

A WAY TO THE FUTURE

Directions for SSND Education



The work of the International Education
Seminar of the School Sisters of Notre Dame
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Dear Reader,

School Sisters of Notre Dame have been educators in many countries for many years. Now, over 150 years after Blessed Mary Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger founded our congregation, the School Sisters of Notre Dame throughout the world have considered together again "Theresa's Founding Vision: Grace and Challenge." We did this in order to determine anew what our charism, the contributions of the past, and the challenges of the present demand regarding future direction for our ministries. All our ministries are directed toward education. "For us, education means enabling persons to reach the fullness of their potential as individuals created in God's image and assisting them to direct their gifts toward building the earth." (Constitution, 22)

This paper, "A Way to the Future: Directions for SSND Education," is one tangible result of our common work regarding our ministry of education. We recognize this paper as simply another step on our way to the future. We trust it will call forth other creative responses as we and those with whom we collaborate, shape the future.

We invite you to read and reflect on this paper and to respond with us as together we, "like Mother Theresa . . . educate with the conviction that the world can be changed through the transformation of persons." (Constitution, 22) Let us continue to pray for and with one another. "Our union with God, (and) our love and prayer for those to whom we are sent . . . are fundamental to our ministry." (General Directory, 40)

Gratefully and prayerfully,

*S. Mary Margaret, SSND
and General Councilors*

Sister Mary Margaret Johanning, SSND
General Superior
and General Councilors

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PRELIMINARY REMARKS

In May, 1984, the general council of the School Sisters of Notre Dame invited two sisters from each province and region to an international seminar with the theme,

MOTHER THERESA'S FOUNDING VISION: GRACE AND CHALLENGE.

This seminar concerned itself with our ministry directed toward education,* and took place in two sessions in 1984 and 1986.

Between the two sessions, the topics of the seminar were discussed with the sisters in each province and region. Individual provinces and regions probed their understanding and living out of our mandate of education, and prepared a concensus statement of key contributions and challenges of their ministry.

The work of the provinces and regions helped to formulate the guidelines presented in this paper which respond to the goals of the second session of the international seminar:

- to clarify and raise consciousness of how we realize Mother Theresa's founding vision today;
- to bring together, on the international level, the experiences and results of dialogue in the provinces and regions;
- to develop guidelines which shed light on our ministry and are directed toward the future.

These seminar goals challenge us to ask the questions: who we are and who we are called to be as an educational congregation.

* "Education" is defined differently in different countries, but for School Sisters of Notre Dame, the vision and work of education has always included what Mother Theresa in her times and in her language expressed as "Erziehung and Unterricht" (literally translated into English as "instruction and moral/character development"). Both these aspects are also included in our common definition of education today: "For us, education means enabling persons to reach the fullness of their potential as individuals created in God's image and assisting them to direct their gifts toward building the earth." (Constitution, 22)

GRACE AND CHALLENGE

1. We, School Sisters of Notre Dame, form an international religious community within the church. A significant way in which we further the mission of Jesus Christ is through our ministry.
2. Our congregation was founded by Mother Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, a woman who recognized the needs of the human person and the signs of the times, discerned the will of God and responded whole-heartedly. Her vision and work in education influenced the educational and social system of the nineteenth century in the countries where her sisters served.
3. In light of her charism, we, too, read the signs of the times and respond to them through our ministry directed toward education. We take into account the possibilities and needs of each country or culture.
4. Following the example of our foundress, we work with youth, women, families, and the poor. Whether we serve in schools, parishes, or other educational settings, we know that we, as SSND educators can contribute to a positive change in society and to the building of a more just and peaceful world.

5. Mother Theresa founded our congregation which developed into an international community. Some essential characteristics of her vision of education and her openness to go beyond national boundaries shape our goals:
 - a. a sensitivity for human needs in a changing world, for the signs and the possibilities of the times, as well as for dialogue and collaboration within the church and with other institutions;
 - b. an orientation rooted in the gospel and the call of the church in different countries and cultures;
 - c. a readiness to become more effective in ministry and with others to accept responsibility for humanity and the whole of creation;
 - d. generosity and trust in God, despite diminishing resources, to take on new educational tasks as the need arises within countries or cultures;
 - e. struggle for unity within the congregation and for a common vision of education;
 - f. the endeavor, as an international community, to be a sign of peace and hope for the world.

6. Like Mother Theresa, we, too, need to know the conditions of the world. We live and work in societies
 - a. in which technology, pluralism, and rapid change have both positive and negative results; for example, dialogue and collabora-

tion; world-wide efforts toward justice and peace; and a global view; but also, consumerism and unemployment; stress, anonymity, and rejection of responsibility; decline of faith, loss of Christian values, and a lack of orientation in life;

- b. in which the steadily increasing imbalance between the powerful and the powerless, the rich and the poor continues to contribute to a violation of human rights, to hunger, illiteracy and hopelessness.
7. Mother Theresa shared in Christ's mission through her ministry, her prayer and suffering, and through her whole life and her death. We, too, want to be faithful to her spirituality in living as active apostolic women religious.
8. Through consideration of our ministry directed toward education, we recognize anew that Mother Theresa's charism, our charism, "continues to develop in the living community, which, enriched by the past, enables the congregation to unfold in the present and to be challenged by the future". (Constitution, Prologue)
9. Essential for our mission expressed in ministry are the gospel, the church, our charism and heritage, and YOU ARE SENT.

**DIRECTIONS
FOR SSND EDUCATION**

ACTIVE APOSTOLIC SPIRITUALITY

1. Like Mother Theresa we answer the gospel call to mission through active apostolic spirituality that challenges us to
 - a. base our lives on a personal relationship with Jesus;
 - b. contemplate the presence of God in the world;
 - c. be prayerfully involved in ministry;
 - d. strive for availability, flexibility, mobility in response to human needs;
 - e. adapt community living to the needs of the ministry;
 - f. integrate our prayer, ministry, and community life;
 - g. accept the paschal mystery in our lives and allow it to transform us;
 - h. appreciate our sisters' ministry of prayer and suffering.

2. We call ourselves
 - a. to probe the meaning of an active apostolic spirituality;
 - b. to determine the implications of an active apostolic spirituality for our community living and to make appropriate changes in order to be a more effective community in mission;

- c. to reflect periodically at the cultural and international levels on our corporate mission, life, and faith and to take appropriate action that will enable the charism to continue to develop;
- d. to re-evaluate our missioning processes in order to strengthen unity among ourselves as we are sent to respond to urgent needs.

EDUCATION

1. The diverse needs of today's society and the signs of the times call us as members of an international congregation to develop a world vision and a sense of global responsibility in ourselves and in others. We are convinced that we, and those with and for whom we serve, learn from one another, enrich one another and enable one another to grow.
2. The needs of our times require that we give serious consideration to the contributions of modern educational thought, theology, the social and natural sciences. Therefore, we renew our commitment to professional and continuing education in order to carry out our ministry effectively.
3. We are called personally and in collaboration with others
 - a. to examine critically social and cultural situations in light of their world-wide impact and to effect positive change where necessary and possible;

- b. to discuss significant topics, promote cultural interchange, and to respond to ministry needs among our provinces, regions, and at the international level;
 - c. to become more conscious of our global responsibility;
 - d. to use suitable media as an important source of information;
 - e. to use appropriate technological equipment wisely and as widely as possible in order to make our ministries more effective.
4. With others, we endeavor to develop a global vision
- a. by developing programs with a global perspective, appropriate to our respective ministries;
 - b. by encouraging the study of languages;
 - c. by furthering the understanding of and appreciation for other cultures and by making possible cross-cultural experiences;
 - d. by challenging ourselves and others to appreciate and to use the earth's resources responsibly;
 - e. by critiquing society and culture in light of the gospel in order to effect positive change in living conditions for all people;
 - f. by fostering a critical sense of the newest scientific research and technological devel-

opment and by responding out of a Christian vision.

5. Faithful to the charism of Mother Theresa, we are guided by a Christian view of the person and of the world.
 - a. We see persons as the image of God. Therefore, we share the Good News with all who are with us on our journey; in this experience, we mutually discover deeper meaning in our lives.
 - b. We help each person to develop as a unique individual and at the same time, to become a responsible member of society and to accept shared responsibility in the church and in the world.
 - c. We enable persons to develop holistically in a broken world by responding to basic human needs; we foster their emotional, social, intellectual growth and support their moral and religious development.
 - d. We see a new call to encourage people to shape leisure time meaningfully and to use it in creative ways which serve individuals and the community.
6. We are challenged to help each individual to live meaningfully and to use the positive elements of a pluralistic society
 - a. by enabling others to direct their lives anew toward Christian values in the spirit of the gospel;

- b. by developing Christian consciences that are able to grapple with diverse problems of life and that strive to resolve them;
 - c. by fostering personal and shared responsibility as well as critical thinking and decision making skills;
 - d. by strengthening skills in collaboration and dialogue;
 - e. by developing appropriate leadership skills;
 - f. by fostering the role of the laity and collaborating with them in carrying out the mission of Christ;
 - g. by promoting our charism among the laity in a way that is mutually enriching.
7. We continue to follow the example of Mother Theresa by serving primarily children and youth, women and families, the poor and the marginalized.
- a. We are challenged to reach out with openness to children and youth, who are often the most fragile members of society. We respond attentively and lovingly to their concerns that they may discover a sense of meaning in life and may go with hope into the future.
 - b. In accordance with our charism, we as women religious have a particular challenge to respond to the needs of women in society. Therefore, we address the causes of this problem, which often are rooted in society, and seek effective ways to help women discover their true identity and live as equal

members of society.

- c. We discover new ways to serve the family. We support the efforts of families to maintain unity and we also answer the needs which develop through the changing realities of family life.
- d. In solidarity with the poor, we demand of ourselves a simplicity of life style. We are called to adapt ourselves to the realities of the culture to which we are sent and to work with the poor to improve their living conditions wherever possible.

INTERNATIONALITY

As an international congregation we are called to be concerned with the whole world just as Mother Theresa was.

1. We strive to foster peace and justice through our attitudes and activities.
 - a. We inform ourselves about the political situation in our own country and in the entire world.
 - b. We search for ways to use our influence through direct action in issues that affect our lives and the lives of the people we serve.
 - c. We design a plan for peace and justice education at the provincial and regional levels, where possible.

2. Like Mother Theresa we accept new ministries and go to other cultures to spread the Good News.
 - a. We appreciate and insert ourselves into the cultures within which we minister, and are enriched by them.
 - b. We share our personnel as well as our intellectual, cultural and financial resources, where possible.
 - c. We learn other languages in order to understand other people and cultures better.
 - d. We have concern for the oppressed and marginalized whose human dignity is disregarded.
3. Growing interdependence characterizes our world today and requires us to
 - a. dialogue in light of the gospel on cultural, social, and political realities;
 - b. join others to find creative ways of building a more just and peaceful world, based on gospel values.

CONCLUSION

As we look toward the future and the challenges it brings, we affirm the conviction of our foundress that through education the person can be transformed and bring about the transformation of society. In her spirit we continue to express our mission through ministry directed toward education.

These guidelines provide a framework for this educational ministry. Implementation at all levels will lead us on a common way into the future. We move forward in a spirit of continual discernment, always ready to do what God tells us.