

## Welcome Dies Natalis 2022

Henk Kummeling, Rector Magnificus Utrecht University

Mr Ambassador, colleagues, students, all present here in the Domchurch, and all those who with us today through a live stream especially Willemijn Os,

Welcome to the Dies Natalis of Utrecht University . And a special welcome to our international guests, particularly to our Honorary Doctors, Professor Joao Mano and Baroness Minouche Shafik. We are delighted to have you in our midst.

We are here together at a grim time.

On the one hand, it is wonderful that we can meet each other in person again, after two years of corona, that have taken a heavy toll.

On the other hand, our thoughts are with the indescribable suffering caused by Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine.

Our keynote speech today by Prof. Jim van Os is about psychological suffering. Every time I see images from Ukraine, I realise how much destruction and pain is being caused at the moment, and at the same time, it is almost unimaginable how much trauma this will mean *for the future*.

Colleagues of Professor van Os, Professor Durston's labelling group of the strategic theme Dynamics of Youth, want to bring the issue of psychological suffering out into the open.

That's why they asked Florentijn Hofman to design the artwork on the Domplein that you just walked past.

The ColourCross is meant to make us think about what we see, think and feel - and also to collect data. The message is that the boundary between 'normal' and 'abnormal' is less clear than you might think, when it comes to perception, the way we experience the world, and also the psychological suffering that can induce.

It shows that we all are vulnerable, as human beings.

But if we are aware of this, if we fully face reality, and allow ourselves to be touched by what is happening, then vulnerability also contains great strength. It is then, that we can truly connect.

And can respond effectively to what a situation asks of us.

What is asked of us at this moment is that we care for the people affected by the war. That we take a stand and show solidarity. First of all with people from Ukraine, who are fighting so courageously for their country and freedom. Or who suddenly became refugees. We stand with Ukraine.

But *also* with citizens of Russia who stand up against the Russian regime, and suffer from its actions.

Today we raised the international peace flag instead of our university flag on the academic hall. At our university we have students and staff from both Ukraine, and Russia and Belarus. We help them as much as we can, and we see fellow students and colleagues reaching out to them, which is crucial. For financial support, we use our university's emergency fund . And because not all costs can be financed from this source, the Utrecht University Fund is conducting a crowdfunding campaign , which I highly recommend.

The Dutch universities have severed their ties with Russian institutions. We did so with pain in our hearts. Because we believe in the power of academic exchange and connection. That is what is needed. Needed to tackle climate problems, to eradicate poverty and also to counter autocrats. We as scientists and scholars have a role to play in interpreting what is happening now.

We as academics have a role to play in interpreting what is happening now. Internationally, and in The Netherlands. And I am proud to see that a number of our scientists and scholars are very active, providing valuable insights. They are actively strengthening the societal and political debate with knowledge.

Unfortunately, a number of rectors of Russian universities have defended Putin and his war. But this hasn't stopped individual staff members to criticise the war at great personal risk. Some parents of Russian students in Utrecht were arrested for this. It is our duty to also support these students and individual academics. And we will do everything in our power to help academics that flee the violence in Ukraine.

Because we believe in cooperation across borders. In curious collaboration. Between people, between countries, between social partners. Like scientists did a fortnight ago, when they immediately drew up a lesson plan for colleagues at primary and secondary schools on how to discuss the crisis in Ukraine in their classrooms. Because there, too, the impact is great.

Dear all,

Connection, and curious collaboration across borders. That is the thread that runs through this Dies Natalis. We will see examples from both the fields of research and education.

In keeping with the theme of this day, Curious Collaboration, I am pleased to announce that today we will also launch the new U-Collaborate in Education portal today. This portal inspires, connects and facilitates transdisciplinary education at Utrecht University. For by working together with civil society organisations and businesses on solutions to complex problems, UU adds value to society.

With these thoughts and messages I wish you all an inspiring Dies Ceremony.