

## FOREWORD

Education has been integral to the Spiritan mission of evangelization since the foundation of the Congregation. In 1703 Claude Poullart des Places established a seminary to provide a broad-based and comprehensive education to poor seminarians in order to equip them to be effective ministers of the Gospel to the poor of their day. The graduates of Holy Ghost Seminary soon acquired an excellent reputation both for their apostolic zeal and for their erudition, many in turn serving as directors and teachers in seminaries in France and in the New World. Francis Libermann, although initially reticent in regard to the involvement of his Society in educational works, quickly realized the importance of education at the service of mission, insisting on the need to attend to the ‘intellectual and physical aspects of civilization, in education, agricultural and technical knowledge’ (N.D. VIII, 248).

The years that followed Libermann’s death saw the establishment of numerous educational establishments across the globe – teacher training colleges, agricultural and trade schools, in addition to traditional secondary schools – many of which were widely reputed for their excellence. For a period in our more recent history, we questioned our involvement in the ministry of education, particularly as several of our educational works were no longer directly serving the primary purpose for which they were founded, namely the service of the poor. An in depth re-examination of our continued role in education as a missionary Congregation, particularly in the light of the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, led the 1998 General Chapter of Maynooth to re-affirm education, both formal and informal, as an integral dimension of Spiritan mission with a view to empowering the poor to develop their God-given talents and to take their rightful responsibility in society and shape its future.

Today many of our confreres across the globe continue to be involved in educational works, both formal and informal, in response to the needs of our times. Several circumscriptions in Africa have begun to reinvest in education seeing in this ministry a particular contribution of the Spiritan charism to an increasingly autonomous local Church. The present *Spiritan Guide for Education*, the first such handbook since our foundation as a Congregation, seeks to ensure that all our educational works both traditional and new are clearly at the service of our primary purpose, namely the evangelization of the poor (SRL 4). Requested by the General Chapter of Bagamoyo, and drawing on the expertise and experience of many confreres and lay people involved in our various works, the Guide identifies the core values that should underpin all our educational undertakings, whether long-standing or more recent; it outlines criteria for the establishment and organization of new works as well as for the re-evaluation of our more established schools in order to ensure ongoing fidelity to the Spiritan charism.

As all such Guides, the *Spiritan Guide for Education* will develop in the light of experience, best practice and the changing circumstances in which we carry out our mission, and will be subject to regular review. It is the hope of the General Council that it will provide both direction and inspiration to all who are involved in this uniquely collaborative ministry between Spiritans and laity as we together endeavor to live out authentically in the contemporary world the spirit and intuitions that we have inherited from our Founders.

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