



PHILOSOPHY OF SACRED HEART EDUCATION

Sophie's Gift...

Our Call to the Future

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION COMMISSION

Letter from the International Education Committee

December 12, 2023

Dear Sisters and Mission Partners,

All Sacred Heart educators, religious and mission partners, recognize that Sophie's vision of education is a gift that we have received. In the midst of the world's current uncertainty and instability, Sophie's vision inspires us to demonstrate a contemplative sensitivity and regard for the human dignity of each person through the service of education. We believe that education is inherent to the process of humanization and, therefore, is at the heart of our mission to discover and reveal the Love of the Heart of Jesus. Chapter 2016 called for the writing of a contemporary philosophy of Sacred Heart education. We offer this text to all who wish to live the vocation of Educator of the Sacred Heart with both humility and hope.

When we first began our work as a commission, we found inspiration in the Society's *Constitutions*, particularly the section on *Our Service in the Church*. We then read all the original documents that have so enriched generations of Sacred Heart educators: the Plan of Studies, Chapter documents, the 1988 IEC document, essays and talks by Mother Stuart. We read the texts of popular education and materials produced by RedLAC and the other Networks of Sacred Heart schools as well as Society documents such as *Being Artisans of Hope in Our Blessed and Broken World*, materials prepared for the Special Chapter, and the subsequent work of the international commissions such as the International Planning Commission.

Covid challenged us but never discouraged us. Through the power of zoom we were able to conduct zoom regional gatherings with Africa, Europe, the Philippine Duchesne Region and ASIANZ. During these sessions, we used a common power point presentation giving an overview of our work. We tested some of our ideas regarding both the Philosophy of Sacred Heart Education and the Profile of the Sacred Heart Educator, which had been emerging. We listened to the echoes and opinions of the participants. We also attended a variety of meetings before and during the pandemic; thus, we collaborated with lay people and RSCJ locally and regionally. All these conversations contributed to our reflection and writing.

Throughout the process of composing this philosophy of education, we were constantly inspired by the call to *synodality*. We experienced in our prayer and work together the impulse of the Holy Spirit beckoning us on. Our reflection and conversations reinforced the sense that the Spirit and Sophie were in some profound way encouraging the process of discernment that eventually has been realized in this document.

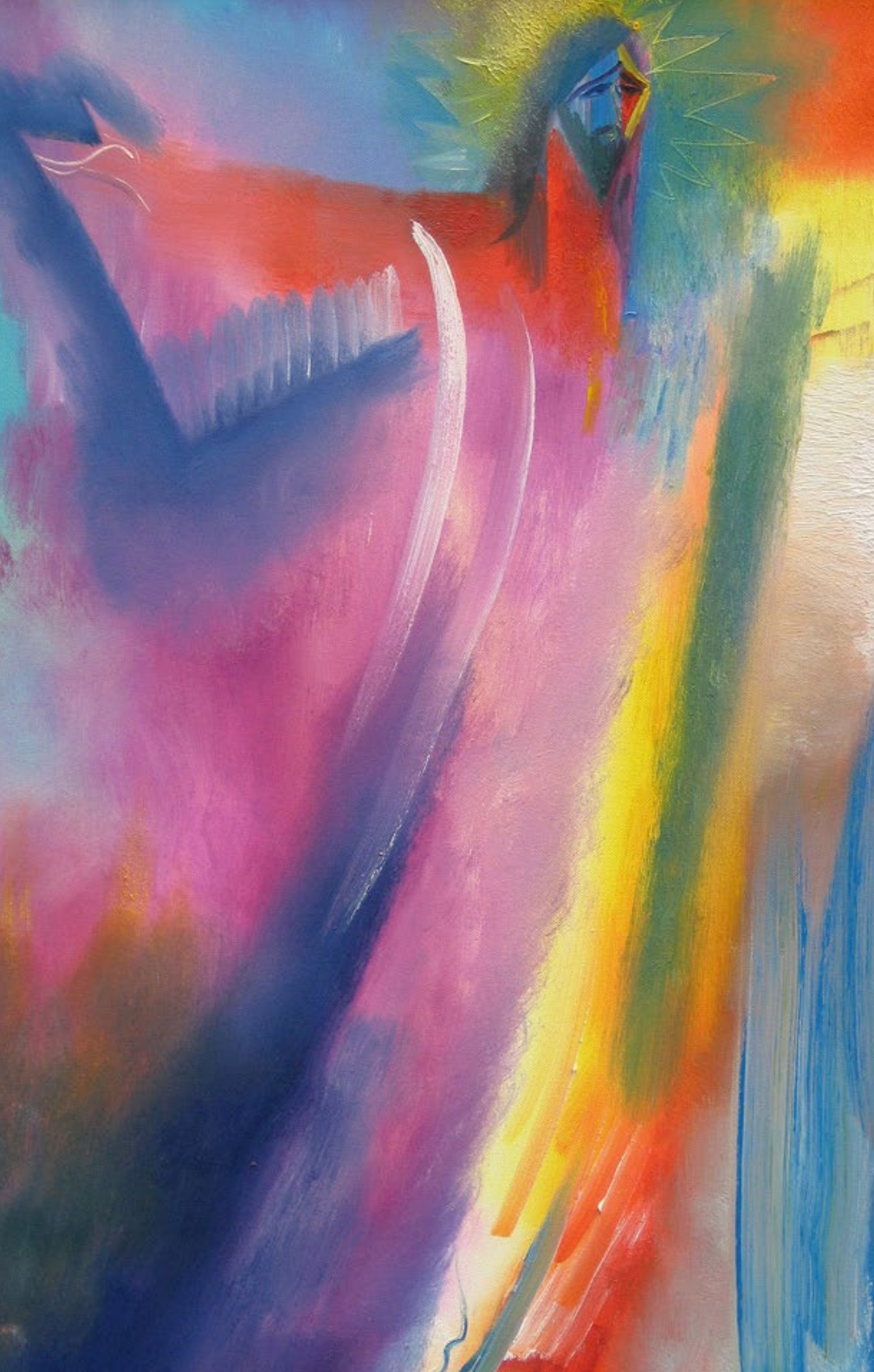
We hope that the spirit of this document is unifying, and we hope that it will inspire all of us as we engage in revitalizing the Society of the Sacred Heart for the sake of mission. We believe that exploring the philosophy of Sacred Heart education while probing

the potential of the four apostolic priorities will help religious and mission partners to deepen both our understanding of mission and our ability to live it.

Now let us pause and in silence turn to Mary, *Mater Admirabilis*, who models the very qualities we hope to embody as Sacred Heart educators. Inspired by Mary, may we build a world that reflects Christ's hope for humanity.

United in Christ's Heart,

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We are sent by the Church to communicate the love of the Heart of Jesus. In Him all find their true growth as persons and the way towards reconciliation with one another. This we believe; this we want to proclaim.

(Constitutions of the Society of the Sacred Heart #10)



Saint Madeleine Sophie chose to express this conviction through the service of education, especially of the young. Faithful to her inspiration, and, like her, open to new situations, we make her desire our own:

- that people become ever more aware of truth, of love and of freedom
- that they discover the significance of their lives, and devote themselves to others
- that they take part creatively in the common effort to transform the world
- that they be enabled to encounter the love of Jesus
- that they let their lives be shaped by an active faith.

(Constitutions of the Society of the Sacred Heart #11)

Introduction

Our world is at an historic paradoxical moment. In the midst of extraordinary possibilities that offer promise and life, we simultaneously witness inequality, suffering and violence. Responding from the depths of our relationship with Christ and attentive to the urging of the Spirit, we respond to the reality in which we live as educators. *Our experience points to a deeper truth, that of solidarity.* Our spirituality impels us toward transformation through our contemplation of the pierced Heart of Jesus in the fractures and potentiality of our world. Inspired by Christ's attitudes, we are bound together in this common effort.

Drawing from our tradition of care for relationships, we embrace the unity inherent in our humanity and seek to strengthen collaboration with other groups equally committed to justice, peace and integrity of creation. Through education we hope to help to humanize the social fabric, and thus contribute to global transformation.

We see education as a process of *humanization*, rooted in the Gospel and in the educational intuitions of Madeleine Sophie Barat. Education is an intentional practice of generating learning through experience, encouragement and mutual discovery. This process of pursuing the truth is inherently relational, dynamic, dialogical and reciprocal. Education leads to freedom because it is an integral formation process that responds to the urgency for meaning and encourages people to seek justice and peace.

As Sacred Heart educators, religious and lay, we root our practice in the vision of Madeleine Sophie Barat. We know that her quest for meaning and truth became anchored in her relationship with Christ in and through whom she experienced the tenderness and warmth of God. The image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus best conveyed to her the depth and gratuitousness of God's love for all. We see the Risen Christ as the all-embracing, loving manifestation of the Divine, extended without limit, totally inclusive, unconditionally welcoming.

Inspired by Sophie and the spirit of the Society of the Sacred Heart captured in the *Constitutions*, we desire to demonstrate a contemplative sensitivity and regard for the human dignity of each person. We commit ourselves to discover and to reveal God's love in the heart of the world through the service of education.

The quality of relationships is central to our vision and educational practice because through the dynamic of mutual respect one experiences being honored as a human being in whom the Spirit dwells. Awakening in each person this self-knowledge is a significant objective of Sacred Heart education. The experience of being loved nurtures in each person a sense of personal worth, a deep appreciation of human dignity and the value of creation. This perspective is essential to the work of transformation.

Thus, we design our methodological process around a critical vision of the world and the conviction that a transformative education responds to the urgency of life. We set out to work for the transformation of our world into a community of justice and peace, reflecting Christ's vision and love for humanity and creation. In the twenty-first century, this work translates into an educational practice centered on each person within a community, in which educators accompany people in the development of attitudes essential for a life with meaning.

Philosophy of Sacred Heart Education

Education... *a process of humanization*

Education is a service of close relationship and deep respect. This *love in action* allows the person to develop what is considered most valuable in order to become a full and authentic human being. The experience of being loved nurtures in each person a deep appreciation of human dignity, confidence in being an agent of one's own growth and a sense of personal worth. This process of humanization occurs within the community whose values focus on solidarity, compassion and justice. Learning and living in this context strengthens the person's capacity to work for the common good, and this perspective is essential to the process for transformation.

Education... *a path towards transformation*

The quality of relationships creates a space characterized by an ethic of care and unconditional acceptance of the other, where everyone receives and gives so that all can grow together. The energy created by the dynamic of authentic relationships inspires people to build communities committed to the common good of all creation. The value system of these communities leads to transformation that is characterized by mutual respect, compassion and hope.

Education... *a practice rooted in silence*

Our perspective as educators is shaped by our own interiority, our relationship with the Spirit and with our community. We cannot develop this perspective without choosing to create in our consciousness, in our heart the space and time for silence. It is in silence that listening begins, and it is in silence that we develop sensitivity to Mystery.

We value space and time for silence because in and through silence we strengthen our ability to discern the essential from the non-essential, making us persons who value the interior life. Generative listening enables us to be present to the other as educators. The quality of our presence contributes to the depth of relationships. We desire this energy of respect and love to remain at the center of our educational practice.

Education... *the art of contemplation*

At the heart of our educational mission is the integration of a contemplative approach to the world in our own lives. Becoming people of interiority is essential if we are to become fully human. Developing interiority calls for taking the time to stop and pray.

Learning to distance ourselves and go deeper to see life from a different context frees us from living only on the surface. This contemplative gaze gives us balance and the ability to cope with crises and extreme situations.

“The glory of God is the human being fully alive.
The life of the human/PERSON is God’s vision.”

– Attributed to Saint Irenaeus

Philosophy of Sacred Heart Education

Education... *formation in thought and critical consciousness*

To stay true to our intention as educators, we aspire to develop multiple intelligences and support individuals to reach their potential. We recognize the importance for logical reasoning, understanding, emotional knowledge, creativity, critical thinking and problem solving. Developing the capacity to think critically necessitates intellectual training that fosters penetration of thought and inquiry. Essential questions structured around *how* and *why* serve to deepen persons' capacity to think as well as their ability to handle complexity and uncertainty. Such an education enables people to become persons of discernment.

Education... *an intentional practice*

Education is the process of seeking truth and understanding humanity. Truth is complex and must entail different perspectives. If people are to discover the significance of their lives so that they will choose to participate creatively in the common effort to transform the world, they need to learn to appreciate and honor other people's points of view. Generating learning through experience, encouragement and mutual discovery, we engage all the members of the community in processes that are inherently relational, dynamic, dialogic, and reciprocal. Integral formation encourages the virtues and habits essential to live a fully human life.

Education... *seeking a common horizon*

As educators we respond to the realities within our own context always looking towards that horizon where we are called to be ONE. Our conviction is that a transformative education responds to the urgency of life and that humanity unites us on a shared path. We see education as a dialogue and partnership with people, many of whom have different beliefs, and yet, all of whom draw from a universal system of values. We choose to participate in this globalized world affirming that it is conditioned by love. As educators, we commit to listening deeply to the cries of humanity and creation and to responding with compassionate action with a preference for the most fragile and vulnerable.

Going beyond borders to serve all.

We embrace the universality of humanity and feel called beyond differences of nationalities, languages and faith traditions. Attention to reality plays a significant role in our educational practice. *Love in action* is the means through which all experience being valued. These elements speak to us of Sophie's vision of education. We aim to work for the transformation of our world reflecting Christ's vision for humanity and creation. We act with hope, courage and confidence because we know that transformation is ultimately the work of the Spirit of God.

“It is the direction of the intention which gives us unity.
Direction of intention is the greatest power in our life. We are
what our intentions are. We live by our intentional thoughts.”

– Janet Erskine Stuart, RSCJ



In the *Philosophy of the Sacred Heart*, we have captured the essential concepts underlying our foundation as Sacred Heart Educators. We offer this profile as a description of our aspirations and dispositions as they might be lived given our character and context on a day-to-day basis.

Profile of the Sacred Heart Educator

As Sacred Heart educators, both religious and lay, we want to live and manifest the attitudes and feelings of the Heart of Jesus in our world.

We feel responsible to transmit and renew the educational legacy of Madeleine Sophie that we have received.

In whatever field we work, we feel part of the same community, united by the same spirituality and the same one objective: that the love of the Heart of Jesus may be known.

The following calls are essential to Sacred Heart Educators.

ONE.

Be persons of integrity and authenticity

We aspire to live human values and to attend to our own formation and growth in faith.

We believe that it is important to develop the capacity to listen and dialogue, to be patient and to be close to others, to be self-critical in our educational work and to be willing to learn and to change.

We integrate into our practice consistency and responsibility, always acting with mutual respect and trust.

We want to live open to reflection, to wonder, to the interior life and to Mystery.

TWO.

Be persons with an educational vocation

We value and promote the centrality of the person and her/his growth in all dimensions: affective, spiritual, physical, intellectual and socio-political.

We are attentive to the growth of each person; we accompany her/him and help the person to develop her/his gifts, talents and abilities.

We want to have a broad vision that focuses more on the process than on immediate results, encouraging an effort and an appreciation for a job well done.

We create a communal and welcoming environment and we encourage discernment.

THREE.

Be persons who live education as a process of interaction with the world

We pay attention to the calls of the world through interaction and dialogue within the socio-cultural context.

We analyze the current reality. We want to be open to change and to prioritize Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC).

“We seek more and more to be present on the peripheries, where life cries out.” (p. 22, *General Chapter* 2016)

We desire to know the Society of the Sacred Heart and its apostolic priorities both locally and internationally.

“Today, more than ever, people need to become interior souls, to learn to be the authors of their own lives, with a personal core that sustains and unifies them as valuable, unique, unrepeatable beings, with clear and noble goals that motivate and encourage them to become what they are called to be.”

— Attributed to St. Madeleine Sophie Barat, 1830

FOUR.

Be persons committed to ongoing formation

We attend to our on-going formation to be competent in our service as educators.

We aim to deepen our understanding of the pedagogy of the Sacred Heart by enhancing our methodology. We utilize the most effective tools and evaluation processes in our educational practice.

We want to learn new ways to teach, guide and accompany the persons with whom we work.

We intend to encourage cooperation, exchange and active engagement.

We know we must be mindful of both our local reality and the context of the global community.

We want to deepen our interior life and spirituality of the Sacred Heart with the hope to witness through our lives the God of Life.

We wish to learn to see the world wherever we are from the point of view of the most vulnerable.

FIVE.

Be persons who work in a team

We hope our way of relating within a team is marked by reciprocity. We want to work in a coordinated manner characterized by appreciation and humility.

We value attitudes of solidarity, selflessness and generosity and we believe that these generate synergy among all.

We engage in consistent reflection on our own actions and practices.

We believe that shared leadership capacity enables us to engage the entire community in the educational task.

We commit ourselves to reconciliation and peace. We believe that they affect the way we solve problems and face crises by enabling us to adopt alternative approaches.

SIX.

Be persons who live in generosity and joy

We recognize that Sophie's vision of education is rooted in generosity of spirit and deep appreciation of joy.

We sense that seeking balance and silence is essential to the capacity to give joy to others.

We know that being grateful persons enhances our capacity to be generous.

We believe that in inviting others to experience hope, we need to project the spirit of joy and generosity through our words and actions.

“If I had my life to live over again, I would seek to live in complete openness to the Holy Spirit.”

– Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat



Considerations for the Formation to Mission of Educators of the Sacred Heart

The continuing formation of Educators of the Sacred Heart is essential if Sophie's vision is to be transmitted.

While formation to mission programs need to be culturally sensitive, there are certain universal elements to the formation of Sacred Heart educators:

Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat

- Basic understanding of her biography with a focus on the political and historic context
- Exploration of Sophie's relationship with Christ and her orientation to the Holy Spirit.
- Knowledge of Sophie's perception of prayer as the interior life or interior spirit.
- Sophie's understanding of education as a means to communicate love.

The spirit and charism of the Society of the Sacred Heart

- Understanding of our mission to discover and reveal the love of God in response to the urgent needs of our world
- Appreciation for the dynamic of being wholly contemplative and apostolic
- Commitment to interculturality
- Commitment to JPIC

Calls of the Apostolic Priorities for purpose of revitalizing the mission of the Society of the Sacred Heart

- Education
- Spirituality
- JPIC
- Formation

Core Values We Wish to Uphold

- Co-responsibility
- Collaboration
- Integration
- Transformation
- Subsidiarity

Focus on the essential points of the Philosophy of Sacred Heart Education including the Characteristics of being a Sacred Heart Educator and the Methodology of Sacred Heart education.

In the future, formation programs and the supporting resource will be shared through a digital library.

A special thank you to Stephen B. Whatley
for generously allowing the use of his
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All paintings by Stephen B. Whatley
stephenbwhatley.com

Cover: *Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat*. 2020

P3: *The Glory of Christ – Easter Day*. 2008

P4: *Autumn Flowers From East Dulwich*. 2022

P8: *Bluebird of Hope*. 2009

P10: *Pink Lilies in Florence's Vase*. 2002

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