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The Spiritan Charism, the University Misison, and the Duquesne Strategic Plan

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DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY'S STRATEGIC PLAN, 2018-2023: AN EXERCISE IN NEW EVANGELIZATION

Our globalized, multi-cultural and, at times, secularized world creates fresh challenges for mission. It calls us to renew our methods of evangelization . . . We (Spiritans) want to give special attention to first evangelization and to the new evangelization, as well as working with and promoting reconciliation among groups of people who are marginalized with a view to their integral human development.”¹

There is an ever-growing popular phenomenon in the United States, aptly titled, “*Word on Fire*” (www.wordonfire.org). Founded by Bishop Robert Barron, prior to his ordination as auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of Los Angeles, *Word on Fire* describes itself as a “global media ministry . . . utilizing the tools of new media to draw people into or back to the Catholic Faith.”² *Word on Fire* is evangelical. It “proclaims Jesus Christ as the source of conversion and new life.” It is Catholic. It utilizes the resources of the Roman Catholic Tradition – art, architecture, poetry, philosophy, theology, and the lives of the saints – to explain and interpret the event of Jesus Christ. It places an emphasis and urgency on the use of contemporary forms of media and innovative communication technologies, such as blog feeds, *You Tube* clips, on-line study programs, topical discussions of current controversies, and film series. Described by Cardinal Francis George as “one of the church’s best messengers,” Bishop Barron, from his ministry in California, reaches millions of people each year. In addition to world-wide gatherings of Catholics throughout the world (2016 World Youth Day, the 2015 World Meeting Families, for example), he was invited to speak on religion to employees at Facebook’s headquarters in 2017.

Bishop Barron is an unapologetic evangelist. He preaches the word of God, in forms that are appealing and effective, to” those who have never heard the Gospel . . . or who have barely heard it.”³ He uses methods, and addresses topics, that are urgent in the contemporary age: science and religion, atheism, sexuality and faith, the power



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of the media, and the plight of the “nones” (those who identify themselves as having no religious affiliation at all). The number of those in this last category continues to grow exponentially in the United States.

Why has Bishop Barron become so increasingly popular (and deeply unpopular for many non-believers) among Americans today, both Catholic and not Catholic? Because, in part, the bishop has tapped into a profoundly effective medium: digital communications. He is preaching an ancient message using a contemporary platform that reaches hundreds of millions of persons today, and addressing matters of truly serious import for them. He is “listening” on three fronts: his “proclamation” is centered on the Word of God, his topics are meaningful to his hearers, and his “means of evangelization,” his primary tools of communication, are current and widely employed.

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The case will be made in this article that Spiritan efforts at “new evangelization” take many forms: effective preaching and teaching, simple presence among those searching for meaning in their lives, dialogue with men and women of other faith traditions, and radical witness to the Gospel. If Spiritan educational ministry, in itself, provides a “New Evangelization in cultures that have forgotten their Christian roots,”⁴ then a new and vital expression of this evangelization can be found in an institutional commitment to a “direction” that is profoundly Spiritan. That direction certainly finds expression in Duquesne University’s new Strategic Plan that is premised upon Spiritan principles and ideals. And that Strategic Plan, in turn, can facilitate a proclamation of the Gospel, in innovative and effective ways, for men and women of the twenty-first century.

Strategic Plan – Phase One

In a recent opinion piece published by the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (January, 14 2018),⁵ the newly endorsed Strategic Plan for Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit was unveiled to a wide audience. The product of years of discussion and deliberation, countless drafts and revisions, the first draft of the Strategic Plan was produced through

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a collaborative effort of university faculty members, staff, students, board members, and Spiritans. From the perspective of scientists, psychologists, legal scholars, student life personnel, student leaders, business experts, and theologians, we asked, what is the “Spiritans mission” of Duquesne University today? “What do we do that makes us different from our secular counterparts in higher level education?” “What are the critical needs of young people today and how can we address those needs?” “What role do we play in the landscape of Catholic higher education in the United States, as uniquely Spiritans?” And, importantly, “What role do we play in our own city and region?” “What is our Spiritans contribution to the city of Pittsburgh, to all of its residents, but in the Spiritans tradition, *particularly* to those in most need: the poor and the most vulnerable?”

This first phase of the evolving strategic plan was an exercise in true “listening.” Father Adrian van Kaam, C.S.Sp. (1913-2007), founder of the Institute of Formative Spirituality at Duquesne University and author of numerous books on spirituality and spiritual care, wrote frequently about the spiritual art of “listening.” His former colleague, Dr. Susan Muto, put it this way:

From the days of listening to the stories of those huddled with him in hiding in Holland during the Hunger Winter, through the writing of his dissertation, ‘The Experience of Really Feeling Understood by a Person,’ to the eleven-volume series he wrote articulating his theory of formation spirituality, Adrian van Kaam exuded a passion to help individuals and groups to understand themselves and each other. Most of all, he wanted people to know that they were understood and loved by God. He did this first and foremost by listening to people, to Christian history and scriptural wisdom, and to fields of study from neuroscience and medicine to physics, from film and art to anthropology, and from music to psychology. Van Kaam’s joyful interest in humanity and creation was endless.⁶

Our first “strategic exercise” in listening, as we put together an ambitious new Strategic Plan for Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit, was not without focus or intent. We, the participants of the planning process, arrived at the process with questions: how could we listen carefully to our own treasured past? How could we be guided by our founding history as an institution of service for immigrants and refugees? Listening to our own particular history of academic and extracurricular strengths over the course of 140 years, what wisdom could we glean? Acknowledging our contributions to the political and social life of our city and region, what lessons could we “hear?”

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This listening exercise then spread to the important object of our concern. “If we truly listened,” we said, “what would we hear our students saying to us . . . about their personal lives, their emotional and social needs, their struggles and intellectual challenges?” “How are these different now from those of past generations?” “How can we listen to

developments in technology, business, and the arts?” “What do Duquesne University alumni tell us about their experience at the university and their preparation at Duquesne for professional careers and personal decision-making?” If we truly listened, what would we hear?

The characteristic of profound listening holds a unique position within the Spiritan Congregation. In his letter to Father Jean-Rémy Bessieux (May 4, 1845), Father Francis Libermann, Second Founder of the Spiritan Congregation, advised the apostolic missionary in Gabon to be gentle and respectful, showing concern and deference to everyone. Initially convinced that Bessieux had died accidentally, Libermann expressed his “joy” at the discovery that Bessieux was, in fact, alive. Libermann communicated his intention for Bessieux to prepare the young in Gabon for advancement in education; he then encouraged Bessieux to “listen” to those in his care. “Follow the habits and conventions of all and do not expect others to adapt themselves to your own particular tastes and inclinations.” “Support their plans and give them your help, as long as these plans are not contrary to justice and truth, nor opposed to the spread of the faith and good morality.”⁷ Libermann’s approach to missiology and enculturation was just beginning to take shape. He later instructed his missionaries to “forget about Europe . . . be African with the Africans.”⁸ This missionary principle of “listening” and divesting, shedding (*kenosis*) one’s own culture in an effort to become acculturated to the lives of local people, languages, cultures, and pastoral practices is a core Spiritan principle, and one that serves as a precious compass as we carry out our own mission of Catholic, Spiritan higher education at Duquesne University.⁹

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A Signature Focus: Listening to the Local Community

“In envisioning the future of Duquesne, I ask myself: What would the Holy Ghost priests who arrived on the Bluff in 1878 do if they arrived here today? If the Spiritan priests were transported to Pittsburgh today, they would see minority communities in the Hill District and Uptown, in our own backyard, that are severely underserved. They would peer down the river into the Mon Valley and see neighborhoods filled with elderly, needy individuals whose lives were decimated when the steel mills collapsed, trying to survive with little support . . . The answer seems obvious: They would stare down the challenges of our time and help a new generation of students build something fresh and miraculous. . . We have a duty to help re-invent Western Pennsylvania”¹⁰

Duquesne University has a long, storied history of service to the local community. Founded by the Holy Ghost Congregation in 1878, to assist recent immigrants working in the steel mills—and their families—to advance themselves through education, Duquesne’s essence for the past 140 years has been one of service to others. That service has taken many forms, from volunteer activity through social agencies to faith-based programs and academic initiatives, partnering Duquesne University students and faculty with members of the Uptown, Hill District, and Hazelwood neighborhoods. In recent years,

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the Duquesne University Mylan School of Pharmacy established a pharmacy in the Hill District, as a “mission-based, state-of-the-art, comprehensive clinical pharmaceutical center designed to serve the University community, as well as the underinsured and uninsured in the Pittsburgh area” (web site reference). The Duquesne University Law School’s Tribone Center for Clinical Legal Education serves the community and its students, by combining education and public service through counseling and defense in civil rights, family law, unemployment compensation, advocacy for children in delinquency cases, and for veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injuries and other mental health disorders and addictions. Community-oriented academic programs abound. The University has a broad array of community-serving Centers and Institutes, including its Center for Community-Engaged Teaching and Research (CETR), which has re-energized itself with its own new strategic plan. All these activities are undertaken in the spirit of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the Apostolic Constitution on Higher Education (Pope John Paul II): “The Christian spirit of service to others for the promotion of social justice is of particular importance for each Catholic university, to be shared by its teachers and developed in its students.”¹¹ And “in its service to society, a Catholic University will relate especially to the academic, cultural, and scientific world of the region in which it is located.”¹²

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Addressing unmet needs in the local community, however, must take a different form in a Spiritan institution. The focus of service must be on the person or community being served and not upon the needs of the one serving. Too often, “service programs” or volunteer opportunities, have centered upon the needs and desires of the volunteers, and not upon the real needs of a community. At Duquesne, that focus has shifted from an orientation of “community service” to a truer form of “community engagement.” The chief difference lies in the act of listening and reciprocity.

The Carnegie Foundation (2012) has defined community engagement as “the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.”¹³ Partnerships of all kinds require on-going face-to-face conversation, a shared plan, shared resources, and sustained communication. It is paramount that institutions of higher education approach the institutionalization process by building understanding, relationships, and trust with members of the community. This can occur only by talking to, and getting to know, community members.¹⁴ According to J. C. Votruba (2004), community partners “want us [in higher education] to treat them as partners, not supplicants. They want us to seek first to understand and then be understood. They want us to recognize that they have the capacity to teach us as well as learn from us. And they want us to appreciate that our future, as well as theirs, is dependent upon our work together.”¹⁵

This unique form of community engagement, from a service paradigm to one of

effective engagement, is a clear priority of the University's new Strategic Plan. Indeed, a strong network of community partner organizations, many located in neighborhoods near the campus, already exists. Talented new faculty who demonstrate interest in community engaged teaching and research are continually attracted to Duquesne. Most recently, Duquesne's Center for Engaged Teaching and Research supported 43 faculty, 1,600 students, and 120 community-based organizations working together on community-oriented projects and services. (McCune Foundation Report). Consciously aligning the needs, and strengths, of local communities with the needs and strengths of the university opens up new teaching and research possibilities. And from a Spiritan perspective, it is an exercise in "authentic listening" that results in transformative action, for both the local communities and ourselves. As David Hollenbach, S.J., has noted:

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A university that aspires to be Catholic and to serve the common good must do more than include nods to the importance of social solidarity in its mission statement. It must translate this into teaching and research priorities, and actualize these priorities in day-to-day activities in classroom and library. This will take both the courage and the humility that the privileged learn only when they encounter the reality of poverty and other forms of suffering."¹⁶

Enhancing the University's community engagement initiatives, to develop "... authentic, mutually beneficial alliances with governmental, faith-based and community organizations (Strategic Plan, number 2) will serve to strengthen both the University and its neighbors from a truly Spiritan perspective." In the spirit of the 2012 General Chapter at Bagamoyo, "we must be ready to learn from those to whom we are sent."¹⁷

Global and Ecclesial Concern: Listening to the Church and the World

"Every Catholic University is to maintain communion with the universal Church and the Holy See; it is to be in close communion with the local Church and in particular with the Diocesan bishops of the region or nation in which it is located. In ways consistent with its nature as a University, a Catholic University will contribute to the Church's work of evangelization."¹⁸

Over the course of more than a century, Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit and the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh have enjoyed a vibrant and fruitful relationship. In part because the seminarians for the Pittsburgh Diocese have pursued their undergraduate degrees from Duquesne for decades, many members of the ordained clergy (including the present Ordinary) are Duquesne graduates. Indeed, the current (12th) Bishop of Pittsburgh, Very Reverend David A. Zubik, holds two degrees—an undergraduate degree and a master's degree in education administration—from Duquesne. As well, Duquesne graduates include Bishops, and now Cardinals, serving in other areas of the United States and around the world. This fact is a point of pride for Duquesne and the Spiritan Congregation.

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Additionally, graduates of the University's School of Education have served, and continue to serve, in leadership positions throughout the Diocese. As superintendents, principals and directors of Catholic elementary and secondary schools, the influence of the University in the faith formation and education of young persons in the Pittsburgh Diocese has been formidable. With graduates of the University's Pastoral Ministry Program and Masters of Theology Program serving as directors and instructors of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine Programs (CCD) and Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) in the Diocese, the partnership between the University and the Catholic Diocese has been further solidified. Its work with Catholic Charities and its various programs, the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, the Pittsburgh Catholic press, and other agencies has been rich and beneficial to both the local Church and the University.

But the University intends to accomplish more in this regard. In its new Strategic Plan, we have proposed an effort to collaborate with the Diocese of Pittsburgh and other dioceses "to assist in the development of their lay associates and clergy as these dioceses reconfigure themselves for the 21st century." One aspect of the new Diocesan program entitled "On Mission for the Church Alive" is the creation of hundreds of lay ecclesial ministers in service to newly configured parishes. Administrative and pastoral needs will be great. The University, through its Schools of Business, Education, and Liberal Arts, is committed to serve as a transformative influence and resource in this period of challenge and change.

"...effort to collaborate with the Diocese of Pittsburgh and other dioceses "to assist in the development of their lay associates and clergy as these dioceses reconfigure themselves for the 21st century."

A particularly creative project in the new Strategic Plan, proposed in collaboration with the Pittsburgh Catholic Diocese, is the concept of a Catholic Leadership Program for high school students that will be housed at Duquesne. Currently in an active planning stage, the program will form young Catholic leaders, both academically and spiritually, in a way that brings their faith alive and allows them—as their lives unfold—to serve the Church and the community. Designed for aspiring high school juniors and seniors from regional Catholic high schools, the program will combine specialized academic formation, including science education, with community engagement projects, led by faculty and staff of the University. It is hoped that the project will become a national model of its kind for the United States Church.

We draw inspiration for these new initiatives from the Spiritan Rule of Life, which states that "in local Churches the following are our principal activities: fostering Christian communities and the education and training of a committed and responsible laity; engaging in social and educational work in line with our Spiritan calling."¹⁹

The global outreach of the university has witnessed a renewed energy and vitality in recent years, especially with the creation of the Center for African and Global Studies at Duquesne. This outreach has existed for many years – and positive effects in healthcare programs in Africa, academic alliances with international Spiritan institutions, and community engagement efforts in the Caribbean have been noteworthy. An interest in

the expansion of these programs informs the spirit of the new University Strategic Plan. As stated in *The Heartbeat of Spiritan Education in the U.S.*: “The missionary outlook introduced to the Congregation in the eighteenth century and reinforced by Libermann has given the Congregation a global vision . . . In education, it means working for the empowerment of peoples and their liberation from injustice, poverty, and ignorance.²⁰ In practice, this means exposing our students to “languages, cultures, and religions that differ from their own in order to encourage them to respond to the needs of others.” (Strategic Plan 2) That response, consistent with a truly Spiritan vision, is both liberating and hope-filled.

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The Polestar of All Decision-Making: Listening to our Students

If there is a singular theme that runs throughout the entirety of the University’s new Strategic Plan, it is that of concern for our students. It appears in each of the individual objectives. It manifests itself as a concern for their well-being, an attention to career preparation, and a focus upon individual attention to students’ needs and aspirations. It manifests itself in enrollment and recruitment efforts, climate cultivation initiatives, and teaching excellence objectives aimed at true and effective learning. It is the reason that we plan new construction, recruit, hire, and retain the best of faculty, and advance interdisciplinary education. It even shows itself in marketing and assessment protocols, with an emphasis upon maximizing the experience of our students for learning and personal development.

Who are these students who attend Duquesne University today? They are an increasingly diverse, sophisticated group of young men and women, living and studying in an environment that prizes diversity and has committed itself, in the new strategic plan, to actively cultivating that diversity on its campus. This effort reflects, unquestionably, a Spiritan value of enormous richness and importance.

While the Spirit is the source of our unity, we relish diversity: cultural, human, spiritual, ecumenical, interreligious, and the distribution of charismata for the building up of the People of God and the world. Variety and complementarity are commonly characteristic of our [Spiritan] community. The Spirit is the giver and the shaper of the gifts that each person receives for the building up of the Body of Christ and the human family. Spiritan educators are Spirit-linking leaders who appreciate the diverse ways the Spirit works in person in community.²¹

Are the students who attend Duquesne and similar Catholic institutions prepared to grapple with questions of faith and their roles in the Church today? Sociologist Robert Wuthnow argues that “unless religious leaders take younger adults more seriously, the future of American religion is in doubt.”²² As the church prepares for a Synod of Young People in the fall of 2018, some troublesome statistics have emerged. An examination of reports from two national surveys – The Pew Forum Survey on Religion and Public

Life (2015) and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA, 2017) – have given rise to serious concern about the faith of young persons today. According to *Catholic World Report*, the Pew Survey – an adult focused instrument – indicated a sharp rise in the population of “nones,” those identifying as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular. The growth of this unaffiliated group is significant, rising from just over 16% of the U.S. adult population in 2007 to 22.8% in 2014.²³ As *Catholic World Report* notes:

Most of the ‘nones’ have roots in organized religion. Nearly 80% reported having been raised within a particular religious tradition. It comes as little surprise then, that the increase in ‘nones’ paralleled a nearly eight percentage point decline in the number of Christians over the same period. The Pew Survey reported that Catholics were among segments of the Christian population that suffered the largest loss in numbers.²⁴

The CARA survey supports the findings of the Pew Survey, but with particular attention to young people, and especially young Catholics. Half of the surveyed group, according to *Catholic World*, “now self-identify as atheist, agnostic, or without religious affiliation – each a segment of the religious ‘nones’ highlighted in the Pew studies.” One of the principal reasons attributed by these young people for their departure from organized religion is the incompatibility of faith with science. Both surveys coalesce in their findings regarding a way forward, underscoring that “a renewed emphasis on the complementarity of science and religion . . . would be a worthwhile endeavor.”²⁵ (*Catholic World Report*). The goal is that these young men and women can find at Duquesne University role models whose faith is so transparent that it becomes infectious. The goal is, additionally, that our efforts at evangelization will reveal to our students a life of faith and service that is truly authentic and meaningful.

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Conclusion: Listening to the Gospel

As Pope John Paul II expressed so eloquently in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*:

Evangelization means ‘bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new . . . It is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and, as it were, upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, humanity’s criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration, and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation.’ By its very nature, each Catholic university makes an important contribution to the church’s work of evangelization. It is a living *institutional* witness to Christ and his message, so vitally important in cultures marked by secularism, or where Christ and his message are still virtually unknown.”²⁶

Bishop Robert Barron is able to evangelize effectively because his message is rooted in the Gospel, his method of communication is contemporary and creative, his stance is credibly and intelligently linked to the church, and his personal witness is authentic and engaging. If the enterprise of Spiritan education is, itself, an evangelical act, then a Strategic Plan for a Spiritan work of education must employ that same roadmap. It must take into consideration the needs and gifts of its students, their means of communicating, their aspirations, both professional and personal, and their many challenges. It is a message, a plan, that must be in sync with the church, both universal and local. It is a plan that must be based upon love for the poor, and marginalized, and service of the poor and marginalized in reciprocity and true engagement. Ultimately, it is strategy for an institution that must be rooted, clearly, in the words and spirit of the Gospel. This is precisely the Strategic Plan recently adopted by Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit. And it is our hope that the Spiritan Founders would be proud of the abundant fruits that it yields—because they planted the seeds 140 years ago on this Bluff overlooking a city and community that now bears their imprint, which is poised to make even more shining contributions for a new era.

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Endnote

¹ Congregation of the Holy Spirit, XX General Chapter, Bagamoyo, 2012, 1.7

² <http://wordonfire.org/about/wordonfire>, 2018

³ Spiritan Rule of Life, #4

⁴ Jeffrey Duaine, John Hansen, William Headley, James McCloskey, Paulinus Odozor, “The Heartbeat of Spiritan Education in the United States,” published in *Spiritans Pedagogy: A Handbook*. Duquesne University, Pittsburgh PA: Center for Spiritan Studies, 2012, 28.

⁵ <http://post-gazette.com/> (Duquesne University is Embracing the Future, Ken Gormley, January 14, 2018).

⁶ Letterman, Rebecca and Susan Muto. *Understanding Our Story: The Life's Work and Legacy of Adrian van Kaam in the Field of Formative Spirituality*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017, Introduction.

⁷ *A Spiritan Anthology. Writings of Claude-François Poullart des Places (1679-1709) and François Marie-Paul Libermann (1802-1852)*. Chosen and presented by Christian de Mare, C.S.S.p. Rome: Congregazione dello Spirito Santo, 2011, 362-365, here 365.

⁸ Letter to the Community of Dakar and Gabon, November 19, 1847. In *Spiritans Anthology*, 281-287, here 287.

⁹ Congregation of the Holy Spirit, XX General Chapter, Bagamoyo, 2012, Part I, A, 1.8

¹⁰ <http://post-gazette.com/>. Duquesne University is Embracing the Future, Ken Gormley, January 14, 2018.

¹¹ Pope John Paul II. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990), in *Catholic Identity in Our Colleges and*

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¹² Ibid., Part I, B. 37

¹³ Welch, Marshall, *Engaging Higher Education: Purpose, Platforms, and Programs for Community Engagement*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2016, 38.

¹⁴ Ibid., 82

¹⁵ Votruba, J. C., “Leading the Engaged Institution. President-to-presidents lecture at the annual meeting of the American Association of States Colleges and Universities,” Charleston, SC, 2004, 5.

¹⁶ Hollenbach, David, S. J. “The Catholic University and the Common Good,” *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education*, 16 (Summer 1995) 15.

¹⁷ Congregation of the Holy Spirit, General Chapter XX, Bagamoyo, 2012, Part I, A, 1.8.

¹⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Part II, Article 5.1

¹⁹ Spiritan Rule of Life, #18

²⁰ “The Heartbeat of Spiritan Education in the U.S.,” *Spiritan Pedagogy: A Handbook*. Duquesne University: Center for Spiritan Studies, 2013, 24.

²¹ ., 28-29.

²² , Robert, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007) 17.

²³ [://www.catholicworldreport.com/](http://www.catholicworldreport.com/) Catholicism and “Nones:” The Data on Youth and Young Adults, February 23, 2017.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Part I, B, 48, 49