

**XXXIV GENERAL CHAPTER
SOCIETY OF MARY (MARIANISTS)**

**REPORT OF THE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

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This report deals fundamentally with the period 2006-2012. But it will also make references to the time of my first mandate, so that to some degree it covers the two periods in which I have been the Assistant for Education, that is, from 2001 until today. What I have experience and accomplished cannot easily be separated out into two distinct parts.

During this time I have had the opportunity to visit and get to know all our Marianist communities and works. Naturally, I paid special attention to the educational institutions of all types (secondary and elementary schools, universities, non-formal education, publishing houses, etc.), to the educational activities of any other works, as well as to the formation of our religious in the aspects most connected to my Office. My vision of Marianist education became enriched through knowing and understanding different settings, in the exchange of opinions and perspectives with many Marianists — religious and lay — and in reflection upon the needs and challenges that present themselves in each location.

I have also had the chance to express in many ways (in Chapters, assemblies, seminars, workshops and other meetings; through writings addressed to the entire Society of Mary or to a given Unit; in meetings with Unit councils and with various communities, in personal conversations) my own viewpoints on the Marianist educational apostolate. Given all that, it would be difficult for what is laid out in this report not to have a certain repetitive character. I shall try to avoid that as much as possible, but I will not avoid mentioning the convictions, opinions and viewpoints that I have put forth on various occasions and in diverse forums.

**1. OUR EDUCATIONAL APOSTOLATE: A PRIVILEGED MEANS FOR
FORMATION IN FAITH**

I will begin by citing the invitation given us by the last General Chapter in the paragraph entitled *Opening the world to faith: integration of faith and culture*:

... we too feel ourselves called to respond to the challenges of our world from within the perspective of the Incarnation. That is:

1. *To act in the midst of the world, among its people, inserted in their reality, and to discern the opportunities that each society and culture offers toward the development of a renewed faith.*
2. *To become particularly concerned with the relationships between faith and culture, and to be convinced that the Christian experience liberates the person and contributes to an authentic progress of societies.*
3. *To utilize in our mission all of those means which form the social and cultural fabric of the society in which we live, especially those which contribute to the education and formation of the whole person. ("Education is for us a privileged means of formation in faith." Rule of Life, 74)*

(In Mission with Mary, 22)

To use the means that form part of the social and cultural fabric, to take action in the midst of the world and among people: these are fundamental choices for our mission that bring us into the civil, secular context and, in a special way, into that of the relationships among faith, culture and life. The institutionalization of this presence, far from being a burden, has constituted, and continues today to constitute a means for solidly implanting the Marianist charism in different societies and countries, and the best way to imbed our presence in those contexts and those relationships. We must not see in our educational institutions as a burden that is difficult to bear, but as powerful instruments for the accomplishment of our mission "in the midst of the world."

In line with this, the General Council, in setting out its goals and guidelines for the 2006-2012 period, noted as one of its intentions to *help clearly define the mission of each Unit, both from the point of view of our charism, as well as in terms of their actual situation.* For the realization of this goal the Office of Education proposed to *facilitate and work together so that all of the Units might clearly define their mission and goals, and that, in these goals, it may be clear that our principal objective is formation in faith and that education is for us a privileged means to carry out this work.* We also proposed to *give special attention to our educational centers of all types: academic, professional, university and non-formal, and promote ways to assure their Marianist character and, in collaboration with the Office of Religious Life, to put into practice a well-planned pastoral work.*

I believe I can say that this conviction and these orientations have continuously motivated the work of the Office of Education during these years, and that its activities have, at every moment, been guided by this commitment. Along with the other members of the Council, I have insistently (*opportune et inopportune*) encouraged all the Units to take these calls into account when they choose their means of

evangelization. Taking into account our fundamental goal of forming in faith, it is appropriate that, when discerning means of evangelization, we consider our preference for those which fit into the social and cultural context of the societies in which we live and work; especially for educational activity, understood in a broad sense, but normally developed in school institutions.

2. A GENERAL DIAGNOSIS

Marianist education today occurs in more than thirty countries, in a large variety of ways. It is carried out *via* ninety elementary and secondary schools, some forty works of non-formal education and other educational activities. About nine thousand lay persons and four hundred religious work in these centers, which are attended by more than one hundred thousand children and youth. The three universities, located in three different geographical and cultural areas of the United States, as well as the *Grupo Editorial SM*, with its important impact on the cultural and ecclesiastical world of nine countries, are educational means of the first order which continue to broaden their respective ranges of action. Over the last few years, points of collaboration have been established among these large institutions, which gives us an example of the synergies that make a future global network of Marianist educational works and institutions possible.

Education is the principal occupation of the Marianist religious; a great part of them are directly involved in this field. In spite of personnel problems, almost all the educational works, of every type that have existed for some years, continue to function today, sometimes with considerable expansions and renovations. In many cases they have new administrative structures and updated projects. In the meantime, various new works have opened, some in countries where we were never before present and others fulfilling needs in countries that already have a long tradition of Marianist presence.

The educational apostolate of the Society of Mary is very much alive. There are many positive aspects and signs that back up this affirmation and which show the vitality of our educational charism. I believe the most important is the fact that education is appreciated and valued by the entire body of Marianists. We can state that today there a renewed esteem for education exists among us. There is a clear consciousness that it is the way in which we can best contribute to the evangelization and integral development of persons and of society. The majority of young Marianists feel drawn to the educational apostolate. It is a field in which, both in the past and in the present, we operate well and know how to work. In general, Marianist education is highly valued by the numerous families who have confidence

in us, by the local churches and by the civil societies in which we serve. Our attitude towards integration is significant in the context of the educational, social and cultural forces at work in each place.

This renewed appreciation for education coincides with what is currently found in various ecclesiastical circles. Within the Church, there is a very clear consciousness of the importance and the necessity of education – and of educational institutions – for the task of the New Evangelization, even to the point where the Pope refers to the current situation as one of an authentic “educational emergency.”¹ The *lineamenta* that serves as a preparation for the next Episcopal Synod, planned for the month of October of this year and which will have as its study topic “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith,” dedicates an extensive paragraph to this question. It gathers up some significant words of the Pope in his discourse at the Catholic University of America (Washington, April 17, 2008),² and affirms, among other things, that: “*The Church, therefore, has an age-old tradition in education, namely pedagogical resources, studies and research, institutions, personnel - consecrated and non-consecrated from religious orders and congregations - in a position to provide a significant Church presence in academic institutions and educational activity, in general.*”³

Another of the principal positive aspects is the interest in defining and expressing clearly the identity of our institutions. In this sense *The Characteristics of Marianist Education* plays an important role. Furthermore, each establishment normally has an educational *Plan* – in some cases it is identical with the document on the *Characteristics* – which provides a clear orientation for the work being done. We have a solid, and up to date, pedagogical tradition which permits the delivery of a quality education in every sense of the word.

There are good pastoral ministry programs which try to respond to the real needs of the educational community with activities adapted to the youth and children whom we serve. Campus ministry in the schools, furthermore, is expanding into other areas, such as family ministry and care for the teachers and other co-workers, and alumni.

A decisive factor in the success of our education is the staff: teachers, administrators and co-workers – mostly lay persons – committed and well formed. Many of them have a clear Marianist identity and share with us our educational mission of

¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the Convention of the Diocese of Rome* (Rome, June 11, 2007).

² “*The Church's primary mission of evangelization, in which educational institutions play a crucial role, is consonant with a nation's fundamental aspiration to develop a society truly worthy of the human person's dignity. At times, however, the value of the Church's contribution to the public forum is questioned. It is important therefore to recall that the truths of faith and reason never contradict one another.*”

³ XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Lineamenta*, 20.

formation in faith. It is a curious fact that their role, as it grows more significant in administrative positions, has contributed to more clearly defining and making explicit the Marianist identity of many works.

One aspect that has undergone a great transformation in these last years is the manner of administering our works. Their complexity, together with the shortage of religious, the necessary professionalization required for certain jobs and the desire for more participation of the laity, has led to organizing the management and leadership roles of the educational institutions in new ways. In some Units, centralized structures have been created, differentiated from the provincial or regional councils. With the participation of religious and lay persons, they undertake to coordinate and direct, not only the economic and organizational aspects, but also the educational, pedagogical and pastoral, as well as the management of human resources.

At the time of creating these structures, some Units have transferred the title of the works to associations or foundations directed by the religious (such as in Chile, Argentina, Madrid); others have created an internal organism which operates under the direction of or in dependence upon the Office of Education (Peru, Zaragoza)⁴; in others there is a signed mutual commitment between each school and the Marianist institution (*sponsorship* in the United States) or a service of “*Tutelle*” [guardianship] (France). These new avenues have also contributed to reinforcement of the Marianist identity of the institutions in increasing the interaction between the educators and in creating a greater consciousness of working in a network.

3. THE BIG CHALLENGES

The positive evaluations which I have just noted must not make us forget some situations that demand reflection and concrete action, because they represent risks or presage difficulties for the future. I am going to spend some time on some of them that appear important and problematic to me, because I believe that we need to take them quite seriously.

3.1 *The presence of the religious and the laity*

A well-known situation and one of concern to all of us, from many points of view, is the shortage of religious in some Units. A consequence of this is the scarcity of the

⁴ In the current Province of Spain the two systems originating in the Provinces of Madrid and Zaragoza are being maintained for the time being.

religious personnel – in some cases their total absence – in the works. We can foresee that in some places this challenge is going to intensify still more in the coming years. It is a serious problem and represents a great challenge to the identity of Marianist education. Normally, in almost all the Units, it is receiving a preferential attention and is being confronted with appropriate policies. The role and formation of the lay staff are key elements of these policies.

One might think that the situation is the same in all our schools. But in fact there are two distinct situations: in some Units, where we have been present for a long time, there exists a Marianist legacy that comes out of a setting of an abundant presence of religious. In these institutions a tradition has been created, the fruit of the contact with the religious; some of the laity present there have known our pedagogy well for a long time, are imbued with a spirit that guarantees a generally Marianist environment. They have also had and continue to have courses of formation, but all grounded in that basis, in a certain Marianist *humus*. The present shortage of religious is made up for by the know-how of the faculty and by the general spirit of the institution. A school in these conditions can continue to be *Marianist*. But it is not something that we can take for granted; it is a part of the challenge we face for the future.

On the other hand, in the places where our presence is more recent, where we are beginning (normally in the younger Units), that tradition does not exist and that spirit is not yet firmly ensconced. The lack of presence of the religious often turns out to be a deficiency. I believe that in order to consolidate the Marianist character of these works, it is necessary to have a sufficiently strong and numerous Marianist presence at the beginning of an educational foundation. This is the only way to assure the modeling and transmission of the educational style and goals that are essential for us.

I have already referred to the increasingly decisive role of the laity and have highlighted its positive influence in relation to the identity of the institutions. Given the new situations, we have been stimulated to give to the lay person the role which corresponds to his place in the Marianist mission. We could say that it is one way of contributing to the revalorization of his vocation in the Church. Paradoxically, we have come to accept in a positive way the preponderant role of the laity in the works, while in certain cases it is more difficult to define and take a new perspective on that of the religious. It was just for that reason that the General Chapter proposed a guideline that we need to keep working on: *Deepen reflection on the role of our religious communities within our apostolic works, and make their presence both significant and stimulating* (MM 23, 5).

I believe it is important to underline that the existence and good functioning of the *organs of administration*, to which I referred above, should not presuppose a distancing of the religious from direct, “hands-on” involvement in the school. Rather than thinking that their only mission consists in *assuring the spirit* from a position removed from direct contact with teaching and administration, they need to be present and directly involved with people (this observation seems to me to be valid for all the religious, be they lay or priests). Nor should there be any kind of barrier between the works and the Unit authorities. Open interaction and communication prevents any decoupling of the works from the Unit Administrations. Otherwise, their relationship could become manifest only in isolated moments, or when some economic or other crisis arises. The apostolic works configure the Unit’s mission and are not something outside of it; they cannot operate differently from or parallel to the concerns and interests of the Unit councils or without the visits of their members to the communities.

3.2 The transmission of the Marianist educational charism

It is a well recognized fact, to which we must pay due attention and which is related to what I have just said: where the Society of Mary is growing, where we have many vocations, there is normally a lot of dedication to education, good will and growth in the educational works. But this good attitude is not always accompanied by the possibility of adequately transmitting to the young religious the Marianist pedagogy, its specific characteristics, our particular style of education, our *know-how*. In those places the new generations of religious cannot count on models, either personal or institutional, from which to draw a theoretical and practical educational wisdom. The fact that many vocations in these locations come from surroundings without a Marianist presence makes the problem more acute, because previous personal experiences of contact with our education are lacking.

Although I have already done so on repeated occasions, I want to insist that this is one of the principal challenges that we face for the future, the solution of which is not guaranteed and to which we need to devote the interest and forces that it merits. The Unit Councils and especially the assistants for education have here a big job and an enormous responsibility. It is not enough just to trust in teacher training and mechanical repetition of some maxims about Marianist education. I think it is essential to awaken and to stimulate the teaching vocation in the young religious, to strengthen their formation in this field. We have to acquaint them with some documents, give courses and program their preparation in this field from the beginning of their formation. But these means, although necessary, are not sufficient in themselves. There is a practical know-how and an educational sense that are learned directly, by contagion. For this we need also, and above all, courage and

enthusiasm, witnesses, mentoring, direct knowledge of works that present a solid Marianist character.

Our situation as an international community offers us possibilities in this sense that we should not neglect. The last General Chapter made note of it in MM 50.1 and, above all, in paragraph 35:

... the Chapter invites those Units with experience, both in pedagogy and in the Marianist method of education, to welcome the young religious from Units of recent creation, in order to help them learn the theoretical and experiential educational and pastoral styles proper to our charism.

There has been some movement in this direction, but I believe it needs to be intensified, just as the paragraph cited points out.

The handing on of the educational charism to the laity, on the other hand, is the condition not only for maintaining the identity of our institutions, but also for their very survival. I am not going to insist upon this, since it seems to me to be so evident to all of us, and because, to a certain degree, I have referred to it in the previous section. There is a concern that normally translates itself into good plans and accomplishments. We must not forget in any way that the newer generations of teachers have not had much contact with the religious. For that reason, besides the necessary theoretical formation, it is important to know how to mentor them, to be close to them, in a way in which they can experience, and not only hear about, what *family spirit* really means. This characteristic of our spirit and our pedagogy will contribute to their formation as Marianist educators, through a contagion that earlier we could take for granted.

3.3 The financial support of the educational works

This concerns a fundamental aspect of the operation of all of our works and, naturally, of the educational ones as well. Upon it depends not only the possibility of accomplishing their mission but also their very survival and, to a great extent, the maintenance of satisfactory internal environments. In some cases, the problems in this area are a serious threat for the future.

From an economic perspective, the situation of our works is enormously varied. There are countries in which the works are maintained solely through the contributions of the families of the students. This poses a constraint as to the population that we can serve, which is now putting in serious difficulty even the existence of our centers in a given country. In these locations there is usually a generous fund of scholarships for students who cannot bear the costs so that, at least

partially, we can maintain our institutions open to the entire population. Thus, it serves practical necessity, as well as remains consistent with our principles.

In other places, the state is responsible, to a greater or lesser degree, for a large part of the costs. This policy, not always understood or favored by all sectors of society, allows the institutions to be open to the greater part of the families who are seeking access to them. It supplies a guarantee, relatively secure, of survival and of operating in appropriate conditions. In cases where this advantageous arrangement does not exist but where it appears possible to arrive at it, we need to be present and active participants in the associations through which we can influence the decisions of the public authorities.

Another solution, which for some time already has been producing results in some places – although we need to be aware of the inconveniences that it might bring – consists in working in collaboration with other private entities to assure minimal economic funding.

But the activity and development of some works in poorer surroundings, among them almost all those which have opened in the last several years and all those of non-formal education, are normally possible only thanks to external assistance, often from other Units. They are characterized by a dependency which, on occasion, raises serious doubts about their continuity.

We must be aware that the resources of the Society of Mary itself are diminishing and that it will be difficult to assure this assistance in the future. This touches, without a doubt, upon one of the most worrying questions at this time not only for Marianist education in some countries, but also for the very autonomy of the Units themselves. We need to dedicate to it, as has been done now for some time, a preferential attention. It is essential to continue the search for public and private financing, beginning in our own countries, if we wish our works to be viable for the long term.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Besides matters directly related to our apostolate, there are also other functions that involve the Office of Education, as indicated in the *Rule of Life*, especially in Articles 106 and 7.19. I am now going to refer to some of them.

In conjunction with the other Offices, the Assistant for Education must be concerned with the various facets of formation of the religious, since to him is entrusted their integral formation (*RL 7.19 a*). Especially is he to be involved in all that pertains to their professional preparation, be it intellectual or technical (*RL 7.19 b*).

Normally, in all the Units, we try to give the young Marianists a solid spiritual and theological formation, which is absolutely necessary. But sometimes one gets the impression that the only thing important is to seek a diploma or a certification in “religious sciences.” Nevertheless, I believe that to prepare our religious well – whether or not they are destined to be dedicated to teaching – they should also have a formation in the human sciences or technology, in what we might call “profane” studies. The *Guide to Formation* gives some very precise orientations about these studies, the criteria to take into account and the necessity of a dialogue with each person in formation, in order to try to match his personal capacities and inclinations with the common mission of the Unit.

The initial formation continues up to perpetual vows and, thus, covers also the first years of active life. It happens occasionally that, due to lack of personnel and the need to preserve the apostolic purposes of our educational works, the young religious take up too soon – sometimes immediately after the scholasticate – positions of responsibility in them. It would be desirable, nevertheless, that during the first years of apostolic life they might be able to dedicate themselves to teaching or some other direct ministry with students. They could, in that way, learn and experience in a positive way what is meant by the educational apostolate. It appears fundamental to me that the assistants for education be concerned about the satisfaction and success of the youngest religious in their first years of apostolic activity, as well as for their progressive formation so that in the future they will be able to take on the responsibilities and tasks of leadership. In the same way, one of their concerns should be preparation for the moment of professional retirement, which is happening to more and more religious, as they finish their active life.

Campus ministry in the educational institutions is a field where the responsibility is shared by the Offices of Education and of Religious Life; in some Units there is also an Assistant for Pastoral Ministry who attends to this specific area in close collaboration with the other Assistants. The programs that are common throughout the Unit, where these exist, offer indubitable advantages: security for those in charge locally, the possibility of sharing initiatives, opportunities for formation of pastoral workers, enrichment by means of exchanges, consolidation of Marianist identity.

In the same way, the formation for justice and peace of the religious themselves, of the students and of our co-workers constitutes a field of shared action with the

Assistant for Temporalities. The last General Chapter invited us to this task, especially in sections MM 41 and 26, 4-5. This is an aspect that will require continued attention, even though there already exists in our educational works a great interest for education in this regard; pastoral programs, furthermore, are often open to this type of formation and to work in solidarity, making possible also an initiation into volunteering.

So the task of the Assistant for Education in each Unit demands a conscious dedication. But in fact, only the large Units have Assistants dedicated full time to the functions assigned to the Office. In the others, the dedication is only partial, so it overlaps with other responsibilities, at times very absorbing. Although aware of the practical difficulties it means and in spite of the lack of personnel – or precisely for that reason – I believe that there must be an effort made in all the Units for the Assistant to have the time and the possibility of dedicating himself sufficiently to his Office.

5. MEETINGS AND COLLABORATION

5.1 *Meeting of the Assistants for Education*

In November 2008 we held in Rome a *Meeting of the Assistants for Education* of the Society of Mary, with the participation of those responsible for this Office in all the Units and of the members of the General Administration.

The fundamental purpose was to strengthen the consistency of the Marianist educational mission and to support the Assistants in the jobs that belong to their Office. It was especially a means of putting into practice the guidelines and goals that we had proposed from the General Administration:

- a. *Facilitate and encourage communication and mutual enrichment among different sectors and persons who participate in Marianist education.*
- b. *Maintain fluid communication between the Assistants for Education from each Unit.*

It created a privileged opportunity to get information and new ideas, to open up a forum for debate in which to raise questions about the duties of the Office of Education, to provide a space for affirmation and renewal of our convictions about Marianist education. Our purpose was not to make decisions, nor was it to choose solutions for particular situations within the Units. Rather, by engaging in this

common reflection, we trusted that these reflections might give rise to interesting initiatives and developments within each Unit and Society as a whole.

Attention was centered on five major areas:

- a. The Three Offices. The Office of Education: meaning, functions.
- b. The situation of the educational apostolate in the Units of the Society: strengths and weaknesses; threats and opportunities.
- c. Marianist education: historical and charismatic foundations; the *Characteristics*; diverse types of educational institutions; pastoral ministry in the educational works.
- d. The context: Catholic education in the worldwide educational panorama; the view of other Congregations.
- e. Some important questions: mission shared with the laity; new forms of animation and administration.

For two weeks we reflected and dialogued over these and other aspects of Marianist education, benefitting also from the very valuable contributions of other persons. The participants came to understand the educational situation of the whole of the Society of Mary and became aware of the importance that this field of apostolate holds in the different Units. We were able to identify the principal current challenges and to study how to confront them for the future.

The meeting was very worthwhile. We were able to take the pulse of Marianist education at that moment. The sessions of the meeting revealed realities, concerns and hopes; and initiatives, plans and new proposals arose.

5.2 Meeting and report on non-formal education

In November and December 2010 we held a meeting in Rome about the Marianist non-formal educational works. Various religious knowledgeable about this type of apostolate, or with responsibility over some of them, participated. We reflected upon their peculiarities, educational possibilities and needs and, at the same time, sought ways to make them more effective, to strengthen their Marianist character and to allow for a greater awareness of this educational apostolate in the Society of Mary. The meeting was preceded by a survey similar to that which had been done some years ago, in 2003, the purpose of which was to become acquainted with the situation at that moment and plans for the immediate future.

Some months afterwards, and as a result of this last meeting, I sent to all the members of the Society of Mary a report with the title "The Marianist Works of Non-

Formal Education,” which was published as a *Three Offices*. In it I presented some considerations on this field of our education, taking as a point of departure the results of our dialogues and work in the meeting of 2010.

Both the Rome meeting and the later article are a way of responding to the desires of our Chapter of 2006, which

... entrusts to the General Council the responsibility of... encouraging the various works that we currently have to make known in a better way and to transmit to a wider audience our Marianist pedagogy. This should be done not only in our schools but in all other areas of our mission;...

(MM 20. 4).

The schools of the Society of Mary have always supported non-formal educational *activities* as a complement to the strictly scholastic. But, it was only a few years ago that these types of activities took on a special relevancy, so as to constitute separate entities in themselves. They respond to needs that require a kind of education different from that of the school, or to situations in which the latter is not possible. At this moment we have more than forty such centers, the majority in Africa, Asia and Latin America. They touch 6,000 persons and some fifty Marianists work in them. To these must be added the centers which welcome occasional groups and programs, as well as activities in this field carried by individuals.

The fundamental characteristic of these works is probably the *exclusion* from society experienced by their target audience, be they children, youth or adults. Our non-formal educational works try to draw them out of that situation, facilitating a positive and humanizing social integration. They also try to hand on to them some values based in the Gospel and which are precisely the same that underpin our dedication to all our educational works. So, in our meeting we considered what features our Marianist educational apostolate should have in the non-formal field. It seemed to us that the same criteria that are put forth in the document on *Characteristics of Marianist Education*, intended initially for scholastic education, are valid for the non-formal area. Nonetheless, we drew up some “complementary” articles dedicated to this type of education that can serve as inspirations and orientations for those who work in these Marianist centers.

One of the major challenges of these works is their financing. They are all possible thanks to assistance coming from individual donations, from subsidies by private or public organizations and, most of the time, from other Units. The problem is not an easy one, precisely because of the conditions of the environment in which they develop. They are born to serve people without resources and their contributions cannot maintain their operation. Moreover, the general economic situation at the

time many of them got started was, at all levels, better than the current one, as affected by the worldwide financial crisis. So, we dedicated a lot of time in our meetings to discussing these questions and we came up with several considerations and criteria, which I have included in the recent *Three Offices*.

Our non-formal educational works bring us close to the world of the poor and marginalized in a realistic and effective way from one perspective, that of education, which we know well. Nonetheless, we need to be careful lest a mythical image of non-formal education as the panacea that can alleviate and resolve, in a more “humane” manner, the problems of their education, in contrast to the formal, regulated school system. Nor can we think that it is the only form that Marianist education has in its approach to the world of poverty and marginalization. This is also being done through the institutional schools. More than a third of the Marianist schools today serve poor or very poor populations; furthermore, in all our school institutions, efforts are being made to be open to students of whatever stratum, and the work of social education continues to go well beyond theoretical reflection.

On the other hand, we must not unnecessarily perpetuate situations of social exclusion or “special” conditions, nor develop this non-formal works when it would be possible to have a school work. We want to provide the best education possible and, normally, this is done through regulated and more formal systems.

5.3 Relationship to other institutions

- a. Education Committee of the USG and the UISG
Several years ago in Rome, a Committee on Education for the Union of Superiors General and the International Union of Superiors General was established. I have been participating in a very active way with this committee, since its beginnings. It has organized several meetings for reflection and study on questions that are of interest to all the religious congregations which work in the apostolate of education. It has been a privileged setting for sharing anxieties and initiatives with other general officers responsible for education.
- b. Congresses and assemblies of the OIEC
The Catholic International Education Office is a private, independent and not-for-profit entity, created in 1952. It currently groups 210,000 schools, 44 million students and around 3,350,000 teachers in more than one hundred countries. Its fundamental goal is to create and develop links for mutual assistance and an active and responsible solidarity among its members.

The *OIEC* links together 102 countries as constituent members, 20 religious educational institutions with an international scope as associate members, and 18 institutions related to culture or education as cooperating members. It has permanent representatives in several international organizations (UNESCO, Council of Europe, UN, Holy See).

The Society of Mary belongs as an *Associate Member* to the *OIEC*, from which we receive proposals and information on a regular basis. This affiliation made possible the valuable participation of the Secretary General of that organization at the meeting of our Assistants for Education in 2008, which I have already mentioned. For this reason also I have had the opportunity to participate in the last two Assemblies, which are traditionally preceded by a scholarly Congress. In 2007 the meetings took place in Santiago de Compostela and in 2011 in Zaragoza, in both cases in Spain.⁵ These were two magnificent occasions to become better acquainted with the global situation of Catholic education, to feel oneself part of a network that is accomplishing an immense task in almost every country in the world. It was a chance to reflect upon the fundamental role of the Catholic school in the task of evangelization and the spread of culture in very different contexts.

The Congress of 2007, which was to precede the Assembly, had as theme *A New Person in the Service of Justice and Peace*, but was unable to meet because of the change of venue which I mentioned. Last year's theme was centered upon *The School as a Place for Education in Human Rights*. The discussion was about the work which the Catholic school does towards creating a culture in favor of human rights, especially those of children. Our current society is still filled with transgressions against these, so the Congress analyzed the concrete challenges that this fact presents to education and the necessary initiatives for developing an integral education in values which can advance the defense of those rights.

6. MARIANIST EDUCATION: TRADITION AND PROJECTIONS

As you all surely know, two years ago we began a process of reflection, study and elaboration of materials about Marianist education. On several occasions (meetings of various types, through *Via Latina 22*), I have been making known the motivation, the purpose and the plan to move it forward, as well as the steps that were being

⁵ The meetings had been planned for Lebanon (2007) and Egypt (2011). In both cases they had to change the site of the meeting at the last moment because of the social and political conflicts in those countries.

taken in its development. It is a dialogical and shared project in which, to begin with, its scope, its recipients, its sections, its authors, its contents and manner of presentation were carefully worked out.

This is a response to the desires of the last General Chapter, which asked us to *empower reflection and study on the relationship between faith and culture from within a Marianist perspective* (MM 23.3), and to put into practice the objectives that, following from the preceding, we marked out in the General Council for this period:

- a. *Deepen the roots of our pedagogy, updating it and adapting it to the times and varying cultures.*
- b. *Encourage reflection about Marianist Education in the world today, and for the future (new calls and challenges, places where we are present, existing educational establishments, new technologies); establish appropriate means of sharing ideas regarding these reflections.*
- c. *Promote exchanges of studies and materials.*

Throughout its almost two hundred years of existence, Marianist education has been faithful to certain principles and has progressively incorporated changes required by society and the Church. Furthermore, the practical realizations have always been accompanied by a reflection on the work done and a rethinking of the ways to respond creatively to new situations. The initial orientations already came at our beginnings, at first under the inspiration of Father Chaminade himself. The Constitutions of 1891 offer some very valuable guidelines on how to understand Marianist education and the dispositions which should inspire a Marianist educator. In 1956, shortly before Vatican Council II, Superior General Father Paul J. Hoffer wrote the circular *Marianist Pedagogy*, which for a long time was – and many elements of it continue to be so today – an obligatory reference for Marianist educators. The current *Rule of Life* places education, just as had some earlier chapter documents, into the context of the Marianist mission. As we already know, the *Rule* refers to education as an apostolate which for us constitutes a *privileged means of formation in faith, through which we aim to sow, cultivate and strengthen the Christian spirit and help it to flourish in the human race* (RV 74; 5.10).

Later, the General Chapter of 1991 called for “structuring the common elements of the Marianist educational tradition.”⁶ To respond to this call, the document *Characteristics of Marianist Education* was developed, which updated some aspects of our pedagogy and noted elements which must be present in every Marianist school. Since then, it has been an excellent instrument for clarifying and strengthening the signs of identity of our works. Although the use made of it varies according to countries and cultures, we can state that is an important point of reference for all the

⁶ *Mission and Culture* 34.3.

institutions. Drawing inspiration from it, the three universities in the United States later published the document *Characteristics of Marianist Universities*.

In these last years, numerous writings on Marianist education have been developed in several countries: Chapter documents and circulars, texts from our tradition, studies published in books and journals, renewed educational projects in the schools, adaptations of the fundamental criteria, plans for improvement and quality, programs of formation for teachers and administrators.

Both in the meeting of the Assistants for Education from all the Units of the Society, held in November 2008, and in the General Leadership Assembly that took place shortly afterward, and, although no express petition was formulated in this regard, there was a perceptible desire to deepen and develop the content of the document on our educational characteristics. The advances in pedagogical theories, the new circumstances in which our students live and the internal situations of the Society of Mary require new approaches. The growing development of Marianist works in new countries, the need to adequately transmit Marianist educational wisdom to the religious who work in them and the predominant presence of lay persons in posts of responsibility, are situations which push us to complete this undertaking.

Thus, it seemed opportune at this point to carry out a process of deepening and bringing to light some reflection upon Marianist education. An international team convoked by the Assistant General took charge of getting it underway. After two meetings held in 2010 and taking into account the responses to a consultation among some thirty Marianist educators around the world, a final project was worked out. Several sections are being developed, in such a way that each of them will become a separate publication. Seven teams of authors were appointed, representing the theory and practice of Marianist education, for the task of writing. Two of these teams are North Americans, two Spanish, one from Latin America, one from France, and one each from Asia and Africa. Among the authors are religious and lay persons, men and women, all directly committed to the Marianist educational mission or exercising various responsibilities in this field.

The intended recipients of the whole project are the Marianist religious who work in education or have been doing so until now; the laity who direct, animate and teach in Marianist institutions; and the young religious in their period of formation. Likewise, it will be useful for pastoral ministers in our educational works and, of course, those in various positions of responsibility in the Society of Mary who animate and govern Marianist life.

In the last analysis, the principal recipients are the children and youth who frequent our educational institutions, schools, universities, institutes of technical and manual training, centers of non-formal education, and parishes. With them, we target the fathers and mothers of the students, who also begin a process of formation when their children enter an educational institution, and the alumni who were educated in the Marianist institutions. In addition, there is also the Church and society in general: it is good for us to know how to articulate what we intend to do in our educational works, which we put at the service of the faith, of human development and of justice.

The purpose of this project is to offer a good instrument for promoting information, reflection or dialogue and to facilitate formation in various Marianist environments. It can also constitute, at the same time, a point of reference and of inspiration for local educational projects. As such, it includes theoretical reflections and proposes more concrete proposals for the future. The *Characteristics of Marianist Education* are thus framed in a comprehensive study that intends to remain thorough and rigorous, yet accessible.

The overall work consists of several sections; each one of them will be developed in an independent publication. The whole is preceded by an *Introduction* written by the members of the coordinating team, which explains the entire project and presents its contents.

- a. The purpose of the first section, Educational Charism and Mission, is to show how the Society of Mary's dedication to education has a close relationship with its own identity. Thus, it presents our charism, our mission and our spirituality as the foundations of Marianist education.
- b. In the second section (Educational Principles), we intend to go deeply into the foundations of Marianist education that were analyzed in the preceding chapter. Here are addressed our concept of education and the anthropology that supports it, the vision of society, the world and the person that we wish to form. Also studied here are questions linked to the dialogue between faith and culture and the pastoral criteria that derive from the Marianist educational principles.
- c. The third topic addressed is the context. Along with the general principles, the educational institutions must take into account the needs, expectations and specific conditions of each locality. On the other hand, they cannot ignore the advances in the pedagogical sciences and education theory. The new technologies of information, communication and knowledge, which quite evidently impact upon the educational and organizational processes of the institutions, merit particular attention in this section.

- d. The fourth section deals with the identity of Marianist education, the heir of a rich tradition with certain distinct traits, the fruit of the principles studied in the preceding chapters. Some clear signs of that identity provide a fundamental orientation for teachers, administrators, personnel and students.
- e. In the fifth section (*The Work of Education: Institutions, Instructors and Recipients*) we explain how the Marianist educational principles are incarnated in concrete activities and institutions: the schools as the principal sites, the universities, the centers of non-formal education and other works. In each of these institutions we try to create an authentic educational community in which are involved various categories of persons, be they the agents of education and its recipients.
- f. The sixth chapter concerns the animation and leadership of Marianist educational works. The implementation of the educational goals depends, in great part, upon the work of administration, management and animation at different levels. It is a matter of binding together quality and coherence with the principles of Marianist education.
- g. Under the title of *New Education in New Settings*, we intend to collect in section seven some specific contributions from countries or continents in which Marianist education is undergoing considerable development but which have less tradition, as in some of those most distant culturally from the Western environs in which it was born. In these settings Marianist education brings its know-how and tradition, at the same time being enriched by the contributions proper to each one of them.
- h. The elaboration of the last section, *A Project Open to the Future*, is being left for later. In it we will express and develop what are, for us today, as the fruit of a creative fidelity, the mission and the vision of a Marianist education as we looks towards future, and the strategies that can make it a reality.

At the moment this report is being written, all the teams of authors have begun their work; some have practically finished it already. Naturally, some of the documents will be based on others already developed, because there are already some very valuable recent studies on some of the foreseen topics.

The fundamental conviction is that Marianist education – today full of life – is the heir of a fruitful tradition and is open to a hopeful and optimistic future, to which it is worthwhile committing oneself.



We Marianist religious have created educational works since our very beginnings. Today, we continue dedicating the best of our human and material resources to education throughout the world. Thus, we who are responsible for the future of Marianist education benefit from a *longstanding educational tradition*, as well as the knowledge that comes from *much experience*.

The vast majority of our young religious feel attracted to educational work (how could it not be so in the Society of Mary?). We must know how to offer them a field in which they can fulfill that apostolic vocation, which is demanding and sacrificial, but at the same time, gratifying and stimulating. It is our job to animate their dedication to the fullest extent so that they can carry out their work with enthusiasm. Thus, they will be able to experience the same satisfaction as so many of our older men, whose self-giving dedication to educational work has filled their lives, making them witnesses to holiness for us all.

Given the recognition and appreciation of our openness to every means of apostolate that can contribute to formation in faith, I wish to again express my own firm conviction about the privileged role that education must hold in that task. Although taken from a very different context, I believe that these words hold true for us: *“In the future, the Society of Mary will be an educator, or it will not be.”*

I end with my sincere thanks to all the religious for the collaboration which I have encountered during my years in this post; in a particular way, to those who work in education and formation – to some extent, we all do – and especially to those who have held positions of responsibility in education and formation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "José María Alvira". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

José María Alvira, SM
Assistant General for Education