

Meredith Meyer is a student of Notre Dame University who is studying for a semester in Rome as part of the Rome Global Gateway. Meredith attended our September General Assembly as an intern. Here are some thoughts on her experience in those days.

“I volunteered for the morning sessions of the General Assembly, but I wish I could have stayed the whole time, because what I heard and saw really interested me! As a young American Catholic, attending an international academic workshop was a new experience for me. It was a great opportunity for me to witness how the Church applies its core principles relating to humandignity to issues in the real world, such as the COVID pandemic.

I worked the check-in table on the first day, and enjoyed greeting people from all over the world who arrived to participate in the workshop. **My favorite experience from the Assembly was witnessing the diversity of its attendees.** They came from many areas of the world and from many different areas of study, all to partake in a conversation about bioethics in the pandemic. I liked the inclusion of multiple different languages throughout the talks, because it represented the variety of backgrounds of the participants. The accommodation of different languages also showed me, in a new way, how people from many nations can commit to working together despite their differences.

I think that one common misconception of the Catholic Church, especially among my generation, is that it separates its theological mission and objectives from science and focuses on only the religious side of issues. The Pontifical Academy for Life and its General Assembly is a great example of how the Church integrates science with religion to address the issues of the world today. The Assembly gathered to address the problems brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic across multiple areas, including biology, healthcare, economics, and social justice. I appreciated this holistic perspective because it demonstrated that the Church seeks to look at an issue like the pandemic from all angles, and is thus involved in the many relevant areas of study.

I am studying theology and peace studies at university, so I am interested in the ways these two subjects interact. I was able to see their conjunction at this conference, where principles of Catholic Social Teaching, including “Life and Dignity of the Human Person” and “Preferential Option for the Poor,” came together with scientific research and public health data to form a discourse on how to uphold human life during a global health crisis. The variety of professions of the Assembly’s attendees also demonstrated to me **the importance of having strong Catholics contributing to society across all professions, including healthcare workers, politicians, scientists, and professors.** Conversely, it showed me the importance of having Catholic priests, sisters, and other consecrated people be a part of the intellectual community.

Another impactful part of the Assembly for me was **the papal audience. Pope Francis offered a powerful address to the Academy, encouraging their work and stressing the necessity of defending human life amidst the struggles of the pandemic.** To me, this direct interaction with the pope was a strong affirmation that the Church values the work of the PAV and supports its objectives.

I am so thankful for the opportunity to attend the General Assembly and witness the work

of the Church in the world firsthand. **Seeing people of all nationalities and academic backgrounds come together for a common purpose reaffirmed to me the universality of the Catholic Church and its intentional mission to uphold human life”.**