Leaders from La Salle Universities in 12 countries gather in Brazil for the 16th IALU Encuentro

From 4 to 8 November, 2026, at La Salle University Canoas, Brazil, the *International Association of La Salle Universities* (IALU)* held the **16th Extended Regional *Encuentro* of Rectors from the South America and Caribbean Region, bringing together 44 participants from 32 institutions and 12 countries**: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Spain, the United States, the Philippines, France, Kenya, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru.

Prior to the opening of the *Encuentro* on 4 November, the IALU Board of Directors met with the Presidents of the participating Universities. The session provided University leaders with the opportunity for direct contact with the Board, which included representatives from all IALU Regions: the President, Prof. Josep M. Santos (La Salle-URL, Barcelona); the Vice-President, Brother Iñigo Riola (De La Salle University-Dasmariñas); and the Regional directors for Africa, Asia, Europe and the Holy Land, Mexico, South and Central America, and the United States. **The Presidents were able to share their institutional priorities, ask questions and gain first-hand insight into the network's future direction**.

Identity, innovation and cooperation

The academic programme began on 5 November with welcoming addresses from Brother Olavo José Dalvit, Visitor of the Brazil-Chile District; Brother Cledes Casagrande, President of La Salle University of Canoas, the host institution; Prof. Josep Santos, President of IALU; and Brother Manuel Orozco, Regional President for South America and the Caribbean. The opening session reviewed the outcomes of the *encuentros* held in Bogotá and Nairobi in 2024 and 2025 respectively, and looked ahead to 2027, at a time when **IALU continues to make progress in implementing its Strategic Plan**.

Over the following days, Presidents and senior management analysed what distinguishes La Salle Universities and how that identity guides institutional management; sustainable development was also addressed, with an emphasis on

agribusiness and sustainable agriculture; the challenges of accelerating innovation, including the success story of the *Pontifícia Universidade do Rio Grande do Sul* (PUCRS); **international cooperation as part of the DNA of La Salle universities**; the landscape of Brazilian higher education and the challenge of artificial intelligence; and outreach, university research and fundraising. A collaborative session with rectors from Mexico provided an opportunity to share best practices and agree on joint actions.

The network makes us stronger

The *Encuentro* concluded with the panel discussion 'New developments and perspectives: the network makes us stronger'. Participants also visited **a technology and educational solutions ecosystem for higher education** in Porto Alegre, and rounded off the week with a cultural excursion to the Serra Gaúcha.

Summing up, the president of IALU remarked that "together we have examined some of the key challenges and opportunities facing higher education, such as innovation, sustainability, international cooperation, research and the impact of artificial intelligence, all guided by our shared Lasallian identity". "However," he added, **"what has left the deepest impression on us has been the spirit of fraternity, openness and common purpose** that characterised our *encuentro*."

"Canoas showcased the best of IALU: Presidents from every continent sitting around the same table, engaging in open dialogue with the Council and amongst themselves, and **turning shared values into shared projects**. As we continue to implement our Strategic Plan, this is the network we are building," said Prof. Carlos Coelho, Executive Director of IALU.



* The *International Association of La Salle Universities* (IALU) brings together more than 60 Lasallian higher education institutions in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America. Inspired by the educational mission of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, IALU promotes cooperation, mobility, research and a shared mission amongst its members.

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