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What a Spiritán Education Means to Me

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Holy Ghost Prep. prides itself in teaching young men in the Spiritán tradition. Students initially believe a Spiritán education to be just a religion class on the schedule. I have discovered that a true Spiritán education transcends a religion class. To me, a Spiritán education is embedded in seven core values: sense of community, Christian service, concern for the poor, global vision, academic excellence, openness to the spirit, and personal development.

Sense of community

The community is the nexus that knits all the other values together. The community is not just your local neighborhood. It extends outward, to the global community – to every corner of the earth. Without community, none of the other values exist. The community, with all its members working together, makes the values what they are. The work these members do in the community is the spark that ignites the flame.

Christian service

One way to allow students to recognize how Spiritáns view community is to provide a service requirement. They hired a co-ordinator to make Christian service a dynamic learning experience. He provides service opportunities in the local community. These activities include playing basketball and softball with an elementary school, serving food at a soup kitchen, helping the local Sisters run their annual Oktoberfest, and tutoring at a local elementary school. Students learn more naturally through experience. At my elementary school, I taught basic subjects, resolved conflicts between students, and managed kids. These skills cannot be learned

in the classroom. They are life skills that I learned because of my interaction with that community. For me, Holy Family transformed the spark into a visible flame.

Concern for the poor

Concern for the poor helps to expand the students' perception and experience. Students take a day-of-service break from the traditional learning environment and leave campus to find and help the poor. The places where they go are disguised classrooms. We are forced to confront a community with which we are not familiar, thus opening us up to new ideas. I took a school van to St Bart's Parish where I learned to stain doors, paint statues, and do other minor repairs. This was not something I would be tested on in class, but I acquired valuable skills through a positive interaction with this community. From interaction with new people my view of community was expanded — the single flame grew into a larger flame.

Global vision

At St Mark's parish in Harlem, New York, I learned the value of my faith by partici-

pating in Mass with the local community. Their liveliness sparked my interest in my Catholic faith which led me to receiving the sacraments for the first time.

I took another step the following summer in Arusha, Tanzania. While I was accompanying a student from a local school, I saw a mural on the side of a building. I will never forget it. It was a painting of a brain wrapped in locked chains. Next to this image was a key upon which was inscribed the word "education". Many of the people living in Arusha are leading economically poor lives. The mural highlights the importance students in Tanzania place on their education. They are well aware how much it can affect their future. Without this experience I would not have learned to value my own education.

Openness to the Spirit

The view of the Holy Spirit is expanded to include the spirit of a community. The people in St Mark's food pantry showed us a great deal of appreciation. The flood of genuine "thank yous" I received was overwhelming. At Mass the next day, just before

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Photo by Kevin Monko





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we stood together as one to receive the Eucharist, people approached me again to thank me for the work I had done. The feeling I experienced that day was the Spirit working His way into my life.

Another concrete way I experienced openness to the Spirit was through our senior retreats. During these weekends, from the examples of both student leaders and teacher leaders, students began to feel the effects of that openness to the spirit. By opening up to the spirit of the community, we opened ourselves up to our own spirit. The senior retreat links the fire of each person into one flame, one Spirit.

Personal development

This final value is the end goal of a Spiritan education. When I visited Holy Ghost Prep as an 8th grader, my Mom wanted me to enrol because the students seemed “so mature.” Because of its curriculum embedding the seven core values, Holy Ghost Prep has a reputation for maturity and personal development. This particular development turns the Spirit into a flame that is ready to light up the world.

Years ago, Fr Philip Agber CSSp told me something: “You must use your education to

help others; otherwise, it is meaningless.”

Holy Ghost puts its students through a series of calculated experiences. These experiences culminate in the highest levels of personal development which completes the cycle of the seven core values.

A Spiritan education begins by developing a sense of community in which to learn and grow. This community then practices Christian service, shows concern for the poor, and shares a global vision. This community then encourages each student’s academic excellence. This community then fosters an openness to the Spirit, with the end goal of growing each member’s personal development. Each stage is marked by new knowledge of the self. Now, as mature, more fully developed men, students can use their education to work together and help others by repeating the cycle, just as many of our faculty at Holy Ghost are currently doing.

So what is a Spiritan education?

Simply put, it is learning from community and giving back that education to community. ■

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