



International Solidarity Reflection

School Sisters of Notre Dame

Shalom

Education

May 2019

Introduction

“Both Mother Theresa and Mother Caroline understood the power of education to energize human beings, especially young women, assisting them to gain independence, to grow in self-esteem and personal freedom and, thus, to transform society. They recognized education as the tool enabling others to live with the dignity of beings created in God’s image. This core pedagogic principle greatly influenced the educational practices of that time. It also helped to lay the groundwork for a more holistic education which integrated instruction and character development.” (*Mirroring Our Charism: Reflections on Who We Are and What Transforms Our Life in Mission*, (2007), pg. 15)

Martin Luther emphasized that it is only through education that we discover our gifts and our calling, our individual vocation. That is, perhaps, the greatest purpose of education: to enable young people to discover their talents and interests, indeed their sense of purpose in the world. Childhood education should be designed so that it elicits knowledge of one’s gifts and calling. Higher education should be available to all who seek it, no matter what their socio-economic status. (Marilyn J. Harran, “Reflections on Martin Luther and Childhood Education”, *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, Volume 4, January 2004)

Nana Akuffo- Addo, current president in Ghana, is one of our most courageous and visionary presidents as he has introduced free senior high school. This policy gives the gift of education and includes all meals, school uniforms, boarding facilities, use of laboratories, and other student advantages. The highlighted themes of ACCESS, EQUITY and QUALITY education, underline the principles driving the policy to widen access to education.

The government is eager to ensure a fair and just society where there are equal opportunities for all, irrespective of family circumstances. However, implementation is affected by many challenges such as an inadequate boarding and classroom infrastructure. As a result, some schools have resorted to running a shift system to ease congestion in dormitories and classrooms. Students are divided into two groups: one group (named the green tract) comes to school for four months and then goes home for a break. The second group (gold tract) then comes to school. In the case of day students, if his/ her distance is far, parents need to rent a room for the student to live alone or with other day students. For the female students, this arrangement puts them at risk. Ten percent of the females in the first year student population are required to be day students while 20% of the male population must be day students.

Call to prayer

We educate, advocate and act in collaboration with others for the dignity of life and care of all creation. (YAS C9, 17: GD 19; Directional Statement, 24th General Chapter, Oct. 2017)

Experience

Elizabeth, a girl of fifteen years, is a form one student in Notre Dame Girls Senior High School. She lives with her aunt in a village called Kurosua No 2. Elizabeth joined her aunt when she was only five years old. Her aunt has ten children so Elizabeth is the eleventh child for whom the aunt provides. Elizabeth found it very difficult to make ends meet or even to take care of her personal needs and provide for her basic learning materials in school. However, she did manage to finish her elementary school education.

She explained that there were days she had to absent herself from school because she needed to join her aunt on the farm to work until the harvest was over. This enabled her to earn money to buy books. This absence from school obviously affected her performance in her classes. Elizabeth's aunt has great passion for education and really wants to see her niece educated, but she must labour long hours to provide the basic needs for her ten children and her niece.

Elizabeth was to report to school on the November 8, 2018 to begin the academic year for 2018/2019 free senior high school education. She could not report on the said date because her guardian could not afford the transportation money and other basic materials for her stay in school. She finally appeared in school with her aunt three months later, with a few items in her bag, a bar of soap and an unpre-scribed bedsheet. When she was asked why she reported late, she narrated her story.

On hearing her sad story, the school community took an interest in her and began to mobilize the materials she needed for her studies. One teacher had to shelter her until the items were purchased and then she was moved into the boarding house. One of the sisters took her story to the SSND community and shared it with them. They organized some items and reached out to her, promising support. Elizabeth had to change the study program that she had initially chosen due to the fact that she reported late for the program and would not be able to catch up.

Even though the government has made senior high school education free and accessible to all, Elizabeth's reality remains a challenge to her and students living in similar conditions. It is her desire and prayer that she will find the means to finish her education.

Reflection

Reflecting on Elizabeth's poverty, the thought arises that there are many other students in Ghana and throughout the world who are out of school because of poverty. Even though elementary school and senior high school may be free, many parents and guardians struggle to get the basic and essential materials for their wards so that they can be in school. The big question here is how can we reduce poverty in our society in order to help the poorest person in the tiniest village to attain formal education or even any formation that would help the human person attain his/ her potential in life. Blessed Theresa and Mother Caroline knew that education is a powerful and energizing tool that could empower the woman, uplifting her self-esteem and self-respect while potentially providing a better living for her and her family. May all continue to plead to God to open peoples' hearts to respond to daily life experiences that call all to eliminate poverty so that education may transform our world.

Action

- Take time and ponder what it means to be taken out of school because your parents cannot afford school fees or basic learning materials for you.
- Reach out to a poor community and support the needy children in that area.
- Pray for impoverished peoples of the world that they may be helped to overcome the challenges that are presented to them.

Closing prayer

Dear God, we know that resources are unevenly distributed and yet we acquire wealth for ourselves at the despair of the poor. Help us to listen to the voices that challenge us to commit our hearts to the service of God's people, God's poor. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

May God bless us all.