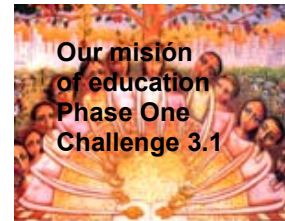


**Establishing fraternal relationships woven by the acceptance of limitations and differences, by the acknowledgement of gifts and possibilities; and a community with a common project.**



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This challenge emphasizes the relationships which make possible the development of a community project. This paper encourages the fostering of an environment that facilitates relationships which are vital to the development of a community project. Thus, we ask ourselves: What is the context, if it exists, where one can grow in the aspects mentioned which promote the formation of a community project? What conditions make possible the growth of such relationships that bring about an excellent common project?

## **1. “A community that forms the Communal”<sup>1</sup>**

Globalization presents many possibilities for a more profound interrelationship between men and women, yet it is also creating a world of individualism in which the common project becomes a very difficult and uphill battle. Globalization highlights individual success at the cost of what pertains to the communal. The emphasis here is on the attitude or manner of being of those who seek to adhere to a common project and to form the type of relationships that bring success to the project.

### **1.1 Building fraternal and horizontal “equal to” relationships**

A point of vital importance is to build relationships of brother/sisterhood, of love, of sincerity and honesty. Such relationships are fundamental in developing positive attitudes and assist in the growth of community. These values which help facilitate growth in relationships do not lessen the importance of self-criticism, personal/communal conversion and constructive criticism. Equality in relationships is essential to the development of such conditions in which the dignity of each human person as a daughter or son of God is central. Horizontal here means to be on par with another where “the better” or “the one who knows more,” does not exist, because that would then cultivate a hierarchical system in which such values would predominate in this new liberal and globalized world.

Building fraternal, horizontal relationships constitutes a paradigm. We are called to respect and accept the other with all that this signifies: values, gifts, potentials and limitations. It also helps one to live humbly, giving from whom one is, what one knows and has without seeking to pressure others with the idea that what he/she has is the best and should be accepted without question.

The learned modern world instills the value of the “one who knows more” over a person’s “being”. The one who knows more knows how to do much and does it well. This is the logic of the learned world that dominates and possesses attitudes of arrogance and success before the one who “is not learned”, in other words, lacks schooling. The learned or well-informed is the one who has the solution, the methodology and the steps to achieve a plan that is effective and active. It is not within his/her paradigm that there are also

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<sup>1</sup> Challenges in the Educational Mission of the Company of Mary. Review of General Chapter Documents from the XV and XIV General Chapters. General Team. Roma, June 2005.

elements of knowledge found in the daily life of the average person; that it is this type of knowledge which serves as the basis for the more specialized knowledge of the educated world.

This mentality eradicates the sense of equality between people who are different, with their personal limitations and weaknesses. The mentality of those who are learned do not recognize their weaknesses, nor reveal them. Instead, they develop a pride for their own abilities and potential and develop a way of relating that is hierarchical with the highest positions reserved for those who have the greatest store of knowledge. This mindset destroys the dignity we feel as daughters and sons of God and the complementarity needed in order to join together in the weaving of effective communities and societies based on solidarity. Such thinking is closely linked with post-modern mentalities which value instantaneous information, information technology, and the latest technology as a sign of power and conquest. As a result, unequal relationships are created. If they are not effectively channeled into changes in basic attitudes, rather than merely cosmetic, there will be a scandalous breach between the rich who continually become richer (with access to the latest technology) and the poor who keep getting poorer (without access to technology and the basic necessities of life).

The challenge is that many assume that modern technology is one of the benefits of civilization. It is believed that scientific advances generate greater quality in relationships because they eradicate all types of discrimination, also believing that technology is a globalizing influence in the world of the poor. Without a sincere conversion of the kind of mentality that sees the latest triumph of technology as “the better” and “the most successful,” the result will be a hierarchical society of the dominate/dominated. It will be a world that emphasizes success and effectiveness, giving more importance to those who possesses more knowledge, information, and technology.

## 1.2 Unanimity of Faith in the Lord Jesus

To formulate a Common Project unanimity of faith is fundamental. We understand a unanimity of faith to be “mutual union and conformity” as specified by Jeanne de Lestonnac. The application of certain values and ideologies, no matter how good or holy they may be will not result in mutual union and conformity. It can only be formed through a profound “feeling” of faith in the following of our Lord Jesus. We understand by feeling, not merely an emotional sentiment, but rather feeling in the Spirit that the Lord Jesus recreates and inhabits our spirit so as to let ourselves be led by Him.

A team, a community that does not consider this fundamental aspect of a common project will end up merely responding to the needs of the world without perceiving the action of the Spirit working in that world; a Spirit who calls for a response from women and lay women and men committed to the Lord. In other words, over and above the values that facilitate the development of mutual relationships, what is needed is a team, a community, where the essential aspects of faith, life, and mission are discerned to determine what God wants in the here and now.

### 1.2.1. How do we form a unanimity of faith in the Lord Jesus?

A unanimity of faith can be formed in diverse ways, but it is crucial that the Common Educational Project that unites and integrates be the person of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of His Father. The respective visions or points of view of the persons who make up the team or community must support and collaborate in the formation of the project at

each stage of the process—gestation, construction and realization—so as to reach a “*union and conformity in the Spirit of Jesus.*”

### 1.2.2. What elements make possible unanimity of faith?

To make unanimity of faith feasible, a climate of mutual trust and understanding is needed one that knows how to accept the gifts of others with their frailties and limitations. In other words, each is accepted as he/she is with all his/her potential and shortcomings. Only from this acceptance can the group begin to build the ties that will enable it to grow, to question and to open itself up to the challenges that the Spirit presents, and to respond according to the Spirit of the Lord Jesus.

We could ask ourselves, what happens with those persons with whom we share the Educational Common Project who are non-believers or of other religions. Reaching unanimity of faith in Jesus Christ does not marginalize, nor exclude the beliefs of other religious traditions that are not Christian because of the theological principle of the Incarnation. The Lord Jesus becomes man and on the Cross poured out His Spirit. This Spirit lives in us, in the followers of non-Christian religions and in men and women of good will.

The seeds of the Word are found in all cultures and the Lord Jesus with his Spirit lives in them. Therefore, it is an invitation to discern the action of the Spirit of Jesus Christ and to explain it within the contexts or realities in which the common project is to take place. This does not mean that we ought only to create a common project based solely on values such as solidarity, networking for common tasks, etc., but rather to deepen what fundamentally motivates men and women to commit themselves to the common educational project. There the Lord Jesus, in an explicit, implicit, or unseen manner, is able to use the educational process to indicate the path by which the project will humanize the world. All the while, we must be aware that it is in Jesus Christ, the true man (Son of God) that the world is humanized.

### 1.3. **Apostolic Formation Community**

The challenge is to create apostolic formation communities that form their members in values that promote the building of community. The Lord Jesus calls the community to live its identity, to take up his mission, a mission that made specific in the Common Educational Project. Apostolic communities that are formed around a specific mission find that faith-life-mission is closely interconnected. The life that grows and is expressed in a particular culture contrasts with the faith in the Lord Jesus that empowers or questions the expressions of that culture; whether they are expressions of death or of life. It is in the Spirit that the community has “*union and mutual conformity...so they may better, more efficaciously, and more holily apply themselves to the service of God.*”<sup>2</sup>

Identity and mission are interrelated and integrated, thus inseparable. It seems obvious that “*to more efficaciously...apply themselves to the service of God,*” the community is fundamental. Nevertheless, it is not a community if its members do not share their faith-life-mission. Their entire being must be put forth, not merely their particular job in the group. The mission and service are entrusted by the same Lord who models union of hearts. A unified community that responds to the “service entrusted,” is the Common Educational Project.

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<sup>2</sup> ODN, *Foundational Documents* – Rules of 1638, rule 40.

### 1.3.1 Distinction between team and community

In reality, the globalized modern world values team work: the connection with others in networks, uniting efforts and common objectives so as to reach the designated goal. It is a group of persons, with the necessary characteristics, coming together in a team so as to function more efficiently. A team formed for a particular project, having all the requisite human characteristics deemed necessary, is not enough to form a “cohesive team.” We ask ourselves why not.

Large modern industries value team work so as to attain their short-term, medium or long-range objectives through effective methods that take into account the quality of persons: their gifts, customs, limitations, and potential. Personnel are evaluated based on the ability to administer their own resources, knowing their weaknesses and maximizing their potential. Those that “render the most” and are “effective” in reaching goals are rated the highest. Nevertheless, the Company of Mary is an apostolic educational body which seeks to respond to the Spirit of Jesus that is in the world. Communities are needed that are founded on faith. Being apostolic, they can respond to the challenges of the same Spirit that is acting in the world, especially among the “anawim” of the Father. Individuals can unite in a team in order to achieve common goals without necessarily sharing their life of faith. “Time is not wasted” is obvious, since the necessities urge them to respond completely. A “cohesive team,” as far as possible, ought to transform itself into being a community-minded apostolic team. Within this identity that springs forth with life, the mission of the same Spirit continues recreating in a concrete world; in other words, in the here and now.

A group of persons guided by a common project and keeping in mind all the elements that go into the building of a cohesive team, would still not have enough to attain the goals of the Common Educational Project. The team reduced to achieving only the proposed objectives without taking into account the faith-life-mission dimension, removes from the common project their commitment “to be witnesses”. Such a team tends to see only the task at hand and how to go about attaining the proposed objectives. Nevertheless, if the dimension of a life of faith and the values that make the group a community are not taken into account, the community itself loses its authenticity. It will not be able to mold itself into a community of equality where all types of collective Messianic individualism are eradicated.

Community is more than a team. A team, as we have mentioned above, can unite so as to attain a concrete objective for a given project. But, after attaining the said objective or proposed goal, it could dissolve. Community goes farther than effectively reaching goals and objectives. This does not mean that the community does not seek to be effective and successful; only that it is shaped by the Spirit of Jesus according to the will of God.

### 1.3.2. The real, not ideal, Community: Community of Love

For Jeanne de Lestonnac, community is to be lived in a real manner with all its consequences, both in its gifts and its limitations. A community must know its reality, such as it is, while continuing to nurture its growth.

“It gives from what it lives.” “It transmits what is lived.” Hence, the importance of the “*sincere relationships with friends*”<sup>3</sup> becomes evident. Friendship grows from the foundation of sincere, honest and transparent authenticity. True friendship helps, questions, creates bonds of unity, reconciliation, and forgiveness. It is not dependent on being in tune with the opinions or feelings of another, but rather takes from the example of friendship of the Lord Jesus himself who said: “*I will not call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master does. I will call you friends because I have given you to know all what I learned from my Father.*” (John 15, 15)

In Jesus, the Father reveals a friendship planted firmly on rock. From that friendship they weave authentic relationships of friendship and love that are optimistic without being ideal. This friendship creates community and helps us find the common good rather than “*our own desires and interests.*” (St. Ignatius) It is a friendship that is woven in sincere and gratuitous love that knows how to “waste time” with others, offering her “yes” to live the mission entrusted in the Common Project.

## **2. “ ...Stemming from a Common Project”**

All we have said previously are basic conditions for creating the community’s common project and forming a communal spirit. The common project becomes real and practical only if it is born from what the community actually lives. From the beginning, it is based on unanimity of faith in Christ Jesus. Through the Lord Jesus, the community shapes and discerns the project in light of the circumstances that exist at the time of its elaboration and fulfillment. The project then serves as the guidelines and processes for the group living it. It is important to remember these phrases: “*The educator in the Company of Mary is an educator who goes beyond merely completing a function and task. It is to educate in the care and transmission of life. This integrated concept is what enables the Company of Mary to understand itself as an institution whose educational soul is based, not on what it does, but on what it is.*”<sup>4</sup>

The common educational project is what makes the community apostolic and enables it to care for and give life. It becomes credible and able to transform reality only in the measure that the community allows itself to be shaped by the project which is in fact, Jesus Christ. Would the education project transform reality if it were not being lived in all its dimensions by the same community responsible for seeing it through? Behind this question is the same God who, in the Night in the Cistercian Monastery, helped Jeanne de Lestonnac see that “*a great number of young souls were at the brink of falling into an abyss and understood that it was she who should extend her hand.*” It is the community transformed by the same God who moved Jeanne de Lestonnac to respond to His call through community and a common project.

Today, is not possible to fulfill the challenge that God presents us with unless the mission is lived in a community where there is union of hearts. From the true love of friendship we are able to respond to the call of God and to confront the realities of the world created by Him. To extend one’s hand in a common educational project is to extend our hands in networks of communities that form a communal spirit; universal friendships, love

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<sup>3</sup> “*There is nothing I recommend more than friendship among yourselves.*” Challenges in the Educational Mission of the Company of Mary. Review of General Chapter Documents from the XV and XIV General Chapters. General Team. Roma, June 2005. p.8

<sup>4</sup> Challenges in the Educational Mission of the Company of Mary. Review of General Chapter Documents from the XV and XIV General Chapters. General Team. Roma, June 2005. p.4

and solidarity. It allows the building of a Common Educational Project that accepts the potential, limitations and differences of others seeing and relating to each one as equally being a daughter or son of God. The project enables each one to respond to the movements of the Spirit of Jesus who speaks through the voices of the marginalized and displaced peoples—through the poor.