

# **Model**

**Educational Institutions**

**of the**

**School Sisters of Notre Dame**

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# Foreword

In this time of radical change and general insecurity, we School Sisters of Notre Dame follow with renewed consciousness the founding mission of Mary Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger. With courage and determination, she faced the challenges of her times. The essential characteristics of her mission are our program today and our standard for the future. They also form the basis of this model for our educational institutions.

Our foundress saw as her foremost life mission the holistic Christian education of girls and young women. With her approach to education, she was a pioneer for the Bavarian school system in the nineteenth century. This was given public recognition through her induction into the Valhalla in 1998.

With our colleagues today, we also face the great demand for competent training, holistic education, and Christian direction for life. May this model help us to “enable young people to reach the fullness of their potential as individuals created in God’s image and assist them to direct their gifts toward building the earth” (Rule of Life, *You Are Sent*).

I sincerely thank Professor Peter Beer and all who worked on the drawing up of this model. May God bless all those who will now put it into practice in the day-to-day realities of education.

Munich, May 5, 2007



M. Salome Strasser  
Provincial Leader of the Bavarian Province  
School Sisters of Notre Dame

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# Preamble

Ever since Mary Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger founded the religious congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in 1833, it has been committed to the education and formation of young people.

Our state-recognized institutions meet universally accepted standards of quality. Together with our colleagues, we foster talents in a well-directed manner. We promote the willingness to learn and achieve, strong social competence, and a sense of responsibility.

In our pluralistic society, our imparting of values is geared toward the Christian image of the world and its people. We are attentive to the dignity of the individual, accompany the process of personal development, value good relationships, pursue dialogue on critical issues with faith and commitment, and sharpen our awareness of the challenges of the times.

In carrying out the mission of our foundress, we focus on:

- Responsible stewardship of creation
- Education that treats both sexes fairly
- Dialogue between religions and cultures
- Concern for disadvantaged persons

# **Educational Standards**

## **Children and Youth at the Center**

Children, youth, and young women are at the center of all the educational opportunities that we offer. We want to strengthen them for life by enabling them to discover their potential, develop their own unique strengths and powers, obtain the competence needed in the social context, and cope with the experience of failure.

## **Our Professional Self-Concept**

In our institutions, children, youth, and young adults follow a path of development together with us. We want to accompany them as qualified educational personnel. It is part of our professional self-concept to motivate young people for their own lives by treating them in an exemplary manner. In this context, collegial relationships with one another are important. Equally significant are a constant willingness to learn, the determination to continue learning in one's professional field, and a pronounced measure of open-mindedness, which will also enable us to learn from the children and young people.

## **Contemporary Methods and Materials**

Without dictating to children, youth, and young adults, or demanding too much of them, we stimulate individual activity suitable for one's development and help those with learning difficulties. By using contemporary games, teaching materials, and educational methods, we open up to them new horizons as they deal with their own world. Since individual enhanced subjects and/or school subjects help toward this endeavor, these subjects also enable holistic access to the world. For us this also means that our educational institutions are open to practical life surroundings in project-oriented and problem-solving learning to the extent possible. A part of this is the inclusion of the immediate life experiences of the children, youth, and young women, as well as constant contact with parents, partners in social institutions, local businesses, organizations,

and associations. When connecting life and learning, it is important to take into consideration the fundamental characteristics of our times. Since our society is based on many and diverse communications processes, both access to the media and its proficient and responsible use will become increasingly important in educational institutions.

Since our society considers itself a society of knowledge where the stock of knowledge constantly grows and is subject to continuous change, life long learning has great significance. In this context, much attention must be given to learning how to learn.

Demographic change shows us even more clearly than before that it is imperative for generations to live and work together. Practical steps toward cross-generational learning are an important contribution here. The plurality of our times leads to a new so-called “lack of clarity.” It is even more crucial now that our value orientation is firm. In this sense, we understand education not only as the acquisition of knowledge but also as the formation of character based on the occidental, Christian system of values.

### **Place in Society**

We maintain the place of our educational ministry within current social contexts. We affirm a principle of achievement that is appropriate to the children and young people in the sense of self-determined, energetic activity that can be described as being conditioned by the situation, brought further, and in various stages of development. At the same time, we emphasize that it is necessary to protect children and young people from being led astray from their purpose by social demands (e.g., in the world of work). In our institutions, we want to offer sufficient space where children can be children and young people can be young people, always in accordance with the characteristics of their age. In this sense, our faculties are important in the sharing by children and young people in plans for educational opportunities, in learning as a team that

appropriately includes everyone, in planning recreational activities together, and so forth.

## **Networking**

In line with our intent, we consider our educational opportunities that prepare children and young people for life as part of a greater network of beneficial services, assistance, and support. These extend from advising parents on raising their children to the close cooperation between the various educational institutions and the organization of special beneficial measures in both the social and educational fields. By this, we want to set a clear example of the flexibility needed to meet the needs of children, young people, and their families.

## **Our Profile**

Responsible for the young people entrusted to us, conscious of the Church's mission to proclaim the Good News, mindful of the tradition of our foundress, Mary Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, and in view of the challenges of our times, we have, in addition to universal standards, the following focal points in the educational work of our institutions:

- 1) Responsible stewardship of creation
- 2) Education that treats both sexes fairly
- 3) Dialogue between religions and cultures
- 4) Concern for disadvantaged persons

With many other people of good will, regardless of race, origin, skin color, sex, or religion, whom we appreciate as partners in our endeavors toward a good future, we are convinced that humanity can further develop only if it succeeds in attaining a balance between individual interests, universal needs, and the resulting necessary action. Fundamental here is the development in the educational process of a comprehensive system of values for the succeeding generation, which constantly takes as its theme the responsible stewardship of creation. In order to be consistent, this

must include living and working together with respect for peoples of different religions and cultures, dialogue with them, and endeavors toward the fair treatment of both sexes. In accordance with the conviction of a close personal relationship with God that is based on creation theology and results in the equality of all people, we are also concerned about all those who need our help, support, and assistance in a particular way. It is essential here to strengthen and practice sensitivity toward our neighbor and awareness of the many and diverse forms of discrimination.

### **1) Responsible Stewardship of Creation**

Despite the repeated experiences of the contradictions and difficulties of daily life, with joyful hearts and as a matter of principle, we can stand by the statement that life, the world, and everything that lives in it are good. This conviction is based on faith in God, who loves creation and who will not abandon it. God's creation is structured on this basic conviction and is not merely a product of chance that will disintegrate into nothing again someday. Since God's creation carries in itself the traces of its Creator, it takes us out of ourselves, prompts us to ask questions and to be amazed, and enables us to see beyond what can only be measured, weighed, and counted. God's creation is a gift that has been entrusted to us so that we can live with it attentively and thereby learn to understand ourselves better. In our educational institutions, we place great value on the practice of a sustainable life style and on the study of creation based on accepted perspectives of natural sciences, ethics, religion, and social and cultural humanities. Opportunities for positive experiences in nature are also valued.

### **2) Education That Treats Both Sexes Fairly**

In accordance with our faith, God created human beings as men and women. Even if men and women differ in their particular nature, they are still equal and enjoy equal rights. Access to all social areas must be equally open to men and women without denying differences in thinking, feeling, experiencing, and so forth. Differences enrich life together and

are not criteria for the distribution of social power. In our educational institutions, we want to give young people the opportunity to become conscious of their respective sexual identity, to develop and foster an appropriate life style, and to develop fields of activity that correspond to their feminine or masculine identity without deteriorating into an outdated role model that promotes various forms of hierarchical structures. In its educational institutions, our congregation as a living community of women wants to act as a model and thus initiate the development of a society in which the sexes are treated fairly.

### **3) Dialogue between Religions and Cultures**

We are convinced that everything about the origin and future of humankind, about the meaning and goal of this world, and about God and creation are expressed in an unparalleled manner in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Joined with this conviction is the firm determination to witness the hope, faith, and love of Christians. We want to enter into dialogue about this and share, not only with the members of our own faith community and culture, but also with those who belong to other religions, represent secular ideological positions, and/or have a cultural background that is more or less different from ours. Maxims for the resulting, many-sided dialogue are respect for the dignity of the person and freedom of conscience. Only then can we become better acquainted with each other, build up mutual trust, advance together on the path of recognizing the mysteries of our lives, and deepen our own convictions. In this context, special significance must be attached to those who attend and use our institutions but do not feel that they belong to one of the Christian Churches.

As a matter of course, we introduce other religions and worldviews to the children, youth, and young adults entrusted to us by, among other things, establishing live contacts with representatives of these religions and worldviews, presenting basic convictions, sharing responsibility for social projects, and promoting a celebrating community appropriate to the requirements of the respective educational institution.

#### **4) Concern for Disadvantaged Persons**

The model of Jesus' concern for the physical well-being, the mental health, and the spiritual growth of others makes us sensitive to the many and various forms of discrimination in our society. In addition to illness, handicaps, social exclusion, impoverishment, expulsion, and flight, there are, for example, the fundamental lack of attention and love, loss of meaning, and an increasing readiness for violence, which impede or even make it impossible for young people to grow up in a healthy manner. In contrast to this, we want to undertake something that will open up new opportunities for children and young people so that they will be able to lead an independent, happy adult life.

As women religious, our relinquishment of personal property increases the financial latitude for disadvantaged persons. The community of service with our employees creates synergy for the daily routine of teaching. Cooperation with out-of-school social services expands the amount of support that we can offer. The inclusion of pastoral ministers presents a clearer image of the connection between concern for disadvantaged persons and the spiritual life. Approaching local politicians and relevant public relations work create a positive consciousness in others. Within educational institutions, concern for disadvantaged persons is put into practice by faculty and children, youth, and young women working together, whereby practical help and the building up of social competence go hand in hand.