

Ursulines Hold International Leadership Conference in Latin America



From **August 11th to 15th**, Colégio Santa Úrsula in Ribeirão Preto (SP), hosted the **1st Ursuline International Leadership Conference of Latin America**, a gathering that brought together lay and religious leaders from the five countries where the Ursulines are present – **Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Peru, and Venezuela**. The objectives were to **strengthen the identity of Ursuline Education**, promote the sharing of experiences, and deepen the charism founded on **SERVIAM** ("I will serve"), the legacy of Saint Angela Merici. The organizing committee was formed by

representatives from each country: **Rafael Bianchi (Brazil), Julio Aroní (Peru), Andrea Raczynski (Chile), and Edgar Contreras (Venezuela)**. More than 90 participants attended the event, representing 13 educational institutions.

Inspirations and Horizons

The conference was inspired by the **Synod on Synodality, the Jubilee Year of 2025 – Pilgrims of Hope**, the **125th anniversary of the Roman Union of Ursulines**, and the preparation for the **500th anniversary of Saint Angela's pilgrimage to the Holy Land**. In this context, the meeting sought to unite tradition and innovation in the formation of leaders committed to faith, social justice, and **care for our Common Home**.

The program included moments of spirituality, prayer, training, debates, and group work, in a process of collective construction of perspectives for the future of Ursuline Education in Latin America.





At the opening, **Sr. Helenice de Souza**, Provincial of Brazil and Peru, welcomed the participants:

"Against winds and tides, but always guided by the breath of the Holy Spirit, it is here that we meet. The beauty of this gathering lies precisely in this: in authenticity, in the possibility of being ourselves, of expressing our faith, our charism, our journey, and our dreams. That is why this meeting is unique," she said.

Sr. Neusimar Marques da Silva, General Counselor of the Roman Union, presented the theme **"125 years of the Roman Union: meaning and horizon"**:

"The charism of Saint Angela has always been lived in diverse ways throughout the centuries. It was never bound to a rigid form. On the contrary: its strength lies in the capacity for innovation, adaptation, and pioneering spirit," she emphasized. Recalling a historic photograph of the **First**

General Chapter of 1900, she highlighted the decision of the North American Ursulines to bring an Indigenous child to the meeting as a visible sign of the educational and evangelizing mission among native peoples. They felt they could not participate in such a historic moment without clearly expressing the mission that defined them: to be at the service of people, especially in education and faith formation.

Thus, they decided to bring the girl, crossing the ocean by ship, unable to imagine registering the moment without her presence. The child not only attended the meeting but was also included in the photograph, as an expression of the true meaning of the Ursulines' existence. *"There is no charism of Saint Angela that is not at the service of others, that does not reach beyond itself toward someone to be served,"* explained Sr. Neusimar.



In the same spirit, the Conference in Ribeirão Preto also included the participation of Valquíria, a student at Santa Ângela Agricultural Family School (EFASA), in Pedro II (PI) – Brazil. As a special guest, she took part in the talk **“The relevance of Saint Angela’s charism today”**, presented by **Sr. Helenice de Souza**.



Sr. Neusimar acknowledged her presence and emphasized the importance of the moment:

“At the heart of this mission is education. Not only academic teaching, but the integral formation of the person, education for life and for service. The Ursuline mission of education has an impact because it is transformative – it generates belonging, commitment, and awareness that life gains meaning when placed at the service of others,” she affirmed. At the end of her presentation, she read a special message sent to the participants by **Sr. Susan Flood**, osu, Superior General of the Ursuline Sisters Congregation ([click the link to read the full message](#))

Other highlights included **Sr. María Eugenia Chávez Flores (Sr. Maru, México)**, who presented **“Angela and the Church”** emphasizing Saint Angela’s call to live an active faith—growing, serving, and facing reality with hope and fidelity.

Sr. Laure Blanchon (France-Belgium-Spain), spoke on **“Leadership in the Way of Saint Angela”**. She highlighted Angela’s relational and spiritual leadership—rooted in trust, freedom, and shared responsibility—empowering both sisters and laypeople to lead with courage and collaboration.

Lawyer and specialist in mediation and peace culture, **Juliana Polloni**, delivered the lecture **“Leadership with Presence: Emotional Intelligence and Dialogue to Transform School Communities”** and **Cecilia Nipp**, Director of Global Relationships and Cultural Exchange at Ursuline Academy of Dallas: **“Global Education and Exchange.”**

Another highly significant moment was the panel **“The keys to Ursuline education and its relevance in the 21st century”**, with the





participation of **Julio Aroní (Peru)**, **Edgar Contreras (Venezuela)**, **Rafael Bianchi (Brazil)**, **Carolina García (Chile)**, and **Lourdes Salazar (Mexico)**. The participants also worked on a SWOT analysis, guided by **Julio Aroní**.

The theme **“INSIEME for the Integral Ecology”** was presented by the delegation from Pedro II (PI, Brazil), who showcased Saint Angela Foundation’s pillars as an agricultural school capable of training and professionalizing youth, enabling them to study, work, produce, and remain in their homeland. *“More than an educational project, it is about restoring the bond with the land and promoting **Integral Ecology** – feeling a sense of belonging to the place, the roots, and one’s own history,”* explained **Rogério Araújo**, coordinator of the institution.

At the closing, the organizing committee presented a final message, highlighting two strategic axes that will guide the work from the Conference onward: **creating spaces for information, exchange, and collaboration, and promoting continuous formation in the Ursuline charism.**

In the final prayer, participants emphasized the special recommendation of the foundress, which summarized the spirit of the Conference:

“Persevere faithfully and joyfully in the work you have begun. And guard yourselves, guard yourselves, I repeat, against tepidity.” (Last Legacy, 22–23).

