**INVOLVEMENT OF SPIRITANS IN EDUCATION**

**IN LATIN AMERICA**

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1. **Preliminary remarks - Need to widen our concept of education**

It is important to widen our concept of education. When we talk of education we tend to think immediately of the formal education that takes place in schools. But education can be both formal and nonformal. The Maynooth Chapter refers to both types of education. In Latin America the congregation does not have its own schools, so we work with **nonformal education.** Even when we work in government or Catholic schools within parish boundaries we tend to use a nonformal educational approach: celebrations, groups, formation of leaders.

**Formal Education** tends to use the **deductive method of giving a class, of starting with theory, with principles**. This works well in a school situation.

On the other hand, nonformal education works with the **inductive method of starting with peoples’ lives and the concrete situation** where people find themselves. The See Judge Act Method is an example of a well-known inductive method in the Church.

The story of the disciples on the way to Emmaus depicts how Jesus uses this method. He does not start by giving them a lecture. Rather he starts patiently with their situation of discouragement and disillusionment to awaken them to faith in the resurrection. Thus it was only at the end of the journey that his listeners recognized him, in the breaking of bread.

Non formal education is not limited to parishes. The methodology of non-formal education can be used in certain situations within the school environment. In fact if some form of a non-formal educational approach is not used to develop faith commitment, graduation from a school frequently can also mean graduation from the Catholic Church.

Many pastoral agents (priests, sisters, laypeople) have been trained to work in a **formal educational** setting, in an institutional way or within institutions (schools, universities, seminaries, hospitals, social institutions) and have difficulty in adapting to the new rules of a non-formal situation. They are competent when it comes to giving a talk, a class, organizing from the top down. But in pastoral ministry they have difficulty in understanding that the rules, the attitudes and the methods now have to be different. In a school situation, the teacher can count on the continuous presence of her pupils. Even if she is a bad teacher, pupils continue to attend because they need to get a diploma at the end of the course. Without a diploma they won’t be able to get a job in the future. And without a job they won’t be able to eat, marry, buy a house and raise a family. In a community or nonformal education context, on the other hand, the motivation is different. The pastoral agent or lay leader does not have a captive audience. He/she must motivate people to come to the first meeting. After the first meeting, people must be motivated to return to the next one. And so for every meeting. When meetings become tiring, repetitive and mediocre people tend to opt out. Pastoral ministry does not have guaranteed clients and so, to be successful, needs a **high capacity of adaptation and creativity**. There are two options: adapt and respond to people's needs and so motivate them or close down.

Many church leaders have been trained for talking at people and have difficulty in knowing what to do when they **don’t have a captive audie**nce. They lack training in the inductive methodology of nonformal education.

In this report I will deal mainly with informal education as this is the reality of the congregation in Latin America. Other people, better qualified, will make the case for formal education.

1. **Some experiences of Spiritan involvement in education in Latin America**
2. **PARAGUAY**

**Programme “Gotas de Amor” (Drops of love)**

This is a mission, **mostly of “street contact” with over** 250 children in the big municipal market of Asunción. The programme is run by a group of lay volunteers and Spiritan postulants. Other experiences involve work with **semi-private schools in parishes** and with **formation programmes for formators** that are linked to the Conference of Religious.

**BOLIVIA**

1. **Work with schools within the parish**

This involves meetings and **accompanying 11 Catholic teachers of religion**, morality and ethics, who work in these schools and organizing **celebrations and talks** in the schools.

1. **Work with Prisoners**

There is also an educational institute within the largest prison in the country, with 3,200 prisoners, within the parish boundaries. In this institute we accompany everything from literacy to higher level education programs.

1. **Work with the health ministry.**

**Health Ministry in Genera**l. We form leaders from among the people who work with health issues, especially in the area of prevention and recovery of health.

**Children’s’ Ministry**. Pastoral agents are trained to accompany the holistic growth of the children, from pre-birth to the age of six years of age.

1. **BRAZIL**
2. **Youth Leadership Training Programs (CDLs - 1st & 2nd Levels) & CDL Musical. This latter involves a process of formation through the Arts - music, song, dance, voice training, body expression and learning to play different musical instruments)**

We organize courses on local and national levels and also in some Latin American countries. On local level, **teams are organized on diocesan level and are reproducing** the programs in over 80 dioceses in Brazil. The programs have been published in four languages: Portuguese, Spanish, English and Ukrainian. We also have training videos to facilitate the training of facilitators who reproduce the courses. The aim is to train trainers.

Participants: young people who participate in youth groups in parishes and schools.

The nonformal **methodology used is very attractive and successful:**

* A number of short talks are complemented by different exercises. Learning situations are created where **participants learn by doing**. They **discover their talents,** their capacity to communicate with others, to think for themselves. This method contrasts with much of the methodology in the Church today of talking at people and treating them as passive audiences.
* There is great **variety, learning is done in a fun-way** and there is a strong spirit of friendship and bonding.
* The program or course can be easily **reproduced to impact on more people and** so involve an ever increasing number of people. This is one of the most important aspects of the course.
* Some of those who have done the programs and are then **invited back to give the courses to others** and so undergo a **second and more profound level of formation**. Here we use an important educational principle: “**the best way of learning something is being obliged to teach it to others.”**
* The programs can also be easily **adapted to very different target groups**: beginners, leaders, students in schools, in parishes and in dioceses.

1. **Courses of “Capacitar” to reduce symptoms of trauma**

Capacitar exercises empowering people to live in wellness, despite difficult conditions, especially those **suffering from: Primary trauma** (e.g. assaults, domestic abuse , rape, unemployment),continuous trauma (people living in extreme poverty; in violent situations, vicarious trauma (people looking after the seriously ill; the elderly).

1. **Workshops in the scenic, plastic and martial arts**,

**These are** initially designed to provide alternative choices to gang violence, drugs and prostitution, and hence, empowerment in a number of key areas.

1. **What led Spiritans to found or to become involved in this work?**

An important motivational factor is the **priority we give to human formation as a channel of freedom from poverty and ignorance** which enslaves many and facilitate their manipulation by the powerful.

**Young people are an important field of mission today**. The threatening collapse of the Church and religious congregations in some developed countries provoked by the exodus of youth is a stark reminder of the importance of this portion of the people of God. Also in developing countries young people are one of the principle **victims of unjust social structures**: unemployment, lack of housing, poor quality education in public schools, violence, drugs, and dysfunctional families. But young people are also a **potential for renewal and transformation of the church and society**.

1. **Criteria that should guide us in our involvement or our disengagement in Education**

**Education work is not only what goes on in schools so we** need to **widen the concept** of education and be clear on the following criteria:

* **Mission to young people. Understanding** a challenge is always a first step to finding a solution. **Diagnosis precedes cure.** Mission to young people does not operate in a vacuum, but in the context of the surrounding culture. The minds and **values of young people today are increasingly shaped by modern** and postmodern cultures and these new cultures no longer need a process of industrialization to spread their message. This is done today through the modern electronic means of communication inboth developed and developing countries. Therefore, an understanding of these cultures is **the key to understanding young people** and helping them on the road to Christian commitment.
* This cultural change requires a **different type of faith**. It means a transition from a **cultural Christianity to a Christianity of personal faith**. Faith can no longer be reduced to Sunday Mass, to a list of dogmas, to a moral code or to social problems. It must be something richer and more challenging. Faith is especially an **encounter with a Person, the person of Jesus** Christ. And the acceptance of Jesus means also the acceptance of his teaching, of his life style, his world vision, and his formula for human happiness.
* **Informal education requires us to start with where people are at. We need to start with** basic human needs. One such need is happiness. In the 4th century BC, Aristotle declared that the end of all human action is happiness. As a result of centuries of struggle against oppression the principle was definitely consecrated by Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) when he inserted the “pursuit of happiness” as one of the inalienable rights listed in the declaration of Independence of the United States, along with life and liberty. Another need is that of liberty. In one of his most inspired moments, Martin Luther King affirmed that “there is an internal desire for liberty in the soul of each human person. People perceive that liberty is fundamental and that to take away liberty from a person is to take from that person the essence of his humanity”. Other needs are: the **need to love and be loved, the need to be recognized, the need for material security to develop other aspects of life**, the need for an **identity**, the need to have **emotional** fulfillment in interpersonal relationships, to be kind and receive **kindness**, to give **meaning** to one’s own life, to **transcend oneself**, to be part of a human group and to count on it for dealing with life’s challenges and **building a better world**. If we don’t start with their interests we can’t hold their interest. We start with these needs and then show their origin in the creative act of God and their deeper roots in the Good News of the Gospel.
* **Education for Citizenship. However, to remain only on this level** is to deny our duty as citizens. Education should take into account the need the change people but also to change society. **The process of political and social awareness** should take into account the educational principle of a growth that is gradual. The development of awareness is something that involves work in groups, is gradual and passes through stages.
* **Methodology and philosophy for working with marginalized people.** In Brazil and other emerging countries the educational approach is very much influenced by the philosophy of the internationally known Brazilian educationalist, **Paulo Freire**. Freire points out that people on the margin of society tend to have a **magical view** of the world. They believe that the solutions to social problems must come from divine intervention or by waiting passively for those in power to have pity of them. They see the solution to social problems as **favours rather than rights.** Poor people also suffer from an inferiority complex by **assimilating the opinion the elite** classes have of them, that they have no value and are to blame for their situation. This creates passivity and resignation to their lot in society.
* **There is a need to strengthen Civil Society.** On the one hand, in a strong civil society people **discover the deeper structural economic**, social, political and cultural causes of the problems that afflict them - problems related to employment, health, housing, educational, transport - and, on the other hand, they become aware that they can **become subjects** of their own destiny and bring about change. Through the different **intermediary organizations** in society they have power and a voice: popular movements, local community and youth organizations, trade unions and political parties. The **transition from the awareness of being a serf** in a medieval organized society to that of being a citizen in a modern democracy and the awareness that all power comes from the people and not the elected official and the elite classes is an important step in this process. The divine right of kings and other people in power is long dead. People become aware that political process involves **more than electing representatives** every four years and then forgetting about them. A strong civil society will demand accountability of its elected officials.
* **Today the internet can be an important ally**. Young people are connected on a continuous basis through the internet and mobile phones. In the different internet groups, Yahoo groups, facebook, blogs etc. they discuss issues and pass on texts that have the effect of creating awareness. Here the systematic accompaniment of groups in communities is also important.
* **All our works exist to evangelizer.** An important theological principle is that all our works, whether they be parishes, communities, groups, programs or schools or universities – all exist to evangelize – independent of the fact that they use a formal or non-formal educational approach. We should aim for **quality and excellence in education while also passing on a value system**. Otherwise we can be educating cleverer exploiters of their own people. In the midst of the joys and hopes, the sadness and anguish of the human person of each age, notably those who suffer (cf. GS, n.1), the **Church proclaims through words and actions, Jesus Christ, the way, the truth and the life** (cf. Jn 14,6). We are not just social workers or nongovernmental organizations. We have a mission which we received from Jesus Christ. However, **evangelizing is wider than proselytizing** and how we evangelize will depend on the setting and the circumstances we find ourselves.
* **The model of Church that we present is of fundamental importance for the credibility of the message** we hope to transmit and is fundamental for evangelizing people today, especially young people. Inspired by the documents of Medellin and Puebla the Church in Latin America accumulated a significant capital of credibility due to its prophetic gestures on the side of those without opportunity or a voice. During the period of authoritarian and military governments the Church placed its moral force on the side of the marginalized sectors of society and became the voice of those without a voice in many countries.
* **However, there is a tendency today to retreat and strengthen a more clerical and bureaucratic and less prophetic Church**. This tendency can lead to a loss of this moral capital and a loss of credibility, especially among young people. Today the Church has **difficulty in attracting young people from the middle classes and youth with a high educational level.** The **vocations that are being attracted to our seminaries and convents** are not always the most idealistic and dynamic, with **capacity to dialogue with a new world which is being born**. Sometimes we find a **certain fundamentalism** which makes dialogue difficult. There is also an intellectual and cultural weakness in many who participate which is worrying. The Church runs the risk of losing the future leaders and formators of public opinion

**MISSION TODAY**

The Latin American bishops, in their **Aparecida Document of 2007**, propose a radical inversion of the ecclesiastical system, from a concentration by the Church on the **conservation of the heritage of the past to a proposal that everything in the Church should be orientated towards mission.** They talk of **mission on five levels**. **The fourth and fifth levels are seen as mission *ad gentes***. The debate over mission ad gentes has intensified in recent decades, to the point where it is no longer possible to refer to it only in terms of territory or first evangelization. So the fourth level, mission *ad gentes, deals with the areas in modern society that are now mission “territory” (youth, the urban world etc.). So t*he vast world of youth stands out as an important challenge for mission *ad gentes* (cf. RMi 37). The fifth level of mission *ad gentes is reserved for mission in another country.*



The **commitment to education should help to make the shift from a purely cultic and sacramental church** to one which also includes the skills for moving out of the sacristy to evangelize young people in their modern and postmodern cultural setting. Education has a key role to play in this.

Another factor has also become apparent. Leadership skills without a strong, **enthusiastic believe in the message** to be transmitted does not work. One lay person remarked ‘You need to believe, to be enthusiastic, and to be passionate about the message you have to transmit.’ The word Gospel means Good News. Good news cannot be communicated in a dispirited way. The image of a salesperson trying to sell something that he has absolutely no faith in is very relevant here. The message we have to transmit was never more relevant. However, in the present climate of a retreating and sometimes crumbling church such a posture is not always easy.

Work with young people is not for the weak-hearted. One must be prepared to take risks but risks that involve careful preparation and planning. This is the most difficult, the most challenging and the most rewarding mission ‘territory’ that exists today. Here will be fought the **battle that will determine the survival or not of many religious congregations and to some extent the institutional ch**urch itself.

**CONCLUSION – WORK ON TWO FRONTS AT THE SAME TIME**

**A pastoral strategy cannot be based only on short term results.** The **emotional impact of large rallies cannot replace the slow process of evangelization,** that respects the different stages and involves systematic accompaniment of persons and groups. Mass rallies can have their place, but on their own are not the solution. The model of evangelization **cannot presuppose a mass of people, especially youth, that have a low level of schooling, are poor and live in a rural culture.** Today there are signs that some developing countries where we work have started a cycle of economic and social growth in which part of the marginalized classes begins a process of upward mobility. In Brazil, in the last number of years 29 million people from the marginalized classes have moved into the lower middle classes because of income distribution policies of the government...

**The loss of a more critical and more dynamic sector of the population** – especially sectors of the younger generation – makes it more difficult for the Church to work with people who are more critical and have a higher educational level. **If we lose young people, we lose the future**.

In the long term **we run the risk of getting to the stage of some developed countries** where the Church is in the process of losing the youth generation and where the survival of religious congregations and the institution Church is at risk. The future is in the hands of pastoral agents who perceive the need to work on two fronts at the same time:

* **Making an evangelical option for the poo**r and
* **Opting to build a model of Church which has credibility** for a world that, in the words of Bonhoeffer, has become adult.

There are many signs of hope. In many countries the Church is making the work with youth a priority. Perhaps the Church of the future will have less people. But it is important that it be the yeast in the dough, that evangelizes, not from a position of power, but rather through the witness and the dynamism of its members, especially young people. According to Biblical spirituality, when we are weak we become strong.