what kind of university we are promoting. Not all production of knowledge humanizes. Knowledge can illuminate, heal, liberate and reconcile; but it can also exclude, monitor, manipulate, destroy or enrich a few at the expense of many. That is why we need to revive vigorously the spirit of the intellectual apostolate as a service to the Church and society: a way of knowing that does not seek to dominate reality, but to understand it in depth in order to better serve it.

3. The intellectual apostolate: knowing in order to serve

In the tradition of the Society of Jesus, the intellectual apostolate is not an ornament of our mission or an activity reserved for academic elites. It is a concrete way of participating in the mission of reconciliation and justice. It is the patient effort to understand reality, with all the means of reason, science, the humanities and interdisciplinary knowledge. It is knowledge that allows itself to be affected by the suffering of the world and asks how it can contribute to healing wounds, opening paths and sustaining hope.

The intellectual apostolate demands excellence. But excellence, for us, cannot be confused with individual competition for prestige, with an academic life enclosed in its own logic or with the accumulation of indicators of success, without a human horizon. University excellence linked to the Jesuit identity is also measured by the depth of the questions it raises, by the honesty of its methods, by the openness of its conversations, by the ethical quality of its aims and by the ability to generate real transformations in the service of the common good. A university can be technically brilliant, considered "excellent" and yet spiritually poor because it does not ask whom its knowledge serves and whom it leaves out of its benefits.

Here science and spirituality meet in a deeper way than we sometimes imagine. Authentic science demands humility in the face of reality, the ability to rectify, openness to criticism, recognition of limits, teamwork, patience, honesty and respect for what the data show, even when they contradict our preferences. Ignatian spirituality, on the other hand, teaches us to leave "our own love, will and interest" [*Ex.* 189]; it invites us to look at reality from the interior freedom acquired, to listen,

to discern and to choose what is most conducive to the service of God and the good of people. Both science and spirituality, when true to themselves, distance us from ourselves and place us before a truth that we do not possess, but are called to seek, find and serve.

For this reason, a university with a Jesuit identity is a place where the ethics of shared knowledge are cultivated. We do not know for our own benefit or lock ourselves into a personal career. We do not research to accumulate merits. We do not teach to reproduce positions of power. We know to understand better how to overcome threats to life. In this sense, open science, interdisciplinary collaboration, dialogue with social actors and the participation of affected communities and groups are not simple methodological choices: they express a spirituality of knowledge as service.

This does not mean weakening academic rigor or confusing research with a mere taking of a position. It means exactly the opposite: the more complex the problems, the more rigor we need; the more vulnerable life is, the more intellectual honesty is demanded of us; the more polarized the public debate is, the more necessary is a university capable of recognizing the nuances of the complexity of reality, thinking deeply, listening honestly, without naivety and speaking clearly without fear.

4. From knowledge to wisdom

Rigorous knowledge is essential. It allows us to understand reality, identify causes, test hypotheses, correct errors, develop technologies and open up new opportunities. Without knowledge, the university would lose its raison d'être. But knowledge, however necessary it may be, does not exhaust the university's mission.

It can multiply the means without clarifying the ends; it can expand our power without directing our responsibility; it can tell us how to transform reality without always telling us where to do it.

For this reason, we hope that knowledge will lead us to wisdom. Wisdom makes us capable of uniting truth, meaning, responsibility and service to the common good. Based on this conviction, a Jesuit university cannot be satisfied with training experts capable of handling powerful means; it is called to form people capable of discerning the ends that make these means truly human. Wisdom does not consist in knowing more things, but in integrating what we know into a deeper vision of the person, of society and of the world in which we live. Wisdom asks about meaning, consequences, bonds, limits, victims, those who have no voice and future generations. It is not limited to asking what we can do, but what we should do; not only what is effective, but what is just; not only what is profitable, but what humanizes; not only what is technically possible, but what generates life and opens up a better future.

This sapiential vision is especially urgent in the age of artificial intelligence. Faced with technologies that can intensify biases or displace subjectivity, a Jesuit university must not limit itself to incorporating tools: it must form criteria. It must teach us to ask when, how, for what and for whom a technology is used. And it must remember that

no innovation is truly human if it replaces personal encounters, hides responsibility or transforms people into objects.

In the Ignatian tradition, this passage from knowledge to wisdom requires discernment. Fr. Adolfo Nicolás warned, more than a decade ago, about the globalization of superficiality. That risk has not diminished; it has intensified. In the midst of the excess of stimuli, data and opinions, the Jesuit university must be a school of depth: a place where knowledge feeds discernment and discernment opens the way to wisdom. Discernment is not simply limited to choosing between good and bad. Quite often, the most difficult thing is to choose between possible goods, to recognize the best, to discover where life makes its way in history, and to perceive which processes deserve to be initiated and accompanied, even if their fruits are not immediate. Discerning requires good information, listening to reality, inner freedom, dialogue, time and openness to the new. That is why it is not exclusively a personal practice; it also needs to become a community and institutional practice.

The universities of the Society of Jesus are called to make shared discernment a key dimension of their institutional culture. The culture of common discernment leads to a style of making academic decisions, indicating research priorities, digital transformation, partnerships, the way of exercising leadership and the use of its resources. A discerning university community listens to reality, recognizes its capacities and limits, and asks himself honestly, as Ignatius did: what can we do that is most necessary, more universal, more just, and more faithful to our mission?

5. Forming young people for a non-naïve hope

This way of understanding knowledge rethinks the training we offer to young people. The Jesuit university cannot limit itself to preparing technically competent professionals to compete in an uncertain market. It must train people capable of understanding the complexity of their time, building a meaningful life project and putting their talent at the service of others.

Fr. Kolvenbach expressed it clearly: "Despite the strong individualistic impulses in us, a Jesuit university should succeed in transforming its students into women and men for others, as Father Arrupe so often repeated, but also, and even more so in our day, into women and men with others. In fact, impelled by the positive effects of globalization, the emphasis now falls, heavily and happily, on the preposition "with" – on a fruitful partnership – not only from the side of the individual person, but also from the side of the University itself. Much more than before, the University cannot be just an isolated island, or an ivory tower: it has to reach out and make its specific academic methods of doing things available to enrich educational systems at the local, national and international levels, always aware that all these initiatives will ultimately ennoble the same institution" (Address to the Board of Directors of Georgetown, Rome 2007, n. 9).

That is why we continue to talk about a comprehensive education: competent, aware,

committed and compassionate people. Competent, because service without preparation may remain a goodwill gesture that has no practical effect. Conscious, because they need to understand the world they inhabit and recognize how their decisions affect others. Committed, because knowledge should not end in self-promotion, but in responsibility. Compassionate, because without the ability to feel with those who suffer, intelligence can become cold and leadership dangerous.

Among a large number of young people, we perceive talent, creativity and a genuine desire to contribute to a better world. However, we also find anxiety, tiredness, fear of the future and distrust. Hope cannot, therefore, be proposed as a naïve optimism. Christian hope, without denying the darkness, recognizes that history is still open and that we can collaborate in processes that guide it towards more life. Forming in hope means helping young people to look at reality with lucidity without being paralyzed; to discover their vocation without reducing it to success; to exercise leadership without domination; and to sustain the search for meaning in the midst of uncertainty.

Accompaniment, another dimension of the Ignatian way, is decisive. Accompaniment is not there to replace the freedom of young people or to impose a project on them. It is to walk alongside them so that they recognize their gifts, their limits, their deepest desires and the calls of reality. It is to help them to integrate their heads, hearts and hands: to understand, feel and act. A university that accompanies creates spaces where the student does not limit himself to asking himself what professional career he wants to develop, but also what kind of person he wants to become and what world he wants to help build.

This accompaniment is embodied by the entire university community. Professors, researchers, technical staff, management, administrative and service staff teach with their way of working, treating people, resolving conflicts, cooperating and living the mission. A university community becomes credible when its students discover that high professional competence is inseparable from caring to one another and from service.

The context of this reflection is an opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude for the co-responsibility and leadership of the incredible number and variety of people who today sustain and guide institutions with a Jesuit identity. As partners in mission, the commitment of all of them transforms the Ignatian tradition into a shared and living dynamism.

6. Research with human impact

The same logic must guide our research. Jesuit universities must generate useful knowledge to face the great challenges of humanity: social justice, care for the Common Home, and the ethical dilemmas of technological transition. But the usefulness of research should not be reduced to its immediate application or to the demands of the market. There is another, deeper usefulness: to understand reality better, to enrich public debate, to reveal hidden causes of injustice, to imagine

alternatives, and to offer criteria for better decision-making.

Research in search of a positive impact often means leaving offices and laboratories. It means dialogue with other disciplines and non-academic actors; listening to affected communities; making visible the knowledge that is often left on the margins; and recognizing that those who suffer injustice are recipients of our solutions, as well as bearers of experience, intelligence and wisdom. Truly transformative research does not look at the poor and the discarded from above; it learns to look at reality from their perspective and, where possible, alongside them.

This attitude calls for open universities. In times when knowledge is concentrated, Jesuit universities should promote collaboration rather than closed appropriation; open science; responsible transfer; partnerships oriented to the common good; and research evaluated for its contribution to human dignity, sustainability, and reconciliation. The knowledge produced by the university has a public responsibility.

To accomplish this task, the relationship between the university, public institutions, companies and civil society is essential. The university does not replace any of them, but it can offer something that they all need: depth of analysis, critical independence, capacity for dialogue, formation of people and an ethical horizon. To those who exercise public, business and social responsibilities, I express my recognition and my invitation: let us continue to build together alliances capable of putting knowledge at the service of the common good. The complexity of our time is not faced by organizations closed in on themselves, but by communities that learn to collaborate without renouncing their identity.

This collaboration must also be oriented towards the care of the Common Home. The ecological crisis is not just another issue on the university agenda; it is a transversal dimension of justice. The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor cannot be separated. For this reason, our universities must integrate sustainability, social justice and ethical training; reduce their own environmental footprint; research on just transitions; and train professionals capable of making decisions that respect the limits of the planet and the dignity of present and future generations.

7. A network mission: local roots and global horizon

No university can carry out this mission on its own. Much less a Jesuit university, because our mission links us to a universal apostolic body. The International Association of Jesuit Universities (IAJU), whose constitution was signed in Loiola in 2018 and which received decisive support here in Deusto from its rector of fond memory, José María Guibert, expresses this conviction: if each university walks in isolation, its forces are limited; if we recognize ourselves as complementary parts of the same body, we can face the future with hope and greater opportunities.

Networking does not mean homogenizing. Each Jesuit university lives in a different context, with its own cultural, economic, political and religious challenges. Precisely for this reason, the network is valuable: it allows us to value diversity and learn from

it, to share capacities, to support those who are going through difficult situations, to promote joint research, to create international itineraries, to accompany young people better and to offer a more meaningful voice in global debates on education, technology, democracy, justice and sustainability.

The global horizon strengthens us locally. The Jesuit university is universal, because it is deeply rooted. We do not serve humanity in the abstract, but from concrete places, with specific histories, languages, wounds, capacities and hopes. Deusto knows this well: it is rooted in the Basque Country, and located in a unique social, cultural, business and institutional ecosystem. This rootedness does not limit its universality; it makes it credible. Only those who have roots can build true bridges and contribute to turning diversity into shared wealth.

The Jesuit university is called to be a space for dialogue in plural societies, dialogue as a method for seeking truth and building coexistence. In times of polarization, we want to bring together different people without requiring them to renounce their convictions, people capable of dialogue; we want to build spaces where they can meet around common questions and reach shared commitments. The university is one of those few places where a society can listen to itself in depth.

8. A new era for Deusto: tradition that opens up the future

Allow me now to return to Deusto. If I wanted to raise my gaze to the whole of the Society's university mission, it was not to distance myself from this University, but to place its anniversary on the horizon that corresponds to it. Deusto is not celebrating 140 years to look at itself, but to renew its service. Deusto's new Strategic Plan aims to maintain that creative tension between its roots in tradition and its openness to something new that allows us to build a better future. The Jesuit tradition is not a museum piece, but a way of discerning what remains and what matters; a living memory that allows us to understand change critically and contribute to guiding it.

This insight is translated today at Deusto into concrete commitments: a university capable of accompanying learning at different stages; training that combines academic excellence, active methodologies, accompaniment and meaning; a more diverse and inclusive community, where talent and quality training are available to more people; research aimed at the forefront of the ethical and social challenges of our time; a deep-rooted and purposeful internationalisation; a nimbler, transversal and co-responsible organisation at the service of the mission: all this can express, in a concrete way, a university that turns knowledge into wisdom and service.

I would like to convey encouragement and hope to each and every one of you who make up the Deusto university community. To those who research, teach, accompany, administer, take care of the premises... in short, who live the daily life of the university, making the mission in which each one's efforts find meaning a reality. The university is built with plans, structures or resources, but especially with people who believe that their work, however humble or specialized it may seem, is important for others. In this logic of simple and faithful service, the memory of Brother Gárate continues to offer Deusto a luminous image: discreet presence, concrete care, daily

hospitality.

To you Deusto students, I say: the university offers you knowledge, skills, relationships and opportunities. Please! Do not be satisfied with being users of training; become the protagonists of a meaningful life. Do not receive knowledge to obtain individual advantages, but as a responsibility for everyone's life. Never stop asking yourselves who benefits from what you learn, what wounds it can help to heal, what future it can help to shape. Humanity needs the intelligence you possess, but also your compassion, your inner freedom, and your ability to work with others.

On behalf of the Society of Jesus, I would like to express my gratitude to the public institutions, the business and social communities, and to everyone who is joining us today for this celebration. A university like this does not belong only to those who study or work in it. It also belongs, in some way, to the society it serves. For this reason, Deusto's anniversary is an invitation to build an ecosystem of knowledge, innovation and justice that helps the Basque Country, Spain, Europe and the world to face the challenges of our time with depth, responsibility and hope.

Dear Deusto Community, as we begin this academic year and begin the celebration of these 140 years, I invite you to live in creative fidelity. Fidelity does not mechanically repeat the past; it interprets it with gratitude and projects it with audacity. Creativity does not abandon identity; it actualizes it in new circumstances. If there is one thing that a Jesuit university can contribute today, it is precisely this: knowledge that seeks truth in the midst of noise and confusion; wisdom that directs power towards the common good; service that perseveres in justice; and hope that does not deny the pain of the world, but is committed to transforming it.
May Deusto continue to be, from its Jesuit tradition and identity, a university rooted in the Basque Country, open to the world; a house where one learns to think rigorously, to discern freely, to serve generously and to build the future with others.

May the Lord bless this work and all the people who make it possible. Forward, then, with the humility of one who learns, the depth of one who seeks the truth and the courage of one who hopes. Here's to another 140 years of knowledge, wisdom and service.

Thank you very much! Eskerrik asko!