



"The University of the Spirit and the Way"

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On the occasion of the University Patron's Day

Celebrated on May 14, 2016

1. The University of the Spirit and the Way. This expression takes us out of our reality and away from the frenetic rushing and planning of our daily life; it takes us far and wide from where we are to another realm, to the tranquility of a long and wide path.

We soon discover that this Way is ours, the milestones of which we discover continuously as we calmly contemplate it. We soon realize that this other realm is exactly ours, a place we have long overlooked.

In so doing, we learn from this Way the dynamics of truth and life and we return, once again, to where we are, to our chaotic reality, the essence of which is, then, deeply rooted in calm.

This intellectual movement is by no means tantamount to escaping and indulging in intellectual luxury; rather, the aim is to actively

strive for the good and growth in our everyday reality. The existential pursuit to achieve this aim is manifested in the question we asked ourselves on the Pentecost in 2013: “What shall we do?” So, our thoughts took to striving for the Truth and the Life, hence the focus on “the University of the Spirit and the Truth” on the Pentecost in 2014, and on “the University of the Spirit and Life” on the Pentecost in 2015. Here we are, on the Solemnity of the Spirit this year, thinking about “the University of the Spirit and the Way.” This completes the trilogy of words by which He introduced himself, He who is “the Way, the Truth and the Life.” (Jn 14: 6). He gives meaning to our mission as a Christian Catholic university, which – according to the social teachings of the Church – seeks growth and development, completion and perfection for all human beings without discrimination and for every human being in all their dimensions.

The concept of the Way does rekindle in us nostalgia for the history of our University and the steps it has taken over the years in “evolution in continuity”, and which drive us to ask questions about its future. Yet this same, age-old concept opens broader prospects to us and prompts a deeper reflection regarding the faith of our University as well as its identity and function.

2. The concept of the Way in the Bible is one that links ancient civilizations which predate the Bible or are its contemporaries to the Old Testament, the New Testament and the subsequent Church era. In the Old Testament, the people of God went their way led by the Lord. The prophet Isaiah borrowed the concept of the Way from the preparation of the way of kings in the ancient East, as they made their victorious entries into their cities. Isaiah applied the way to God who came to His city and achieved victory over those who put His people in dire straits. The writers of the Gospels borrowed Isaiah’s saying,

when talking about John the Baptist who came to prepare the way of Jesus, the Savior. It turns out that Jesus is the Way and that this Way continues through the Church, as the writers of the New Testament have shown, particularly the writer of the Acts of the Apostles. This idea puts us in an atmosphere of faith, which permeates the history of the relationship between God and humanity, from the moment of Creation to a future, the exact end of which is unknown to anyone. The life, the Way, of every human being is inserted into this long history and this broad way. This life starts at a specific time and ends, on this earth, at another specific time before extending after death into the eternity of God who supersedes History, as He is the Master of History. Therefore, it is a very long way, a very broad one, and our personal or institutional way is part of it.

3. Our University is firmly established in this faith, nonetheless it is aware of and remains open to other approaches to faith. Far from being exclusive to our faith, this intellectual movement, which puts us at the heart of a long history and way, is rather existential. Every belief is fully aware that the history of human beings, institutions, societies and peoples is part of a longer one and that the matters of this world cannot be tackled with the limited prospects of this world as sole reference. Rather, a major mystery overshadows these matters and urges everyone, be they faithful or agnostic, to measure things in relation to a scale of beliefs and values.
4. There are certain things of which each person is aware before they go back to the givens of faith. We are aware that we all go about our own way in life without being in absolute control of it, hence the fact that none of us knows what the present or future have in store and are able to change the direction of it. As we go along our journey, we all look around us and, regardless of our faith, we realize we are never alone. On our way in life, we meet a great number of individuals. As we travel all over our nation from one place to another, and all over

earth from one country to another and from one city to another, we just reflect upon these individuals we meet. We come across men and women, and their differences as men and women, and the differences inherent to each individual. We know that each face we see, whether we know it or not, contains in it a world of different experiences, thoughts, beliefs and various health, psychological, economic, social and family circumstances. We see all human beings with their respective concerns and worlds. We see along the way fierce competition between people and groups. We see the conflicting concerns of success harbored by each human being, institution and society. Therefore, we look for the synthesis of these concerns in order to move forward and to be able, as individuals and groups, to grow and progress, that is, the growth of the “I” and the growth of the “we” at the same time. Each human being is a different world, a different way, even many ways, yet all of us share the same way. Indeed, there are more ways than there was and will ever be people on earth.

5. These sights prompt in us some deep thinking regarding the meaning of life and generate a thorough contemplation of its sometimes futile appearance. People’s reactions differ in this respect: ranging from despair, frustration and indifference; to seclusion within earthly prospects, thus assessing all things according to the “I”; or to working dynamically and harmoniously for the sake of the good on this earth, the good of the “I” and the “we. This is why we ask ourselves about the best way to success, to live a true life.

We soon realize that the way to success and the way to true life is to be faithful to our identity, consisting of taking care of every human being and loving them deeply, so that growth would be achieved.

The primary concern is for us to acknowledge and love all human beings and to know that each is important, whoever and wherever they are, since we all share the same human nature, and human dignity was given to us equally. No human being is more important

than another. Nevertheless, the structures of society are such that a certain hierarchy of positions remains necessary in order to better serve human beings and society. It is a good thing to respect the structures of society, but this should be truly rooted in acknowledging that all people are equal without exception.

6. Far from setting limits on who and what we encounter, this principle prompts us to ponder the long way stretching before us. There is a great temptation for human beings to believe that existence is limited to the present moment; accordingly, they see the way only from their current location and according to its limitations, and thus fall prey more easily to existential anxiety. Let us read what Saint Pope John Paul II wrote in his Apostolic Letter *Orientale Lumen* in 1995: “Today we often feel ourselves prisoners of the present. It is as though man had lost his perception of belonging to a history which precedes and follows him.” (n. 8) This idea sheds light on the fact that the joy of walking along this way comes from casting an all-encompassing look at it, as well as from paving it and making it an easier path to walk by sowing goodness, dynamism, growth, benevolence and love along the way.

The synthesis of the look we cast onto the present moment and also onto the comprehensive course of history and the Master of History, is what makes human beings walk in the present moment without feeling prisoners of the present, by avoiding, as much as possible, losing their freedom. Rather, they are free to move forward, loving their current milieu along the way. Human beings look at what is around them, that is nature, and at who are around them, that is human beings, and thus realize the mysteriousness and strangeness enveloping the panorama. Still, they look at human beings and nature with harmony and love, and seek to make a journey in solidarity with them. So one takes action ...

Human beings take action, then, knowing that the many turns of events urge us to prepare and educate ourselves in such a way as to be faithful to our true selves in all circumstances, based on goodness and kindness and with the aim of growing and achieving success. They take action, even as they are aware that one cannot live or manage life according to a universal checklist of advice alone, but rather according to principles applied with a prophetic and perceptive spirit that adapts to the present moment cleverly. In the language of our faith, this translates into what His Holiness Pope Francis tells us on the Pentecost in 2014: “The Holy Spirit teaches us the path, the way.”

7. These thoughts are of direct relevance to universities, specifically to our University. In fact, the university is one of the arenas of life. It constitutes a way for many people, each of whom has their own individual way. The University family members deal with other people in their daily lives while experiencing in their own world joy, sadness or some other emotion resulting from their lives, their families, their towns, their jobs or any other source. Equally, each person adds to their own way, or milieu, something which they have taken from the University. As is the case with other aspects of life, the University abides by its own operating principles. Administrative staff, teachers and students may rely on a guide or study on how things work in the University, but this falls short of ensuring joy and success. Indeed, in the University of the Spirit, we believe that faith, beliefs and principles lead to pragmatism and realism, which, in turn, put people on the way of joy, dynamism and growth, opening the doors of success to people and institutions.
8. It is faith and intellectual wandering in the world of principles that drive our University to work strenuously on a daily basis in the Lebanese, regional and international university world. Such thinking

prevents us from indulging in intellectual luxury, for there is a beautiful reality we wish to address promptly. We are aware that our University is one way among many other ways of higher education in the world. We know that the way of each of us is situated, now, on that way. Therefore, we all wish for it to grow, and we know that its success lies in its faithfulness to its identity and its mission, both of which constitute the way it should take. University accreditation institutions, for instance, consider, first and foremost, the degree of conformity between a university's work and its identity and mission. We know with joyful certainty that our University is Christian, Catholic and Lebanese: it is rooted in each of these identities and, at the same time, it is open to every non-Christian, non-Catholic and non-Lebanese person for the sake of achieving the growth of everyone we encounter along the way through higher education. In fact, our University aims at dealing with every other.

9. From one perspective, the other is the person who does not belong directly to our University: the other is all components of society and every human being who is affected by our University's work. Those who have been involved in university work for decades know how the university concept has been steadily evolving from that of a semi-closed system with few relations with the outside, to an efficient and mutual relationship between the university, society and nature. The relationship with the outside world has undergone continuous evolution thanks to an active external policy adopted by universities and to research programs that call for cooperation between universities from various countries and geographical regions.

From another perspective, the other is every person at the heart of the University. Everyone who is part of the University knows that their fellow colleague is some "other" person, a different world with their own temperament, issues and sorrows. The University realizes that loving and taking care of the other, that is, every human being, and

taking an interest in the growth of the institution, society and the world as a whole are the elements that guide its way, and that is why our University is working in sync with university action on the international level.

There has been greater awareness that anything that affects “the internal other” automatically impacts “the external other”, and vice versa. My purpose here is not to list events, activities and achievements, but rather to emphasize some strategic lines of actions, which we have adopted, and to describe some developments within our University, which reflect these orientations.

10. This year, the University successfully entered its strategy and operational aspects of its various academic and administrative units into the TK20 program, and the various University teams are taking steady steps on the road to quality and excellence. The University made substantial progress in the world of accreditation thanks to the special efforts of those in charge of this project. As we have previously announced, the U.S. accreditation is still ongoing; having submitted a preliminary report about the University and received the preliminary feedback on it, the University is now waiting for the imminent site visit. Still, program accreditation has made good progress. An ABET site visit has been done during the current academic year for the accreditation of all of its engineering and computer science programs across three faculties: the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, and the Faculty of Sciences, noting that the results of the visit will be announced next summer. Likewise, the Department of Architecture has taken its first steps on the NAAB accreditation journey. In July 2015, the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik became the first university in Lebanon to gain the British MATRIX accreditation for student services, an added value indicator of the most renowned British universities. Moreover, the Faculty of Business and Commercial

Sciences has received the BSIS label, while the faculties of humanities are getting ready to submit their programs for EVALAG assessment. Thanks to these achievements, the University is playing a major role in the debate on the proposed draft law on quality even as it continues to work, along with other universities, to ensure quality through the Quality Committee of the Universities Association of Lebanon.

11. The University is facing the new challenge of regional ranking with the purpose of appearing to the outside world as it is truly on the inside. Therefore, and thanks to those in charge of this project, the University is currently developing a strategy that allows it to advance on the road of excellence and growth in all fields.
12. The same holds true for global positioning, which our University has particularly sought over the past few years, as more members of the USEK family are actively participating in international forums and conferences. Additionally, we stressed the need to go beyond “default internationalization”, in the traditional sense of the word, in order to adopt “a comprehensive and versatile internationalization”. This has prompted us to go ahead with the American Council on Education’s Internationalization Laboratory. Our Internationalization Task Force went on, with efficiency, bringing the world to the University campus and introducing a culture of internationalization among the University’s partners and family. Additional focus is now put on examining strategic points of interest worldwide, in addition to creating “signature partnerships”. The “Study Abroad” program has been enhanced and a greater number of students have had the opportunity to take part in “global classrooms”, with the focus now on raising students to become “global citizens”.
13. On the technological level, the University is modernizing its network and website while promoting its presence on social media. We are on

the verge of eliminating paperwork from the internal administration of the University. Indeed, most applications pertaining to students, teachers, staff and administrative personnel are now electronic, with more than 200,000 e-forms to-date. This electronic strategy, which is beneficial to the environment and nature, and aims to meet the requirements of the young generation, which is the “Net generation” par excellence.

14. Teachers and, consequently, learning are at the heart of the University’s thinking and strategy, in addition to research and living conditions. A few days ago the Board of Trustees discussed two important issues relating to teachers with the aim of making decisions in this respect in subsequent meetings. The first is a large increase in the number of full-time teachers so that our faculty can allot more time for research, whereas the second regards financial compensation for teachers during their tenure and after retirement. I would like here to put particular emphasis on research and on a research mentality, which we are seeking to promote among teachers and students in our University.

Moreover, the University continues to modernize its teaching practices as more than 100 teachers have participated in sessions with U.S. and British universities on contemporary learning methods. USEK has developed its own program for higher education teaching methods, which acquired the licensing by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and intends to launch it in the near future in cooperation with Norwich University. This interest in teaching methods puts our University at the helm of the E-TALEB project, which seeks the modernization of higher education in Lebanon in cooperation with several Lebanese, regional and European universities. Along the same line, USEK made huge progress in online teaching; in fact, more than 60 online classes have been offered to more than 1,000 students.

15. Teachers are backed by staff and administrative personnel who work with passion and commitment to ensure the advancement of USEK's mission. They move forward on their way at USEK, knowing that they are serving the noble cause of our University. Based on all the strategies I have mentioned so far, the University takes pride in the fact that some of its officials have been asked to take part in committees tasked with assessing or examining the work of universities in Europe and the United States, not to mention the strong showing of USEK officials among others on regional and international platforms.
16. We are also mindful of promoting USEK's alumni, as they are part of the University's past, present and future way. Their names are linked to USEK and their success is intertwined with the University's. Strenuous efforts have to be made for the speedy development of our strategy in this respect. Various alumni gatherings have taken place already this year, but we are looking forward to their organization and promotion. This issue has been thoroughly discussed during the last meetings of the Board of Trustees.
17. This all brings us to the students, the end beneficiary of quality higher education, and how we can contribute in developing their personality on the levels of culture, administration, university and life. For this purpose, faculties have actively sought to review their programs. Since late last year, the University has adopted a new map, which has doubled the number of general requirement courses, including for instance, a course on civic engagement, in addition to the campaign "I am USEK... and proud to be." The University rejoices in the prizes won lately by its students in their various specializations or extracurricular university activities, such as sports. It also rejoices in the growing number of USEK students who are enrolled in European

or American universities and who communicate with major universities and faculties with whom our university has concluded special cooperation agreements.

18. The Green Committee has been created this year to emphasize the policy adopted by the University for years.
19. The University is still growing in terms of construction, especially thanks to its generous benefactors. In November 2015, we inaugurated the Faculty of Business and Commercial Sciences' Dealing Room, the equipment costs of which were donated by Dr. Salim Sfeir, Bank of Beirut CEO. His generosity extended way beyond this donation: a few days ago, we inaugurated the Salim G. Sfeir Building following extensive renovation with the addition of a new floor housing the administrative offices of the Faculty of Business and Commercial Sciences. Furthermore, the Board of Trustees discussed in its latest meeting the means to build a major sports complex on campus. I would also like to highlight USEK's interest in making its campus accessible to all, and this includes people with disabilities.
20. While we undertake all this work, we remain aware of the challenges around us, especially the current situation in the Middle East and worldwide. However, we move forward fearlessly, as we believe in the Master of History and we know that the good we have sown in our environment will be enriching for us, for our environment and for the whole world. We are happy to be located in Lebanon, and we will keep on working for the good of this country and the world.
21. I conclude the list of strategies with the new governance system, which was adopted in the University and has already started to bear fruit. I am hereby referring to the creation of USEK's first Board of Trustees in the summer of 2015, having finalized the University's

new bylaws about a year ago. The Board of Trustees members are: Elias Ayoub, George Altirs, Bassam Deeb, Marwan Kheireddine, Anthony Asher, Salim Sfeir, Fady Chamoun, Pierre Chelala, Ray Lahood, Charles Hage, Ziad Hayek, Shadi Karam, Therese Antone, Joseph Saliba, Thomas Sabbagh, James Gaffney and William Clements. The USEK President is also a member of the Board.

I have listed all the names for two reasons: first, it is the first Board of Trustees in the history of the University; and second, because these people are exceptional, both individually and collectively, and USEK considers it wonderful that it met them on its way. These are great people, each in their respective worlds, be they business people or university officials, and each with extensive experience. They have accepted to become trustees for the University, for they believe in noble causes. They have dedicated their precious time, energy and impetus for the benefit of USEK. The Board of Trustees held its first meeting on October 2, 2015 in the New York offices of Dr. George Altirs, during which it elected Dr. Elias Ayoub as Chair, Dr. George Altirs as Vice-Chair and Dr. Bassam Deeb as Secretary. Each trustee is in charge of one of the several committees created to manage the various university sectors. The second meeting of the Board was held on January 30, 2016. This week the Board members have come to Lebanon, mostly from the United States, and have held consecutive meetings over two days during which they have met with many senior USEK officials, including vice presidents, deputy presidents, deans, directors, and administrative officials. On a parallel track, the Holy Spirit University Foundation in the United States, headed by Mr. Fady Chamoun, is making concerted efforts to provide the University with the support it needs in the United States. We cannot thank the Board of Trustees and the Holy Spirit University Foundation enough. We cannot but address our heartfelt thanks for each and every one of them for all they are doing. A thousand thanks then not only for their influence on the University, but also for their

devotion, which is changing some perceptions of the University. In so doing, they are proving that USEK is about the common good and that the common good should be served as a priority to ensure the success of every individual and of society.

The Board of Trustees undertook huge practical steps for the benefit of USEK, on many levels. I am so confident that the basis of a solid working principle will allow the University to go on its way with speedy and substantial progress thanks to the tireless efforts, the general orientation and the active, practical and material support of this Board.

22. In this particular context, I would like to thank Most Reverend Father Abbot Tannous Nehme, Superior General of the Lebanese Maronite Order and Chancellor of USEK, for the paternal concern he bestows upon the University and for accepting to adopt the new draft bylaws and to submit them to the General Council of the Lebanese Maronite Order. With each passing day, I become increasingly aware of the importance of his benevolent and loving presence at the helm of our Order at this particular juncture of its way. I would also like to thank the Reverend Fathers assistants general, who hold the University dear, for granting their approval to the new University bylaws.

Last Saturday, Dr. Elias Ayoub was the main speaker at the graduation ceremony of the students of the Saint Anthony High School, which is affiliated to our Order. Dr. Ayoub, a Hammana native and alumnus of this school, has provided the most substantial share of a donation to establish a language lab in the school. I bring this up to thank him once again for who he is and for the tremendous amount of good he is doing for the Order and the University. Indeed, he has opened the door to the United States for USEK and introduced it to many kind-hearted benefactors who believe in noble causes. Yet, my purpose here is also to highlight the importance of the University's affiliation to its mother, the Lebanese Maronite Order,

the Order of Saints Charbel, Rafqa, Neemtallah, Estephan and many others, the Order of monasteries and institutions in Lebanon and in many countries of the diaspora. It is the Baladite Order, one that has made its country's name a part of its own. This is why many people feel spiritually affiliated to it, because they find in it elements of their own identity and nostalgia for the traditions they grew up with. This is what drives many people to stand by the Order and its institutions, including the University. The Lebanese Maronite Order established USEK, hence the fact that it acts as a guarantee allowing the University to go steadfastly on its Way.

23. I have listed all this work and these achievements, for thankful thoughts and for a look.

Thankful thoughts for all those who are striving to ensure the growth of the University, all faculty, administrative staff, employees, students and officials, and all those who are in touch with it and who believe in its noble cause.

A look at the University's way, through the long and broad Way. The University is achieving "evolution in continuity" and is on a permanent quest for success and excellence. It knows that success is linked to intelligence, perceptiveness and sound administration. However, it also knows that the success story in this world is, first and foremost, a story of a spirit or of a heart, cherishing the beautiful truth, vibrating with life, dynamism and joy, and seeking the long and broad Way, that is filled with quiet and serenity. This success story is the story of the Way, the Truth and the Life. It is a look, from above, on our University which journeys, journeys, and journeys, since it is "the University of the Spirit and the Way."