

The Heartbeat of Spiritan Education in US Province of the United States

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit does not define its role exclusively as service to either education or social action. While some religious congregations define their role in terms of service to a particular group in society, e.g. the sick, the elderly, the young, etc., and make a valuable contribution by doing so, the Spiritans, like some other religious congregations, have preferred to define their role more broadly in terms of spiritual and human need. This inclusive role of the Congregation was expressed by Francis Libermann in a letter to Dom Sallier with these words: "... evangelizing the poor is our primary end. But the missions are the more specific aim we have chosen, above all, those who are poorest and most abandoned. Providence has pointed us in the direction of the black people in Africa and in the colonies. Without any doubt, up until now, these are the poorest and most abandoned of peoples. We would also like to work for the salvation of souls in France, above all for the poor, while not abandoning those who are not so poor." (N.D XIII, p.170)

I. A Historical Perspective: Our Founders and the Education Apostolate

a) *Claude Poullart des Places*

Claude Poullart was born the only son of a noble family in Rennes, Brittany, in 1679. As a young man, aged twenty-two, he arrived in Paris to study for the priesthood. He had given up a promising career as a lawyer to study for the priesthood. He had a profound concern for the poor which found expression first in helping the young chimney-sweeps of Paris. In 1703, while still a student, he founded a seminary for disadvantaged theological students and, at the same time, the Holy Ghost Congregation. Claude was ordained a priest in 1707, and died only two years later at the age of thirty years.

After Claude's death the Congregation he had founded continued to flourish and to maintain his tradition of high academic standards, a simple lifestyle and a religious commitment to difficult ministries. Later, preparation of seminarians for the priesthood was widened to include foreign missionary service. It was not until after the French Revolution that the Superior General at the time, Father Bertout, gave the society an almost exclusively "mission" orientation, motivated, at least in part, by his efforts to regain for the Spiritans, some of the recognition formerly accorded them by the French government (Koren, *Essay of Spiritan Charism*, p.126). As the situation of the church in France and the demands of the apostolate overseas grew and were modified, the Congregation adapted accordingly.

By the end of the eighteenth century some 1,200 priests had been educated at the seminary on rue Lhomond. It was temporarily suppressed at the time of the French Revolution. After the revolution it reopened and has continued to provide a home for members of the Congregation and others studying at universities in the Latin Quarter of Paris.

b) Francis Libermann

Francis Libermann was born in 1802 in Saverne, Alsace, the son of a Jewish rabbi, and was given the name Jacob. He became a Catholic in 1826, taking the name Francis. Soon after, he felt called to become a priest. However, a short time before he was due to be ordained he was stricken with epilepsy, and his ordination was postponed indefinitely. Having spent thirteen years in various institutes of theological education, he became interested in a project to establish a society for the pastoral care and education of freed slaves. Francis was ordained a priest in 1841 and the same year opened the novitiate of the new society, the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary.

In 1848 an unusual event took place when, following negotiations between the two congregations and the Holy See, all the members of the new congregation joined the Holy Ghost Congregation founded by des Places, and Libermann became its Superior General. This union brought an infusion of new members who revitalized the older congregation. Under Libermann's leadership the Congregation continued to grow and to develop its educational, missionary and pastoral work in many countries outside France and her colonies. Francis Libermann died on February 2, 1852, leaving behind him a reputation for holiness.

Henry Koren, C.S.Sp. points out how easily Libermann changed his attitude with respect to scholarship and education in the light of what he saw as the needs of the missionary church during the ten years he said he needed for laying the foundations of the Congregation. (N.D., 133) Koren quotes Libermann:

- [If] Spiritan Rule of Life is to be interpreted as meaning that everyone must go to the missions... If our rule says we may not have several houses in Europe "it is important that the constitutions of the Congregation be changed." (N.D. 135)
- "In 1850 (Libermann) published a brochure about the Congregation - most of which pere Cabon neglected to include in his 14 volumes of Notes et Documents. In its first paragraph he spoke about Fr Poullart des Places as the founder of the Congregation, and in its final paragraph he made an appeal for candidates having a special vocation to teach, adding that this would be their almost exclusive task." (N.D., 136)
- "The widening of Libermann's horizons should not surprise us. As always, he wished to be guided by what the Holy Spirit indicated in the concrete situations of life. When he realized that the Congregation would "probably" be obliged to undertake the education of boys in junior seminaries he also knew that this practically meant accepting colleges." (N.D., 137)

Libermann's fully formed convictions at the end of his life concerning education continue to animate the Congregation's educational philosophy.

II. Spiritan Marks of Education

a) *Openness to the Spirit*

In keeping with the dedication of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, both des Places and Libermann regarded openness to the Spirit as the guiding principle of their lives and of the Congregation. This represented a departure from the traditional emphasis on blind obedience rather than on fidelity to the Spirit. Two examples of their openness to the Spirit are adaptability to change and respect for each person's uniqueness. First, they showed a deep respect for the light of the Holy Spirit manifested in the changing circumstances of life. In education this means responding to the most pressing educational needs of the people of their times. Second, they respected each one's personal vocation as a manifestation of the Spirit's guidance. In an educational context, this meant respect of each individual's personality and talents.

Libermann's respect for the Spirit at work in peoples and cultures led him to adopt an innovative approach to cross cultural education. In sharp contrast to the "assimilation" policy of both Church and State in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies of the time, he advocated respect for local cultures in both educational and missionary activities. "(The missionaries) must pay particular attention to which customs and habits are characteristic of the peoples and the land. They must carefully avoid disturbing these customs (unless they are against God's law) and modifying them in a European fashion. They will simply try to make (the people) more perfect in their own way of life and in accord with their own custom." This attitude ruled not merely his own life but also imposed on him the greatest reverence for the way of being proper to individuals, not excluding those who wished to join the Congregation to further its objectives.

b) *Global Vision*

The missionary outlook introduced to the Congregation in the eighteenth century and reinforced by Libermann has given the Congregation a global vision which inspires the hope for the realization of one world united in peace and justice in the Kingdom of God. In education, it means working for the empowerment of peoples and their liberation from injustice, poverty and ignorance. Catholic belief presumes that the human person is essentially social, created in the image of God who is love, God who is communion, the one God who in essence is personal relations in love. It further presumes that humankind is destined to live eternally in loving union with God and all of humanity.

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In education, our tradition has meant combining concern for the disadvantaged with openness to the needs of people from all walks of life. Their global mission in the service of the Kingdom of God enables Spiritans to bring to the poor empowerment through

education and to bring to the rich a consciousness of their responsibility to work towards a global society where poverty will be eliminated.

c) A Sense of Community

The motto of the Congregation is “One Heart and One Soul,” evoking the first Christian community in Jerusalem. As might be expected, therefore, a sense of community was highly prized by both des Places and Libermann. This is expressed in common living with shared prayer, meals, work and a simple lifestyle. In education, a sense of community translates into closeness to the students, a family spirit and accessibility.

Spiritans educators are mentors. As mentors they face two challenges. On the one hand they are responsible for communicating a body of objective knowledge to students and holding them responsible for knowing that body of knowledge. On the other hand they must provide nurture to students in their growth process towards human integration. This mentoring takes place in the ongoing dialogue between teacher and student. Both grow and become themselves through the dialogue. Relationship is at the core of the Spiritan educational process.

d) Concern for the Poor

Both des Places and Libermann focused their attention on the most needy people of their day. des Places first became interested in helping the young “Savoyards” or chimney-sweeps of Paris and later expanded his concern to helping poor theological students who would later work in the neglected rural parishes of France and in overseas missions. Libermann felt called by God to help the slaves and freed slaves in the old French colonies, whose miserable condition had been brought to the attention by two student friends, Eugene Tisserant (whose mother was Haitian) and Frederick Le Vavasseur from Reunion.

Concern for the poor remains a top priority for the Holy Spirit Congregation in fulfillment of its mission “to follow Jesus and to announce the Good News of the Kingdom” (SRL1), a priority which it shares with all religious congregations and with the Church in general. Education has remained a potent means of translating that concern into action. For many, education is the beginning of the Good News, leading to spiritual and social empowerment.

e) Commitment to Service

Closely associated with concern for the disadvantaged was the Founders’ commitment to service. des Places was not content simply to pursue his theological studies in Paris oblivious to what was going on around him. He was motivated by a spirit of service to others which inspired him to help the young chimney-sweeps and impoverished theological students. His untimely death in October 1709 was hastened by his prodigious efforts to develop his young society and to provide food for his community during the early months of the year when extremely cold weather caused disruption of the food supply and widespread famine in Paris.

Libermann also had a strong sense of service as shown by his total commitment to the development of his society in the service of the poor and disadvantaged people of his day. His spirit of service also led him to carry on a voluminous correspondence devoted to spiritual counseling in addition to his responsibilities as Superior General of the Congregation. He put service to others before his own welfare, regardless of his weak health. He saw education as service to the Church and to people in need.

f) High Academic Standards

The standards set by des Places for the education of priests were remarkable for his time, when requirements varied widely throughout the Church; in many cases amounting to no more than one and a half years of theological studies. He required that the course of study should extend over at least six years to include two years of philosophy and four years of theology. He encouraged an additional two-year post-graduate course oriented to law or scripture. He exemplified commitment to high academic standards in his own life. Having graduated “summa cum laude” as the youngest and brightest of several hundred students, he was chosen as valedictorian of his philosophy class. He then went on to earn his law degree and later took theology in Paris.

Although he had been a brilliant student himself, Libermann at first was not convinced of the need for high academic standards for members of his society. However, he changed his mind after he became Superior General of the Holy Ghost Congregation when he came to know the scholarly Father Gaultier, who was widely respected in academic circles in Paris. Gaultier had endowed the seminary with a rich library and had attracted a circle of prominent scholars that included the great patrologist, J.P. Migne. Libermann’s policy of encouraging higher studies from then onwards was to provide the Congregation with a number of experts and specialists in various fields.

g) Academic Freedom

When Claude Poullart des Places arrived in Paris to study theology, the University of Paris was dominated by the Jansenist faction. Rather than compromise his beliefs, Claude preferred to forego taking a degree which would have required him to follow courses at the Sorbonne. He took his theology courses instead at the Jesuit School of Theology, in the prestigious College Louis LeGrand, across the street from the Sorbonne.

The struggle for academic freedom and refusal to conform to ways of thinking that were “politically correct” continued for many decades. Poullart des Place’s immediate successors preferred to sacrifice even the lure of a large endowment rather than give up their freedom to teach what they saw as the truth.

The Founders’ concern for freedom was rooted neither in a blind adherence to out-dated ideas nor in an appeal to a direct communication from the Holy Spirit. They believed that the Spirit usually speaks to us through events in the contemporary world. That is why des Places insisted that all his students should master mathematics and the “new fangled” Newtonian physics as prerequisites for the study of theology. This is also

why Libermann insisted on the over-riding importance of learning from experience rather than depending on outdated paradigms, when he undertook the giant task of evangelizing Africa.

The foregoing brief survey shows that education in the Spiritan tradition is energized by values flowing from the living heritage of the Founders: openness to the Spirit, a strong sense of community, concern for the disadvantaged, a global vision, commitment to service, high academic standards and commitment to academic freedom.

III. Theological Foundation for the Spiritan Educational Ethos and Ministries

Ever aware of the theological image underlying our educational efforts, we can then turn to some elements and emphases that pervade Spiritan educational ministry. These elements accent and highlight dimensions of Christian adult living that are not the principal focus of education offered by others within the Catholic community, e.g., Jesuits, Marianists, Salesians, etc.

These elements are inherent in and flow from our Spiritan vocation and way of life. What is more important, however, is how these attitudes and dispositions of heart are embodied in Spiritans who live our educational ministry. These philosophical and theological characteristics shape the image that embodies the education that we offer and can be found in all aspects of our institutions: modes of governance, curricula, faculty and student body composition, extracurricular activities, community service, standards of academic excellence, etc. Among these elements are:

- ***Indwelling Presence Of The Transcendent***

We educate to bring people to an awareness of the indwelling of the Transcendent God within them. (SRL 6)

Spiritan educational ministry has a special emphasis on the indwelling of the Divine Spirit in every human person journeying toward becoming fully alive, humanly, spiritually, intellectually and socially. Spiritan education presumes that every human being possesses a specific vocation in and through which the personality unfolds and character is developed.

This presumes that all our educational, evangelizing efforts seek to form and provide an “upbringing” in the image of Christ, who is “the image of the unseen God” (Colossians 1:15). Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:18) those whom we serve in educational ministry are being transformed into and reflect that image in brighter and brighter glory” (2 Corinthians 3: 18). “This is the working of the Lord who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor. 3: 18) What we are sent to teach is meant to bring all to realize that they “are a temple of God with the Spirit of God living in” them as temples who are holy. (1 Cor. 3: 16-17)

The image of Christ, the Spirit-filled Messiah and Leader in faith (Luke 6; Hebrews 12), informs all of our educational efforts as we seek to fulfill Christ's mandate to go and teach all nations. We educate for relationships in human community, that "all may be one" (John 17:22). No matter what area of instruction we provide – the arts, sciences, math, literature, technology – all is seen as contributing to the life of the community and the preparation of citizens who are faith-filled in a culturally diverse and pluralistic world. Spiritan educational ministry provides a New Evangelization in cultures that have forgotten their Christian roots.

- ***Following The Lead Of The Spirit In Life***
Our educational ministry seeks to develop a keen awareness of the Spirit's lead in every aspect and every moment of our lives. While others may contrast contemplation and action, we see Christian life as quickened by the Spirit at every moment, as did Mary. It responds to our need be aware of God's presence in all of the practical circumstances of life, the concrete, the real. (Practical union with God) (SRL 5)
- ***Relational And Communitarian Living***
Our lives are relational and communitarian just as our God is One in Three. The Church is the sacrament of God's desire that we all may be one through loving relationships. This communitarian and relational focus confronts the schizophrenic culture rooted in individualism. (SRL 1)
- ***Self-Transcendence In Sacrificial Love***
Just as Christ constantly transcended himself in love for the Father, we invite all to transcend themselves in the same sacrificial love that Jesus lived. This is the primary educational principle that constitutes the content and shape of our educational ministry. We are called to this fullness of life in loving relationships. (SRL 3, 38-39)
- ***Relishing Diversity***
While the Spirit is the source of our unity, we relish diversity: cultural, human, spiritual, ecumenical, interreligious, and the distribution of charismata for the building up of the People of God and the world. Variety and complementarity are characteristic of our education. The Spirit is the giver and the shaper of the gifts that each person receives for the building up of the Body of Christ and the human family. Spiritan educators are Spirit-linking leaders who appreciate the diverse ways the Spirit works in persons in community. (SRL 15, 24.2)
- ***Focus On Freedom.***
Spiritane education focuses on freedom. The Spirit which gives life in Christ Jesus sets us free. (Rom. 8:2) Where the Spirit is, there is freedom. We have been released from fear which enslaves and have been brought to the freedom of sons and daughters of God. (Rom. 8:14) It is a freedom that moves us beyond self-

indulgence to freedom in the Spirit. (Gal. 5) This freedom is also the foundation of the charismatic, creative life of the Church which complements the gift of hierarchy and magisterium in the Church. Spiritan education accents the charismatic life of the Church. (SRL 7, 14)

- ***Masters Of Dialogue***
To live a spirituality of communion, presumes that we develop the art and asceticism of dialogue. For Spiritans, dialogue is the only way to be a Christian in the world. Those educated by Spiritans have learned how to enter into dialogue in a pluralistic world and are capable of articulating the Catholic voice in realizing the common good. (SRL 16.3, 17.1)
- ***Solidarity, Subsidiarity And Discernment***
All Spiritan educational ministry presumes that the Gospel is essentially social and seeks peace and justice for all. There is no peace without justice just as there is no justice that does not lead to peace. Our educational ministry is informed by the two sisters of social justice, solidarity and subsidiarity. These two principles inform the way we govern our institutions and all of our pedagogy. They shape the ethos of our lives and communities. Those whom we educate should be immersed in this ethos and be brought up in the art of discerning how to integrate subsidiarity and solidarity in society. This is our way of educating with a sense of seeking the good in common (common good). Integration of the two can only be accomplished by people who possess discerning spirits, individually and communally; spirits that see, understand what they see, judge the value of what they understand and choose to act for the good of all. (SRL 21-23, 44, 46)
- ***Preferential Love For And Outreach To The Poor***
All aspects of our educational ministry presume that all people have the right to hear the liberating message of Gospel love. This is especially true for the poor, those whose needs are the greatest, the oppressed and those who have no voice. All aspects of our educational ministry offer preferential love for the poor whom we serve, either directly or indirectly. (SRL 4, 12, 14)

These elements build on and inform all of the components that are presumed to be present in any accredited, academically excellent educational institution – academic excellence, academic outcomes, moral discipline, the design of curricula, community outreach programs, professionalism of administrators and faculty, sports programs, the very spirit of the institution, etc.

IV. The Lived Tradition

Francis Libermann's new position as Superior General of the Holy Ghost congregation obliged him to face the question of assuming responsibility for educational work, which had always been the primary focus of the Congregation. Since its inception it had provided teachers to seminaries and colleges both in France and overseas. With his customary openness to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in changing circumstances,

Libermann quickly adapted to the new situation and continued the tradition of supplying teachers for seminaries and colleges.

The first new educational project undertaken following Libermann's death was the establishment of a national senior seminary for the French clergy in Rome in 1853. This was in the tradition of des Places' interest in the education of the clergy. Libermann heard the voice of the Spirit in the Pope's invitation to open the seminary. That the seminary was faithful to the spiritual and academic values of the Congregation's founders was demonstrated when it celebrated its first centennial in 1953. By then more than 3,000 priests had been educated within its walls and quite a number had been raised to the ranks of bishop and cardinal. Although the Spiritans were obliged to withdraw from its governance in 2009 because of declining numbers in the French Province, the French Seminary, situated near the Pantheon in the historic center of Rome, continues to be a respected center of higher education for the French Church today.

The same values inspired the expansion of educational works during the thirty years' administration of Libermann's successor, Father Schwindenhammer. Under his leadership the Congregation opened 31 junior and senior seminaries and colleges, of which only one – Chevilly, near Paris – was reserved exclusively for future members. The most important of these were Beauvais and Mesnières in France, Blackrock and Rockwell in Ireland, Braga in Portugal, St. Mary's in Trinidad and Holy Ghost College (Duquesne University) in Pittsburgh. In addition, it established 15 trade and agricultural schools (collectively known as Auteuil), mostly staffed by Brothers, who were officially recognized by the government of France as teachers.

At the Service of the Local Church

The written form of the Spiritan charism and tradition is found principally in the Spiritan Rule of Life. The Spiritan Rule, like that of all religious orders and congregations in the Catholic Church, is inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus. The Spiritan Rule has had a varied history going back to the first version written by Father des Places. It has had to be updated at intervals in order to meet changing conditions in the religious and secular world. The most recent revision of the Spiritan Rule of Life (SRL) was approved by the Holy See in 1987. While the SRL references to educational ministry are brief, they express quite clearly the nature, goals and means required to carry out this ministry.

SRL 18. "In local Churches the following are our principal activities:

- Fostering Christian communities and the education and training of a committed and responsible laity;
- Engaging in social and educational work in line with our Spiritan calling;

18.1 We consider the following to be especially important tasks for our times:

- Youth apostolate, because the present situation of young people is crying out more than ever for social and educational works.

The General Chapter at Maynooth in 1998 included a thorough reflection on the role of Spiritan education as an integral part of our mission:

- “Formal and informal education is not something on the margins of our apostolate, but is an integral part of our mission of evangelization. This conviction is based on two considerations: on the one hand, this social ministry to the poor brings them freedom and promotes the dignity that is theirs as children of God; on the other, the contact it gives with the world of young people provides an opportunity for passing on the Good News, above all through the witness of the educator.” (Maynooth, p. 102)
- “We will make a point of making young people aware of the problems of poverty and unjust structures in their society and the world at large.” (Maynooth 2.13)
- “Where it is desirable, we will further involve lay people in the administration of our educational institutions, while retaining a Spiritan presence as a witness and a source of inspiration. In collaborating with lay people, we will try to share the spirit of our Spiritan tradition with them.” (Maynooth, 2.14)
- “The training of educators is a priority for us.” (Maynooth 2.15)
- “We will put greater emphasis on the training of some confreres as specialists in education, especially for the service of the poor. This presupposes a prior assessment of their needs and will take into account the resources available.” (Maynooth, 2.16)

V. Spiritan Educational Ministry, Formal and Informal, now and in the Future

Present Formal:

In the United States, Spiritans have been engaged in a good number of educational endeavors since almost the very beginning of Spiritan presence on these shores. These institutions are stamped with the Spiritan character in a similar way to our own formation as Spiritans, by “osmosis”, the milieu of the institution and the lived witness of Spiritans engaged in the particular ministry of education. Their values are experienced on a daily basis by the students and passed on subliminally.

As we acknowledge the changing circumstances regarding the challenge of providing trained Spiritans at our sponsored institutions, we continue to focus on highlighting and strengthening the Spiritan charism at these institutions. We emphasize the necessity to make explicit what constitutes a Spiritan educational institution in this age and place. Reflection and planning is a critical part of laying the foundation for the future. The process involves a considerable collaboration with the laity at these institutions.

Mission Statements

There is a parallel development at the two Spiritan sponsored institutions in the US. They both are deeply rooted in a clear mission statement for each school.

Duquesne's statement speaks of five concerns: Academic Excellence, Moral and Spiritual Values, and Ecumenical Atmosphere, the Spirit of Service and World Concerns. Composed by a totally different faculty and student body, we find similar concerns expressed in the Mission Statement of Holy Ghost Prep: Academic Excellence; moral, intellectual and spiritual formation; service to the poor; development of community and the cultivation of unique gifts. Both statements look upon education as formation of the person and not just the intellect.

The Mission Statements really have no import in and of themselves except that they are the basis of constant reflection by the various constituencies of the institutions. So it is the process of developing a mission statement, of continued reflection on the meaning of the statement by all engaged at the institutions, and of implementing the implications of that statement that are the foundation on which these sponsored works continue to institutionalize the Spiritan charism at these schools. These institutions are blessed to have administrators, faculties, staff and alumni that espouse, embody and make substantial contributions of time, talent and treasure in implementing the Spiritan educational philosophy.

In addition to these sponsored Spiritan institutions in the United States, the Congregation also serves dioceses through parochial ministries that have parochial schools. Many Spiritans also serve as administrators, faculty and campus ministers in both Catholic and secular academic institutions and diocesan seminaries that are not sponsored by the Congregation. The contributions of Spiritans to the education apostolate are varied and dynamic. Benefactors, through their financial support, are a critical part of ensuring the financial viability of our institutions and some have even made possible the construction of schools in other Spiritan circumscriptions, e.g., Tanzania, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nigeria, etc..

Present Informal:

Many Spiritans serve as retreat directors, participate in parochial youth and adult educational programs, and are involved in justice and peace activities at the local and national levels. Spiritans also serve as Campus Ministers at institutions not sponsored by the Congregation.

In taking on new parochial ministries, one important consideration might be to look at how we are able to provide youth with a safe atmosphere, academically challenging, and accessible education at the elementary and secondary levels. When we consider taking on a new parochial ministry, one of the questions we must ask is what potential impact our engagement and Spiritan presence will have on the integral development and education of the people we serve.

VI. Conclusion

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit has made a clear choice for evangelization, the promotion of justice, and for the service and liberation of the poor (SRL, 14). These objectives are realized through a commitment to quality education with a clear vision of the Spiritan values. The Spiritan charism clearly embraces education as an important

instrument of evangelization. Properly understood and fully embraced, they will entail an intensification of the educational ministry which can be a powerful tool for the transformation of attitudes and for promoting social change. Faithful to the our Founders and to our sources of inspiration for over 300 years, Spiritans continue to respond to the challenges of our contemporary world and the needs of the Church through an openness to the Spirit which is revealed to us in the people that we serve.

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Acknowledgements

The Spiritan Education Committee of the US Province wishes to acknowledge the various contributors to this document who have provided significant input into the development of this statement. The first two parts of the document relating the historical and Spiritan underpinnings of our educational apostolate was taken from the work that the Corporation of Duquesne University which was written in 1994 under the title, “A Catholic University in the Spiritan Tradition”. We owe a special debt of gratitude to Frs. Don Nesti and Mike Grey for the section on the Constitutive Elements of Spiritan Education. We acknowledge also Fr. John Geary, C.S.Sp. and Fr. Barney Kelly, C.S.Sp. from the Province of TransCanada who put much effort into editing and redacting the different components of the document. We are grateful to all Spiritans who have dedicated their ministry to Spiritan education in the various forms in which it has been expressed throughout the history of the Congregation which is the most powerful statement of all.

Spiritan Education Committee: Jeffrey Duaine, Chair, John Hansen, William Headley, James McCloskey, and Paulinus Odozor

April 2012