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Guide for Spiritan Education



From the beginning of the Spiritan Congregation, education works (formal and informal) have been both fundamental to the integral mission of evangelization and an important tool for transmitting our Spiritan identity and values. It is in the light of the evolving global circumstances and new missionary frontiers that recent General Chapters have called us as a family to be more proactive by way of examining and adapting the mission of the Congregation to the needs of our contemporary world. In this endeavour, the General Chapter of Maynooth reiterated the centrality of education in the Spiritan mission of evangelization today (cf. Maynooth 2.13 -2.16). Also the more recent General Chapter of Bagamoyo called us to

“renew once more our focus on education as a way to the integral liberation of individuals and peoples to whom we are sent” (Bagamoyo 1.4), and mandated the General Council to “elaborate a Guide for Spiritan Education for the whole Congregation” (Bagamoyo 1.28).

It is true to say that the Congregation never had an overall Guide or a policy handbook to orient and adapt its educational works in the ever-changing reality of the world where we served. It was possible in the past to function without having such a Guide for Education. But given today’s demand for renewal and adaptation of the Congregation’s charism and mission to the realities of a constantly changing world, we can no longer afford to function without a Guide

and continue to remain relevant without losing our institutional focus. Consequently, after extensive consultation among Spiritans and lay experts who have rich and diverse experiences in education, and having applied the recommendations and input from major superiors, the draft Guide was finally presented at the Enlarged General Council (EGC) held in Rome (19 June – 2 July 2016). The delegates were well pleased with the relevance of its content and recommended that the General Council endorse the draft Guide as a working document for the whole Congregation. We are therefore glad to present to you what we may appropriately say is our first Guide for Spiritan Education (GSE), which will be published and be made available to all circumscriptions and to all Spiritan education stakeholders as early as February 2017.

As is the case for any policy document, the GSE tries to be comprehensive but not exhaustive while seeking:

1. to give the Congregation the appropriate orientation needed for the articulation, adaptation, implementation and sustenance of its vision and mission in and through educational works;
2. to provide general criteria for the formulation of education policies relevant to each circumscription;
3. to assist circumscriptions, individual confreres and our collaborators in the assimilation and transmission of the Spiritan identity, values and the fundamental principles that flow from the Congregation's stated mission in the Spiritan Rule of Life (SRL). The only obstacle that can prevent us from implementing the spirit of the guide, as stated above, could be our own lack of interest and commitment to witness and promote by way of our lifestyle the core Spiritan values and principles, which are clearly elaborated in the GSE.

In his recent book entitled "The Gift of Administration: New Testament Foundations for the Vocations of Administrative Service, Donald Senior, a renowned biblical scholar and administrator states: "To move an institution

and its resources towards the future required by its mission takes great effort and is one of the most demanding of administrative responsibilities" (Senior, pg. 59). Such a move will require our collective effort, commitment and the creative management of our human and material resources, and, not least, the resolve to change our mindset and *modus operandi*. Participants at the EGC pointed out that the way we Spiritans live and manage education works has, to a certain extent, been one of the major obstacles in transmitting our identity and the values we stand for. The challenge for us is to make our educational works and mission more relevant and adapted to the needs of our world today, while at the same time ensuring fidelity to our charism through regular re-examination. As challenging as it might be, it is necessary that we put ourselves in a constant planning mode (ongoing discernment) for the sake of the future survival and relevance of the spirit and intuitions of our Founders.

It is our hope, therefore, that all Spiritans and our education collaborators will familiarize themselves with the content and spirit of the GSE. It will require courage and discipline to carry out what is been asked of us in this Guide, which is a call not only to discern the signs of the times but also to take full responsibility for the future of the mission of the Congregation. May our education works continue to be fertile grounds where intellectual, human and spiritual potential are enhanced and fully developed. Last but not the least, I invite you to utilize fully this newsletter, *Forum for Spiritan Education*, as a resource for the sharing of information and stories about the diversity and richness of our Spiritan educational involvements.

Fr. Joseph Shio



Living the Values that go with the Brand: Spiritan Education

It should be possible to identify any club, institution or organization by the values for which it stands. Here, values are understood as the beliefs or ingrained principles which apply across all levels within the club, institution or organization that are not only meant to be sacrosanct but also guide how its activities are carried out. Yet considering the world we live in and given the cynicism surrounding the apparent lack of values of many political, economic and religious institutions today, some might consider it wise not to bother with guiding principles or core-values. In public life across the globe we have heard and read about many vision, mission and values statements not being put into practice and experienced far too many dishonest and empty promises. In fact, many of us have seen how empty values and promises have created dispirited people, which at worst have also led some along the path of alienation. People today are well tuned into those who are insincere, who would sacrifice their proclaimed values for convenience, economic or some other short-term gain.

As Spiritans, we have faith-based values (which also embody the living heritage of the Founders) and a tradition that are meant to guide our missionary activities, including all our involvement in education. For us the person of Jesus Christ is at the center of all Spiritan educational works and therefore Gospel-based values must permeate the entire educational experience. Consequently, Spiritan education works, whether formal or informal, should be grounded and guided by the following values:

1. **Preferential option for the Poor;**
2. **Faith Development;**
3. **A Community of Respectful Relationships;**
4. **Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC);**
5. **Holistic and Person-Centered Education;**
6. **Academic Excellence;**
7. **Inclusion and Dialogue with Other Faith Traditions;**
8. **A Spirit of Service and of Sharing;**
9. **Evaluation, Renewal & Initiative.**



These are the values¹ that make Spiritan Education Spiritan and may seem pretty good, strong, and concise. However, what may seem meaningful can easily become meaningless if not put into practice and lived. It would be too easy if all we had to do was to write our values on T-shirts and coffee mugs. Consequently, the challenge facing many well established and new provinces is how to integrate these values into the life of our educational works so that they are truly lived and practiced. Perhaps a helpful image here is that of our core values being weaved into the fabric of the educational work by those who are involved in it on a daily basis. But for that to happen, Spiritans themselves and our lay collaborators must know the core values and the living tradition Congregation as well as be convinced that they are something worth investing in.

It is true that working on core-values provides any group with an opportunity to clarify its identity and mission. Such an endeavor can bring new life and energy, but if that is to happen then initiative and leadership at all levels are required. If Spiritan core-values are to truly take hold in our educational works then they must be clearly stated, repeated as often as possible and promoted at every possible turn. It is also good to remind ourselves that these core-values should underpin every decision in the educational work. Otherwise, given the cynicism that is sometimes present both within our own membership and among lay collaborators, what we will end up with is a poorly implemented values-statement that is without any worth.

¹ These values are elaborated in the Working Guide for Spiritan Education, published by the General Council, 2016 which is subject to approval at the 2020 General Chapter.



Education Ministry- A Tool for Eradicating Poverty in the Philippines

It takes hard work and courage to witness to the core-values of a group or to remain faithful to the founding principles of a particular project and not to give way to popular trends or pressures. Another difficulty in attempting to inculcate or to renew values within a particular work is that we run the risk of inflicting pain on ourselves. Whether we like it or not, we make ourselves vulnerable and open to all kinds of misunderstandings and criticism. Like any other person we sometimes fail and make mistakes; our best plans do not always turn out as hoped for and sometimes painful choices have to be made. Nevertheless, in spite of the difficulties we face, we also need to recall that what we are about is not a personal project but part of something bigger than ourselves, namely the aims and purposes of the Congregation being of service within the Church to the Reign of God.

At the end of the day, an organization's core-values are its basic beliefs and indicate what really matters. The core-values, outlined in the *Guide for Spiritan Education*, manifest Spiritan identity and are to be implemented on the ground in real educational situations. It is up to each generation of Spiritans to face the challenges of transmitting these values to the next generation in the educational endeavor that is being undertaken in the name of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit.

“As Spiritans, we have faith-based values (which also embody the living heritage of the Founders) and a tradition that are meant to guide our missionary activities, including all our involvement in education.”

“It is also good to remind ourselves that these core-values should underpin every decision in the educational work.”

“The core-values, outlined in the Guide for Spiritan Education, manifest Spiritan identity and are to be implemented on the ground in real educational situations.”

Fr. Maurice Shortall

Are you involved in Spiritan Education?

This is your forum. Thanks in advance for sending your comments and stories to Fr. Florentine Mallya:

education.cssp@yahoo.it

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit has been the spring of hope and transformation for many poor children around the world through its advocacy in education. We realize that education is one of the most powerful tools for radically defeating poverty. We are very happy that the Holy Spirit opened the eyes and mind of our one of our founders, Claude Poullart Des Places, to this approach from the start of the Congregation. Moved with pity and compassion for the poor, Claude gathered youths who could not afford to study on their own in France in 1703 and he offered them assistance. He led them to receiving both knowledge and life. It never ended just with education, but he led them to the source of all knowledge, Christ.

In the Philippines, Spiritan missionaries have been laboring among the poorest ethnic groups - Lumads, Subanens, Maranaos and Visayas - for about 20 years now. We found ourselves in the midst of a people so joyful and easy-going, but burdened by poverty, tribal conflicts, religious conflicts and social injustices. We walked on the mountains of Digkilaan for hours and days to be able to offer the holy Mass to these people. We cut through many dangerous rebel (MILF) territories to bring the Gospel to the people and in all of these challenging situations the Holy Spirit supplies the joy.

After some years, we were no longer comfortable with just teaching catechism in the midst of many sufferings; we wanted to do more to improve their social and economic life. We wanted them to know Christ and also discover the blessings that education could bring into their lives. We began first to talk about the importance of schools and gradually we began gathering children with volunteers to teach them how to learn the alphabet.

“Some of the girls get pregnant and just marry at 13 to 17 years of age.”

Starting in 1997, we identified poor children and convinced their parents to allow them to go to school. We were also able to seek local partners and benefactors to sponsor these poor children and to provide what they needed to go to school. One of our biggest challenges was the distance from their settlements to the location of the available schools. Some children had to walk for more than 9 kilometers every day to go to school. This became a big problem and discouraged many of the children. Although some started going to school with zeal, they stopped after one or two years. Some preferred to work with their impoverished parents on the farm for food rather than go to school. Some of the girls get pregnant and just marry at 13 to 17 years of age.





Fr. Illah with pupils and teachers of the Spiritan Learning Center kindergarten in Pindugangan

We also worked very hard to invite the Government to help set up schools nearer to the children’s homes. Consequently, through our constant campaigning and advocacy, in 2013 the Government established two elementary schools in the remote villages of Binasan and Kapisahan Digkilaan, near Iligan city. Nobody that we know had ever graduated to high school from these villages. Although the schools are operating only within bamboo houses now, they are functioning. To go to Binasan from the City of Iligan today, you will have to ride on a motorbike for two hours and walk on a muddy path for approximately four hours, and that is if you are lucky to have a day without rain!

In some parts of the Rogongon area of Digkilaan, Iligan City, the celebrant must himself take the first and second readings and the gospel during the Holy Eucharist, because no one can read. This led to the introduction of what we call, ‘the Marungko’ approach (a strategy in reading). Our confrère, Fr. Adam Bago got national recognition and an award from the Philippine Department of Education because of his efforts in the villages and the ‘Marungko’ reading method in 2013 - and we are happy that the Government began to work with us after many years.



Fr. Adam Bago, CSSP posing with some Spiritan Scholars

After many years of mission, we developed a partnership with the French organization called Enfants Du Mekong. This organization became a great partner in helping

children go to school. They help us to look for benefactors for the children and we follow the children in their daily school life and keep motivating the parents to cooperate. Our link with Enfants Du Mekong has brought education to so many children in the last 12 years!

In 2008, we opened the Spiritan Youth Center in the slums of Barangay T. Padilla, Cebu City. At this center in Cebu, we work with children from the slums and motivate them to get back to school. Also in 2010, we decided to start two little schools to help the poor children who live around our community in Pindugangan, Tipanoy and at Digkilaan, Iligan city. These little schools, called “Spiritans Academies,” have functioned for more than 6 years already, offering a holistic education program for children.



“We continue in imitation of our founders as we seek freedom from poverty as advocates and defenders of the weak (Spiritans Rule of Life 14) by promoting education and life.”

We have made a simple start, now we need your prayers and support in imparting knowledge and Christian values to children. We continue in imitation of our founders as we seek freedom from poverty as advocates and defenders of the weak (Spiritans Rule of Life 14) by promoting education and life. We have achieved great growth and hope for hundreds of children. Together with our partners, we have more than 300 scholars all over the Philippines, including about 20 young scholars at university level. There is nothing compared to the joy and fulfilment you experience when you help poor children. We find ourselves refreshed every day as we find a great purpose in where the Holy Spirit leads us. Together, we can make a difference, offering hope to children through Christ.

Fr. Leo Illah



The Presence of Spiritans in Education in Algeria in the Diocese of Oran-A History of Faithful Service to the People

One cannot talk about Spiritans investment in education in Algeria, without talking about their arrival in the diocese of Oran. 110 years ago in fact, the Congregation sent confrères there in response to an appeal to take up direction of a school for agricultural and technical formation at Messerghin, near Oran. From 1901 to 1975-76 a good number of confrères served in this work. From time to time one meets former pupils there – some at present in agricultural enterprises or working in the national agricultural services. Others, of course, are retired! They still relate to some Spiritan priests and brothers today. The fraternal network of former students and Spiritans involves more than a good couscous meal, but lives on as well in some exchanges between certain agricultural personnel in France and Algeria.

After the nationalization of the Messerghin school in 1975/76, Spiritans continued in education in other ways: in Oran or Sidi Bel Abbès as teachers in a state high school, or as founders and educators in centers for handicapped children. Later still they came as founders of libraries and learning-support services - centers set up to provide Algerian university students and teachers with books to help them in their studies at a time when university libraries were insufficient. The libraries are also where people could find opportunities and places to express themselves. In the fundamentalist and terrorist years, our confrères stayed on, even going so far as to boldly open a center of this kind in 1996 at Mascara.



Fr. Raymond Gonnet (wearing beard and glasses) during the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the library and activities center in Mascara

Today, Spiritans, living at Mascara (Raymond Gonnet from France), and at Sidi Bel Abbès (Michel Crestin and Jean Marc Bertrand from France and Henry Chimezie from Eastern Nigeria) continue at this task in the same spirit of serving the people. Of course, the Algerian world and society has changed and state university libraries are indeed crowded today. However, Algerian

students and some professors still find in our libraries, as well as books, modest places for conversation and reflection.

“The task of education is also to contribute to make adults aware of the richness of their Algerian culture, of their place in facing the challenges for their country and the world and of being open to different cultures.”

The task of education is also to contribute to make adults aware of the richness of their Algerian culture, of their place in facing the challenges for their country and the world and of being open to different cultures. In this sense, at Mascara, our confrere Raymond Gonnet organizes conferences every fortnight (which may involve 150 people) given by Algerians - in areas as diverse as ecology, literature, education, social questions, etc. From these meetings and from the knowledge we have of the people, new initiatives are taking shape in recent years such as facilitation of sessions to help and encourage parents and educators in their work.



A half day of recreation and fun for the children of library and activities center with Brother Michel Crestin (black t-shirt in the back row, on the left) one of the three spiritains working in Sidi Bel Abbès

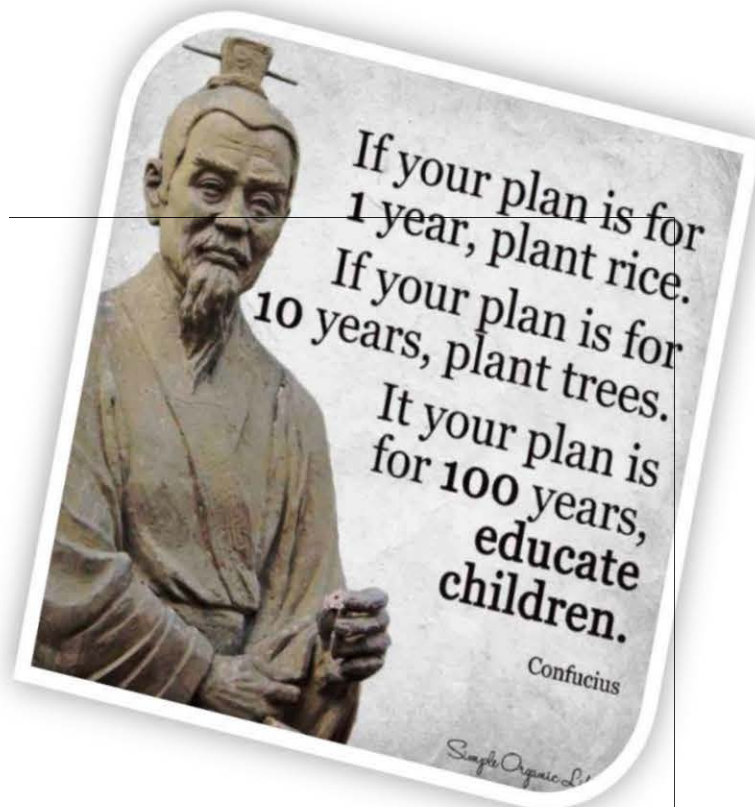
At Sidi Bel Abbès, 3 confreres are involved in providing support for school-goers (300 children and 50 adults) and this remains an important activity, which roots our presence in the town. We are aware also that many hours of supplementary study and special classes can tire the children and diminish recreational activity-time in a child’s life. Thus, in Sidi Bel Abbès for example, while continuing the work of school support, we offer as far as possible recreational half-days, which the children find very enjoyable.

We do these activities with the help of some religious and especially with the help of committed Algerians (Muslims), who share in what we offer, teamwork and a witness to cultural and religious tolerance...

Fr. Jean-Marc Bertrand



Think about it



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