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## Conclusions and Proposals



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# **In the Midst of a Complex World, an Interior Path**

## **Introduction**

The Society of the Sacred Heart strives to respond to the challenges facing education in today's reality. A collective community effort took place at the V International Conference of Directors of Schools of the Society of the Sacred Heart, held in Mexico City in October 2015, a meeting space that links us and prompts us to promote a global transformation through our educational mission.

Since the founding of the Society of the Sacred Heart, Madeleine Sophie Barat saw education as a means to communicate the love of the Heart of Jesus, because in Him is the source of growth in each person and the path of reconciliation for all. The Religious of the Sacred Heart have endorsed that desire, encouraging each person to be open to the truth, love and freedom; discovering the meaning of their life and service to others; collaborating creatively in the transformation of the world and experiencing the love of Jesus and engagement in active faith.

That is why the celebration of the Fifth International Conference was centered around the essence of educational vocation, and themed, "BEFORE THE COMPLEXITY OF THE WORLD, A PATH OF INTERIORITY". We were invited to look in depth at the complex reality we live in, a globalized world that changed our way of being, of understanding, of acting and thinking ... that has changed the understanding of what it is to be human.

Faced with a reality that fragments and exposes youth to vulnerabilities that put all of humanity at risk, three essential dimensions and mutually linked formative proposals were addressed at the International Conference: the mystical dimension that leads us to seek the depths of the mystery and interiority, to give depth and meaning to life; the ethical dimension that leads us to recognize the sacredness in others and seek to be the face of God's mercy in the world; and the ecological dimension that leads us to recognize the sanctity of the earth and the fostering of living simply.

This working document raises a number of recommendations provided by the different conferences and the work of reflection, analysis and proposal at each work-table, which can give light and responds to the challenges that each institution faces in everyday life. What we present below cannot be assumed conclusively, but as a starting point to generate new processes of reflection in our schools. We hope that it will help us develop an awareness and a contemplative look that enables us to feel the mystery that lives within us and lead us to the unraveling of the gift we have received.

## **Young people and social reality**

Each day in our role as Educators of the Sacred Heart we touch the future as we look into the faces of our students. In Mexico, we spent our days working together across cultures, languages and educational systems united in the conviction that we are called to form global citizens whose compassion is rooted in the experience of interiority.

Responding to this call from the Spirit is not easy given many young people's *uninhibited contempt for authority* as well as their multi-connections and their way of being physically present without really being present. (Juan Luis Hernandez) We find ourselves sometimes the recipients of these attitudes, and yet, we understand young people because we are not indifferent to the reality in which they find themselves. We are challenged to our very core by the same realities of violence, poverty and depravation. We see the consequences of corruption, war and addiction. We experience the pain imposed on people through indifference and intolerance. This "contempt" contains an element of hope is so far as it provides young people with an opening to seeing the necessity of a different reality, one marked by hope. This intuition plants the seed of desire to work for transformation.

As leaders within the Family of the Sacred Heart we resonated with Juan Luis Hernandez as he spoke of an educational praxis that sees students as "the future fighters for the defense and care of humanity". Like us, he sees youth as a transforming force. He urged us to create environments in which "...the inner flame (of our students) may grow, an inner flame that will passionately intervene in reality." He shared with us his hope for "*the murmur of the Spirit so that...*

*...the Lord continues walking in our history and that, illuminated by our situated and transforming education, youth who have had the fortune of being linked to ourselves or our schools, one day give thanks to God the Father for having grown among us and for having discovered the beauty of its existence in the experience with others."*

## **Why speak of interiority and contemplation?**

The very young people with whom we work daily will be faced with making strategic decisions not simply for themselves but for the peoples of the globe. The more we considered the realities of the world and the profound challenges youth face, our deeper question became... "in what way are we igniting the flame of hope first set by Sophie who envisioned "a world without frontiers in which all people enjoy freedom and equal rights"? (Pilar Cardo, RSCJ). Were Sophie alive today and facing our realities, what would she do? What type of interventions and transformations might she initiate?

We grappled with these questions united in our identity as Educators of the Sacred Heart. Pilar Cardo, RSCJ, described this oneness as our being “the Great Family of the Sacred Heart, holders of the spirituality of the Open Heart of Christ.” Attentiveness to this open heart is a call to.... “contemplate the Heart of Jesus through the pierced heart of humanity” is at the core of who we are as educators. Our choice of this vocation is rooted in reality. It is never passive. “This open heart shows us the situation of the torn, broken Body of Christ in the entire Humankind.” We who educate within the Family of the Sacred Heart are called to contemplation.

Each recognized the truth in Pilar’s insights about contemplation:

*The place for contemplation is simply the heart of the world and it is precisely there where we discover the Heart of God, the heartbeat of God in Humanity. It is there where we capture the life of God on earth and life of the earth in God; it is where his wounds and his wealth is shown to us: the different cultures and lifestyles, the diverse manifestations of God himself, in multiple ways and languages, to all human lineage. From there, we may capture the presence and action of the Spirit everywhere.”*

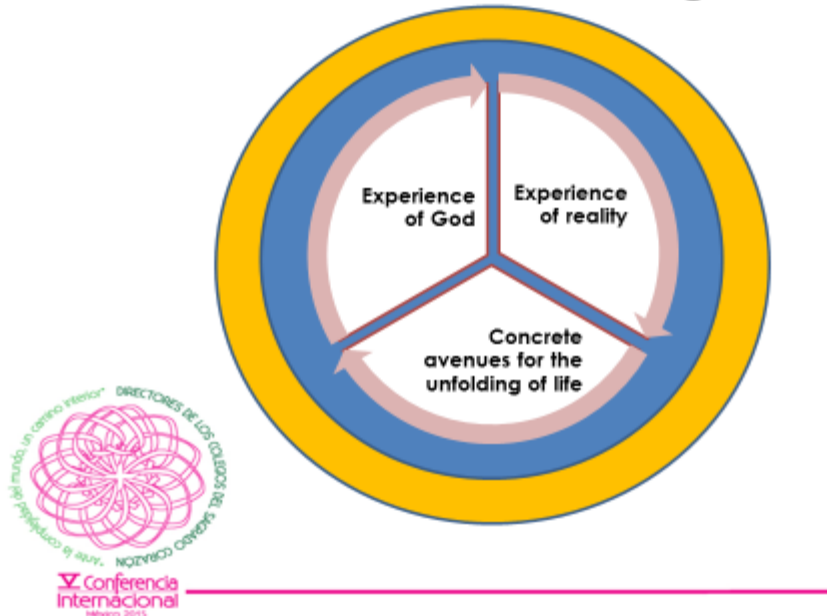
The responsibility of being Sophie’s spiritual heirs compelled us to examine both our philosophy of education and our pedagogical practices. To what are we forming youth? For what end are we educating young people? How and why are we educating as we do?

Our educational praxis in which reality plays a significant role and in which the quality of relationships is the currency through which all experience being valued spoke to us of Sophie’s vision of education. Listening to Mariola Lopez, RSCJ explain that Sophie taught by “contagion” affirmed in us our conviction that we educate through who we are and how we are with others.

### **A charism for transformation**

We desire to demonstrate a contemplative sensitivity and receptivity to God as manifest in all of creation and the courage to walk in light of what we know to be true given our experience of God. We want to be the educators whose presence transforms the young people with whom we have been entrusted.

## Charism: An encounter among



### **The fundamental role of educators**

Mariola Lopez, RSCJ, called us to live lives of prayer and presence as Sacred Heart Educators so that the young people with whom we work and educate “catch” the attitudes of heart that enable them to see the “light in the other”, and thereby, are capable of working for transformation. Education in the tradition of Sophie and all who have gone before us is... “a path of humanization.” (Lopez)

As Educators of the Sacred Heart we attend to the “whole’ of the person as we accompany them and attempt to form them for their futures. This work of education is a shaping of mind, heart and will. Ideally we like Sophie and Janet Stuart, RSCJ, try to see what inspires and moves our students. We...

*“shape their hearts well, ...waking and channeling this integrating center where life gathers and expands; prepare them for sound relations and start them on the road of this First relation which makes all the others capable of being woven with honesty and beauty... we teach them to situate Jesus in the first place, get them use to taking Him everywhere... at least by the trend of the heart.” (Lopez)*

Considering the notion *trend of the heart* led us to probe more deeply our understanding of education as a means for transformation both of the individual and of whole, the community, the family, the globe. To engage in Sacred Heart education necessitates silence, contemplation, interiority. Only with these habits of the heart, mind and will can we hear the murmur of the Holy Spirit and nurture the inner flame of our students.

As our time together evolved and we struggled with the implications of the challenges our speakers offered, we were more and more conscious of a choice laid before us. We chose to be educators in whom students saw “...faces that live what they say; ...that show young people to trust in life, despite being fully conscious of the sorrows of our times; and which give them reasons for loving and caring for life.” (Lopez)

## **ELEMENTS FOR OUR EDUCATIVE WORK**

We want our students to be the best *for* the world, not just the best in the world. Committed fully to educating the best for humanity, we strive to develop nourishing educational framework focused on transformation. Fundamental to this framework are certain characteristics:

- Students become decision-makers and people of discernment;
- Educational Model focuses on the individual in the context of the community;
- Social Commitment borne from Interiority;
- Critical, hopeful view of reality;
- Incarnational Spirituality;
- The Building of Community;
- The atmosphere of the learning environment is infused by silence;
- The school culture and climate are informed by decisions and actions taken in accord with Gospel Values.

### **Decision Making and Discernment**

As the architects of the future, young people will make the strategic decisions that will affect humanity. Essential to their formation, to their education as decisions makers is *discernment*.

At every level of our education from the youngest to the oldest, we want to ensure that the young are encouraged to make decisions that favor life. We hope to accompany them in such a way that they believe they have authority - the right and responsibility to influence the quality of the future through their decisions.

In thinking of the youth as decision makers, we spoke of the significance of them learning to respect their own and others' autonomy. We see that given the pressures of the internet, the constant noise with which the young live, and the identification with self-referencing groups that we hope to help the young learn that each of them has the capacity as a rational individual to make informed, un-coerced decisions. Genuine autonomy is rooted in freedom. We want to help

our students to discover within their own hearts the freedom to be whom God imagines and hopes them to become. This perspective is essential to growth in confidence and self-esteem.

Autonomy, confidence, courage and self-esteem are the fruit of pausing and reflecting on one's experience and actions. Reflection can lead to discernment, the capacity to judge well. Discernment is the ability to perceive truth by going beyond mere perception to assessing value inherent in the idea or action. It begins in silence and listening.

Training in discernment necessitates offering students within the experiences of their schools the opportunities to be authors of change. Such empowerment will promote social responsibility. Reflection on their effectiveness as change agents will help young people enhance their skill as decision makers rooted in discernment.

Discernment within the tradition of the Sacred Heart opens one's heart to Christ. We hope that through our very lives the youth might come to know Christ. We want them to deepen their knowledge of Christ as discovered through the scriptures and all of creation so that the attitudes of Christ's Heart might become their ethical compass point. Equipped with the attitudes of Christ's Heart, the young will be effective agents of transformation. They will navigate and make decisions that favor life.

### **Educational Model Focus on the Individual in the Context of the Community**

Ideally our educational model is one which has relationships at the heart of all activity and thinking. We focus on the individual in the context of the community. This dynamic creates a tension which promotes the mutual growth of both the individual and the community.

Relationships within the Sacred Heart culture serve as the currency for mutual respect and care. Our energy is spent in *forming the heart*. We realize that the capacity of youth to be open to the world is fueled by their compassion, love, forgiveness and generosity. Attending to developing these attitudes of heart calls for a strong program in both critical thinking and empathy.

Much of our work is building towards sensitivity to live with an openness to God, to others and to the natural world. In this way a model of education that is rooted in relationships is closely aligned with forming decision makers who are people of discernment.

We hope that through our pedagogical practices and through our programs that the young recognize in the depth of relationships the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. This recognition is the fruit of discernment. Discernment helps



youth attune their hearts to the heartbeat of the world, to its people and to all of creation. Discernment and relationships lead the young to make strong social commitments.

### **Social Commitment borne from Interiority**

Experiences within the school community ideally help youth experience mutual and genuine respect for themselves and for one another. As they reflect on their experiences and as they effectively engage in change within their own communities, young people discover the attractiveness or pull of serving others, especially those who are marginalized, who are vulnerable, who are poor, who are on the edge. Working with others pulls the students from their own communities to communities outside of their schools. The experience within the school community points outward to the reality of the global community. There the youth experience opportunities that are essentially encounters with the woundedness of humanity and with the brokenness of our common home.

These experiences move students from social awareness to social action. Consciousness of the radical needs of others compel the youth to choosing to be agents of transformation. This work for constructive social change becomes an act of collaboration. Such collaboration advances our own humanization if time is given for quiet reflection on the experience. (Cardo)

Time and space used for such reflection allow the individual to develop interiority. We believe that interiority is “a condition for being a person, for being human.” (Cardo) We have seen that social awareness rooted in interiority... “enables us to invigorate our presence in the world.” (Lopez) Interiority genuinely enriches life by contributing to our being human. Interiority untied with discernment enables all to develop a critical and hope-filled view of reality. As Educators of the Sacred Heart we hope to consider how to provide time and space necessary to nourish interiority.

### **Critical and hopeful view of reality**

We believe that the quality of the future depends on the choices that will be made by the young people with whom we are now working. It is essential that they are critical thinkers so that they can handle increasing complexity as they navigate a future of complex global change. We know that Sophie believed that faith needs to be informed in order to be active. To develop a critical and hope-filled view of reality requires an education of both the heart *and* the mind.

We want programs in the schools and institutions to be rooted in reality so that the young develop their capacities to reflect, analyze and synthesize knowledge and experience as part of their education to social responsibility. Exposure to

the brokenness of humanity and creation without formation in interiority is not sufficient if the end is social transformation. We are looking to help the young develop an alternative ethic to the hegemonic model. Significant to this ethic is *hope*.

### **Incarnational Spirituality Informs Sacred Heart Educational Philosophy**

As we re-envisioned our practice as educators, we determined that the attitudes of heart inherent in people of discernment and the habits of mind essential to persons who think critically are essentially the attitudes and habits of Christ's heart and mind. We hope to form young people who contemplate the wounded world through the eyes of Jesus so that the transformation which they effect is one that builds the Body of Christ. We recognize that our educational philosophy is rooted in the Incarnation.

Characteristic to the Family of the Sacred Heart is that our learning communities and our institutions are Christ centered. The legacy of Sophie is that we hold the spirituality of the Open Heart of Jesus. "This is a gift received," and one that is to be shared with all. It is clear that at the core of our vocation as Educators of the Sacred Heart is the call to... 'contemplate the Heart of Jesus through the pierced heart of humanity'. This path is not passive. It is demanding. "This open heart shows us...

*the situation of the torn, broken Body of Christ in the entire Humankind; thus, looking at reality in all its depth enables us to discover the Mystery that inhabits it and captures the identification of the Heart, in the same heart of the world."*  
(Cardo quoting Arana)

Faith informs all our actions within our learning communities and institutions. This Incarnated Spirituality rooted in reality forms the bedrock of our perspective as Sacred Heart Educators. We appreciate the advantage we have as a post Easter people who have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Attentiveness to the murmuring of the Spirit dwelling within opens our hearts to Christ who points us to God, the Creator. Faith in God, faith in Christ and faith in the Holy Spirit inform the culture and ambience of our schools. Nourishing daily life, this faith sends us forward into the world to serve the people of God, especially those most vulnerable and at risk. It is this connection to the world that informs our educational practices.

This vibrant connection to the world nurtured by our desire to be like Christ encourages us to respect a diversity of beliefs because we know the Spirit dwells within all humanity and all of creation.

## **Building of Community**

We recognize the dignity of each person because we believe that each is created in the image and likeness of God. The Spirit dwells within each person urging us to attend to the quality of relationships both within our institutions, our places of ministry, our communities, and our families. Attentiveness to the Spirit presumes a depth to the commitment to relationships.

This commitment to relationships infuses our actions. The building of community becomes an absolute priority. Institutional and school cultures rooted in the building of community serves as means of accompaniment with the young people with whom we work daily. In these communities and through these relationships they experience a tangible inclusivity that values sociocultural diversity. Within this atmosphere the young people taste firsthand the impact of being valued and respected for who they are. Equally important they are called to treat others with the view that everyone's dignity must be honored. As community members experience depth of mutual respect, each member develops the attitudes of heart and habits of mind essential to becoming a compassionate decision maker focused on transformation.

## **Silence as Time, Space and Consciousness**

We know from our own lives and the meeting in Mexico that silence enriches life. As we reflected on these experiences, we came to define silence in terms of time, space and consciousness. When speaking of *time* with these dimensions, we referred to it as *espacio*. The space that is created by structuring in the time for silence allows the possibility to encounter the Holy Spirit. This encounter allows us to experience ourselves as being under the gaze of God. Seeing ourselves as God does gives us the courage and confidence to be our authentic selves. So too young people can encounter the Holy Spirit and experience themselves as God's Beloved. We sense a responsibility to create and protect certain daily spaces for silence for ourselves, for our colleagues and for the young people whom we serve. (Lopez) These spaces are essential to learn the language of the heart both our own and God's.

As heirs to Sophie's vision, we are called to practice *espacio* and to allow silence to breathe into us a deepened capacity to listen to the murmuring of the Holy Spirit. In this way silence becomes a way of inwardness and contemplation.

Listening that begins in silence supports the young people in their journey towards freedom because they come to hear God's voice within their hearts. The youth are then free to respond. Any education that leads to transformation must begin in silence so that the transformation may have integrity. Structuring silence into our daily lives enables us to be true to our heritage as Sacred Heart Educators. In and through silence we develop the capacity to discern the

essential from the non-essential. Silence is required if we and our students are to grow in the inner life. Listening in silence allows our hearts to be inhabited by the Transcendent One.

### **School Ambience Infused by Gospel Values**

School cultures shaped by silence, interiority, community and reality are focused on truth. Essential to truth is the conviction that Christ is present among and within the community. The act of declaring the continued presence of Christ in our midst is audacious given the current violence, intolerance and poverty of our world. Our willingness to declare this truth connects us strongly to Sophie's charism. Sophie would urge us to "...discover and express the love of God in the wounded heart of humanity."

In our work with young people we touch the face of the future. In Mexico we spoke of the necessity that our vision of the future be informed by our relationship with Christ. If we are to be true to Sophie, we want to educate young people to be ... "the leaders who, from their faith in the love of God expressed in the pierced heart of Jesus, are capable of influencing the weaving of a different society." (Zubiría)

Transforming society, building the Kingdom of God, securing the marginalized voice and opportunity reflect an active, informed commitment to the values of the Gospel. If the young are to catch from us an appreciation of these values and if they are to catch Christ's attitudes and habits, the climate of our institutions has to be characterized by the Gospel. Such a climate is demonstrated in and through the decisions and actions made within these institutions. Young people nurtured in such climates learn to operate in the midst of the world with the heart and mind of Christ.

We want our schools and institutions to be beautiful, harmonious, warm spaces that arouse sensitivity to Mystery. Integrating *espacio* into the fabric of our institutions, communities, and work places is essential if we are to educate to astonishment. (Lopez) We want the students to experience Mystery so that they may see God in all of creation. As heirs to Sophie, we are called to *educate to astonishment*. (Lopez) In astonishment we find the seeds for hope and this is the greatest gift we can give the young people entrusted to us.

These characteristics seem to us to be significant and important to integrate into our examination of our own educational practices. All of us entered the final day in Mexico filled with the desire to be Keepers of the Flame, the flame first ignited in Sophie's heart by Christ, the flame that inspired all who have come before us, the flame that burns within each of us and the flame we believe burns in the hearts of young people. Like Sophie we dream of a future in which all of creation is honored and breathes with the freedom of the Spirit. We see a world in which

the humanity of each person is celebrated and in which all live in honor and dignity.

### **Some strategies, tools and actions to form interiority**

- Creation of spaces for silence and prayer.
  - o With silence, offering strategies and a guide for students to navigate their emotions and feelings.
  - o A holistic vision of the person.
- Significant experiences awaken and deepen the charism within the students.
  - o Encourage reflection about what they are learning (in these experiences, in classes, etc.).
- Relationship between the interior life and service to others
  - o Prepare for the experience, reflect on it afterward, follow-up...
- Interweave or integrate spirituality into the life of the whole school
  - o As a connection with parents.
- Foster youth leadership in serving others, prayer, liturgy.... Letting them create, design, prepare, coordinate...

There have to be facilitators of this process toward an interior life for students.

This presupposes:

- o Spiritual formation for the adults, teachers, that gives them the tools to accompany the students.
- o Broaden the definition of what is contemplation... this may help more people identify with what is being offered

Sharing our experiences, we valued especially:

- The experience of God in a variety of ways
- The integrity of creation as social ecology
- The involvement of parents
- Integrate science and faith
- Identify common social issues which we can respond together
- The integration of “interiority” into the curriculum.
- Working with the students the meaning of life (and what they see as meaning)
- Respect for religious diversity. (beliefs, practices, etc.).

### **Proposed Actions:**

- Review and critique the educational model we use.
- Review the formation to an interior life at the curricular level

## **Our Sacred Commitment**

We are united in the conviction that we are called to form global citizens whose compassion is rooted in the experience of interiority. We want to educate our students to be the best *for* the world. We recognize wonder and hope in our young people. We want to encourage them in their path forward towards humanization. We hope to create cultures in our institutions in which interiority may be developed simultaneously with critical thinking, compassion and faith. We are committed to educating to *astonishment* so that young people may encounter Mystery. In this moment and experience, we sense that the young will come to see themselves as God does-fully alive imbued with Christ's Spirit. We know young people are endowed by grace. We have complete confidence in their capacity to be inspired agents of transformation.

Young people are our priority; they carry the seeds of the future. As we move forward, we hope to be inspired by Sophie's charism. At the heart of this charism is the encounter among our experience of God, our experience of reality and our participation in the unfolding of life. We ask God to inspire us to educate youth so that the flame within their hearts might be inflamed and nurtured by the same fire as Christ brought. May we join the young and take this Fire of Christ's love into the world as we move forward.