

I. MISSION AS EDUCATION: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1.1 Spiritan involvement in education began when Claude Poullart des Places established a community for poor students who themselves would become “*humble and laborious ministers*” among the poorest and most abandoned classes of his time in France. Although Francis Libermann is not known as an instigator of educational works, nevertheless, at the time when slavery in many parts of the world was coming to an end, he intuitively recognised the fundamental role of education in the emancipation of the poor and its importance for the integral development of future citizens. Without doubt, he understood the work of evangelisation in a holistic sense and wanted his missionaries to work for the development of persons in all aspects of life: education “*not only from the point of view of moral training but also from the point of view of intellectual and physical formation, that is to say, in teaching, agriculture and trades*” (N.D. VIII, 248). These convictions led him to express in his correspondence with M. Aragon that “*if we abandon the schools we will destroy the future of the missions*” (N.D. IX, 44 and 50-51). It is under Libermann’s inspirational vision that the Congregation began to grow and develop its educational, missionary and pastoral ministries in many countries in Europe, Africa and elsewhere.

1.2 The Spiritan Rule of Life (SRL) lays out the foundations of the Spiritan charism and mission in the Church. SRL 4 says “*The evangelisation of the “poor” (cf. Lk 4:18) is our purpose (cf. N.D. XIII, 170). Therefore we go especially to peoples, groups and individuals who have not yet heard the message of the Gospel or who have scarcely heard it, to those whose needs are the greatest, and to the oppressed. We also willingly accept tasks for which the Church has difficulty in finding workers.*” SRL 18 refers to educational works as being among principal activities of the Spiritan mission: “*fostering Christian communities and*

the education and training of a committed and responsible laity; vocations' ministry; training for ministries and for the missionary and the religious life; engaging in social and educational work in line with our Spiritan calling; awakening an understanding of the universal mission of justice, and of kinship between people." Furthermore SRL 18.1 reminds us that one of the "important tasks of our times [is] youth apostolate, because the present situation of young people is crying out more than ever for social and educational works."

1.3 Recent General Chapters of the Congregation noted a renewed impetus and growing involvement of the Congregation in education works, especially among younger circumscriptions. The 1992 Itaiçi Chapter singled out education as a tool of liberation which "opens the door to a decent human life, while giving a glimpse of the Lord's special love for the disadvantaged" (Itaiçi 14). The 1998 Maynooth Chapter reaffirmed the Spiritan commitment to the poor, naming education as an integral part of our mission of evangelisation (Maynooth 2.13 - 2.16). More recently the 2012 Bagamoyo Chapter not only identified education as an essential aspect of Spiritan mission today, but also called for more coordination in education works in the whole Congregation (1.28 and 1.30).

1.4 In conclusion we can say that the Founders themselves, SRL and successive chapters present educational works as a clear expression of our missionary vocation within a diversity of apostolic commitments. Furthermore, Spiritan involvement in a variety of educational works has long been considered an important tool for holistic evangelisation, empowerment and human development in many parts of the world. Today, in the context of a globalised world, our involvement in education requires of Spiritans and our collaborators a listening heart and an attentiveness to where the Spirit is calling us "to respond creatively to the needs of evangelisation of our times" (SRL 2).