

## IV. SPIRITANS IN FORMAL EDUCATION WORKS

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**4.1** Historically Spiritans were among the pioneers in building primary, secondary and technical schools in many countries. To this list, founding and participation in teacher training colleges, and numerous junior and senior seminaries for clergy and religious formation can also be added. Most of the formal Spiritan educational works were founded either through a process of collective discernment or by individual members highly committed to the development of young people. This Spiritan legacy continues to be active and alive in formal educational works owned by the Congregation throughout the world, many of which are long-standing and reputed for their academic excellence.

**4.2** Spiritans also have a long history, that continues, of involvement in a wide variety of formal educational works in collaboration with others<sup>3</sup> in small parish-based kindergartens and primary schools and pastoral centres. Collaborating as teachers and chaplains, as fundraisers, as administrators of local parish schools, as board members, and team members of school/university youth-ministry programmes, etc., many Spiritans give a witnessing presence in an educational environment.

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<sup>3</sup> A good example of this is the Auteuil Foundation which was founded in 1866 to care for orphans and entrusted by the Archdiocese of Paris to the Spiritans in 1923 and to Blessed Daniel Brottier. More than 700 Spiritans have ministered in the Auteuil Foundation and continue today as chaplains, board members and as trustees. Currently Auteuil is run by lay people and assists over 13,000 young people in some 200 houses.

**4.3** A particularly positive expression of the Spiritan charism is the founding and support of schools for those with special needs or disabilities, who otherwise would not have access to an educational environment. One example among others is that of St John’s School for the Deaf, in The Gambia.<sup>4</sup>

**4.4** Educational works, like any other, evolve over time and can therefore find themselves in a situation whereby they no longer serve their original founding purpose. In such a scenario there is a need for a re-examination of our presence and how such a work is at the service of “*the evangelisation of the poor*” (SRL 4). In responding to the continually changing circumstances of the poor, contemporary needs and Spiritan values must all be taken into account in an ongoing discernment (cf. 2.9).

Long established Spiritan educational institutions that today find themselves serving social groups that do not easily fit into the everyday understanding of the *poor* face particular questions in relation to the Spiritan charism. Challenging as this may be, evaluation and ongoing discernment is necessary so that Spiritan values are expressed in forms that are different from the original foundation yet continuous with the mission of the Congregation today. In certain situations it may be necessary to accept that a particular institution has fulfilled its mission and no longer requires the investment of Spiritan resources.

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<sup>4</sup> St John’s School for the Deaf has its origins in 1978 when a Spiritan student, Patrick Nolan, on overseas pastoral experience, began working with hard of hearing children in an empty storage room in a mission compound. Today the school caters for some 220 students with a teaching staff of 35 persons and is part of the educational outreach of the Diocese of Banjul.