

Circular Letter of the Superior General No. 26
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Christian Education

Over the last 20 years in every part of the world where Holy Cross is present, the apostolate of Christian education — indeed the work of education — has undergone extensive change. Since education has always been our principal apostolic activity, these changes have had a sizable impact on the congregation. I want to reflect with you on some of the challenges that these changes pose for us today and to do it against the background of the privileged place that this ministry had held in Holy Cross and in the light of a few principles on which I believe we are all agreed.

Background

The Brothers of Saint Joseph came into existence as a group of laymen committed to providing a primary education to children of the French countryside. When Father Moreau became their superior, he broadened their field of activity, but he clearly continued to regard them first and foremost as teachers.

The Auxiliary Priests began as a band of diocesan missionaries engaged in preaching retreats and parish missions and in assisting the parish clergy. But the founder intended from the very start that they too should engage in education and he very soon saw his dream realized despite Bishop Bouvier's lack of enthusiasm for this endeavor.

The Holy Cross Sisters had to limit themselves in their earliest years to providing domestic services in the institutions of the priests and brothers because the bishop would hear of nothing else. But Father Moreau intended from the beginning that they also should be educators, and outside France they soon assumed teaching as their principal activity.

I think it accurate to say that, throughout most of the nineteenth century and the first half of the present century, Holy Cross was considered a teaching congregation though we never officially defined ourselves as such and a good number of religious dedicated themselves to other activities. From the early 1940s until the mid-1960s, we founded or assumed the direction of, literally, dozens of schools. In the 1950s, approximately 78% of the priests and brothers engaged in full-time ministry were in educational work: 85 % in the brothers' provinces and 70% in the priests' provinces. To be more specific, every province of the congregation had at least 50% of its actively ministering members in education, and no brothers' province had less than 75%.

According to statistics compiled a little over a year ago, approximately 56% of the

religious in full-time active ministry were still in educational work: just over 77% in the brothers' provinces and just over 40% in the priests' provinces. It is important to note, however, that some priests' provinces had less than 15% of their members in an educational ministry.

Under education I include teaching, campus ministry, administration and auxiliary services in educational works, as well as ... the newer educational ministries, for example, full-time work for school boards, religious or adult education directors outside schools, education researchers and the like. It should be added that many religious in studies or among the chronically ill or retired are engaged in part-time ministries, and some of these are education-related. However, it is all but impossible to gather statistics on this.

These statistics need shaping. A glance at how our educational apostolate has evolved and is evolving will help.

In the first seven or eight decades of our history, we considered one of our principal "ends," or purposes, to be "the Christian instruction and education of youth through the medium of schools in which letters and sciences are taught and of schools of agriculture and of trades: these latter being especially destined for poor and abandoned children" (1857 constitutions, article 3). Other "ends" were "the preaching of the word of God, especially in the country, on foreign missions, etc." (Ibid.). In that period the brothers formed by far the greater number of the religious and were engaged principally in teaching in elementary schools and in agriculture and trade schools, while at times also providing some adult education. A certain number of the brothers and a good number of the priests were involved in secondary schools and college and university work.

Gradually, more quickly in certain parts of the congregation and more slowly in others, the secondary schools and colleges and universities became the more important activities in terms of the number of religious involved. Today there are still a number of religious who work at the elementary school level, but this ministry has become mostly limited to secondary institutions with an elementary department attached. As this shift was taking place, we began to recognize that we could provide Christian education through means other than schools. Thus our 1950 constitutions saw as a "special end" of the congregation "Christian education and instruction through teaching," but also through "the works of Catholic Action, Catholic social activity, and the apostolate of the press" (article 8), and we began to invest increasing numbers of religious in these activities.

Over the last 25 years the evolution of traditional ministries and the proliferation of new ones have occasioned a gradual blurring of neat distinctions between what we might call full-time educational ministries, for example, classroom instruction, and activities in which education is only a part, though an important part, of what is accomplished, for example, work with basic Christian communities, in which a good deal of informal education takes place. Today the specifics found in our

1950 constitutions form a list that is too short and too clear-cut. We may even question the adequacy of the more generic phrasing of our present constitutions, which say: "By formal instruction and the use of various media of information, we wish to educate men in keeping with their human dignity and their calling as children of God" (C 17). These same constitutions underscore the educational dimension of all of our ministries: "In all our endeavors, pastoral or secular, we must be educators in the faith" (C 21).

Along with the evolution of our ministries, there has been an extensive evolution of most of the social groups that we serve, even when we educate the children or grandchildren of those whom we educated in earlier years. The present generation of younger people, in all parts of the world in which we minister, find themselves in a very different situation from that in which their parents grew up — economically, ideologically, religiously. At the same time many have become aware of the challenges of a rapidly changing society: the demands and implications of development, the consequences and problems of urbanization, contemporary threats to peace, ecological questions, the reality of social injustice, and a host of others.

Finally, our relationship to the institutions we have considered our own is rapidly evolving. At one point most of the schools which we directed were completely or almost completely staffed and administered by members of the congregation. Today many of them have become legally independent. In almost all of them, the presence of religious has proportionately declined, and in the light of the Vatican Council's renewed appreciation of the responsibility of the laity, lay teachers and administrators have become our collaborators rather than helpers or employees. The increasing age of the membership of the provinces and the continuing growth of many of the institutions suggest that our presence will diminish proportionately still more. Thus the fact that we are still present in most of the secondary schools, colleges and universities in which we ministered twenty-five years ago must not hide from us the fact that we are in the midst of dramatic changes.

To sum up, education is, as it has always been, the ministry in which Holy Cross has invested the largest number of its personnel. Our presence in that ministry has been rapidly evolving and will continue to do so. The ministry itself is in rapid evolution, and its nature, its aims and the means to achieve them, and the responsibilities and rights of various persons to provide education are all under discussion. If our constitutions rightly call us to "a periodic review of [all] our apostolic activities [as] indispensable" (C 29), the need for a thorough assessment of our apostolate of education should be clear. These are the reasons which have led to the present circular letter.

Certain Principles

As background to addressing the challenges that these changes pose, I invite you to reflect upon a few points on which I believe we stand agreed. They concern

the apostolate of Christian education and, in particular, the school apostolate, as well as the importance of the presence of religious in this apostolate.

1. *Christian education.* The Church and therefore in a very special sense religious communities, exist to live and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. We are Church and, surely, religious to the degree that we live and announce the gospel. More particularly, the *raison d'être* of all our activities is evangelization by word and action. This, in brief, is " the content of Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World published after the bishops' synod of 1974. We must therefore measure the Christian or religious character of every one of our activities and of the way we perform it by how effectively it communicates the gospel. In this sense, all of us, whatever our activities, are educators in the faith (C 21). But there is, of course, a more specific ministry of Christian education.

Before turning our attention to this ministry, it is important to recall the purpose of all education. I would describe that purpose as twofold. Education fosters the individual's development as a person: his or her abilities, talents, and possibilities. Education also serves to socialize the individual: it fosters his or her insertion into a particular group through the acquisition of its values, ways of perceiving and doing, and the like. The bond between the two aspects is such that it is difficult to imagine one being carried on independently of the other. After all, an individual develops as a person only in dialogue with other persons and therefore as a member of society.

In his *Christian Pedagogy* published in 1856, our founder speaks of the teacher as a friend of the student (p. 10) who must know each one of his charges (pp. 23 and 27) and help them all develop "the seeds of the good qualities they have within themselves" (p. 14). He urges the teacher to imitate the respectful way in which Jesus taught, eliciting the ready cooperation of his disciples (p. 18). On the other hand, he speaks too of the legitimate expectation of parents that the education given will provide the students with all that they will need to find a position in society (p. 8). Though Father Moreau writes of the elementary level, he is only enunciating the principles recalled above as applicable to education at every level.

Education inevitably involves the student's developing a system of values. It can therefore never be neutral from the viewpoint of the Christian, for these values will accord with the gospel or be at variance with it. Further, since every society in every culture, simply because it is human, contains certain anti-evangelical elements, a Christian education will necessarily have its counter-cultural aspect: it must challenge the anti-evangelical elements in any given society. To broaden our perspective somewhat, let

me say that a Christian education will provide for a confrontation of the gospel with the system of values of a particular society or, better yet, for a confrontation and dialogue between Christian faith and culture. In the "fostering of this dialogue the role of every teacher may be considered a properly pastoral role." The results produced by the dialogue will be manifold. It will certainly have an impact on the way in which the Christian faith is expressed. It will, hopefully, also have an impact on the society and its culture. It will most immediately exert an influence on the individual educated and the ways in which this person will employ what his or her education has provided. Education empowers a person; the kind of education — the values acquired — will assure how that power will be used.

In his *Christian Pedagogy* Father Moreau warns of the danger of forming learned people who are not good people (p. 6). He explains: "Learning does not assure virtue, while virtue readily allies itself with learning and assures that the latter will be put to good use" (Preface). He insists that "instruction" is not enough; the task of the religious is "education" (passim). Hence, he concludes to the indispensability of both "learning" and "piety," in the teacher (pp. 5-7) and returns to this necessity often both in the *Pedagogy* and in his circular letters.

We should note that the "learning" which our founder fostered among the religious was scholarship. The clearest illustration of this point lies in the kind of books he encouraged the French priests and brothers to publish: volumes at once works of professional educators and works of scholarship.

We should note too that for our founder "piety" in the teacher did not mean a simple fidelity to religious practice. Nor did he envision "virtue" in the student simply as a moral quality of the individual's life without an important social dimension. At the secondary school at Notre Dame de Sainte Croix, he established a conference of Saint Vincent de Paul among the students to put them in contact with those poorer than themselves. He hoped to develop in them a sense of their responsibility as eventually influential persons in a society whose members for the most part did not have the advantage of an education like their own. If we look for a difference between our own outlook and his, it lies principally in our appreciation in contemporary society that the poor are most often poor because they are oppressed by unjust structures. It lies, in other words, in our perception of the social justice dimension of poverty.

In attempting to appreciate Father Moreau's remarks cited above, we might say that his concern was for what we today call a holistic education. In fact, he occasionally speaks of the development of the mind, the heart and the body.

2. *The Schools.* The foregoing reflections apply to all education. They apply to informal education provided in the variety of ways in which it is available. They apply, in particular, to the use of the communications media, which, for better or for worse, have an increasingly important educational impact. And, of course, they apply to formal education provided through schools, which, until recently, were considered to have, along with the family, the principal educational role in society.

In certain respects, the importance of the school is declining. In other respects, it is growing. As other means of education have assumed greater importance, the near monopoly of the schools has disappeared. But as the family increasingly finds itself unable to fulfill, or chooses to neglect, its educational responsibility, the importance of the school increases. In short, the position of the school in society is changing. By far the greater number of Holy Cross religious involved in the apostolate of education are working in schools. Hence, I invite you to reflect for a moment on this ministry.

In the young of any group lies its hope for the future. The kind of education provided the young will largely determine the kind of future the group will have. Though the child's home provides the earliest education and the parents retain responsibility for their children's education until they become adults, the education the children receive is provided largely by schools over which the parents usually have a very limited control. They have, of course, even less control over the communications media to which their offspring are exposed.

Because education socializes the young, the education provided by the schools is of importance not only to the family but to all who are concerned about the future of society. In particular, it is important for both Church and state. Perhaps the clearest example of the importance ascribed to the schools by civil authorities is furnished by totalitarian governments, which usually take over the school system to insure indoctrination of the young in the ideology of the state. (For the same reason these governments control literacy programs and communications media within the country). An illustration of the importance of the schools for the Church is found in the data provided by well-documented surveys which show that, in many areas, the great majority of Church leadership, clerical and lay, are the products of the Catholic schools. Indeed, they suggest that the schools of one generation have largely determined what the Church of the next generation became.

In reflecting above on Christian education, I recalled that this latter should provide for a dialogue between Christian faith and culture. It would seem to follow, then, that the Catholic schools should be at once a community

of learning and a community of faith. This affirmation raises several questions. What does it mean in countries where the majority of students and perhaps even a majority of the teachers in the Catholic schools do not share our Catholic or even our Christian faith? What does it mean for non-Catholic students or teachers in a school where the majority of both groups are Catholic? The answers to these questions are not easy.

On the one hand, a Catholic school does not exist to proselytize. The Vatican Council reiterated the traditional teaching that everyone's act of faith must be free from all coercion. It not only professed "fraternal respect" for other Christian denominations but expressed "sincere regard" for the spiritual values found in non-Christian religions and the ways they are lived out.

On the other hand, a Catholic school cannot be neutral regarding the values it fosters. In fact, no school is neutral: one system of values or another is inevitably fostered. If Catholic institutions pretended to be neutral --to be, even for some of the students, simply another school providing quality instruction in secular subjects --we would have no justification as religious or even as Christians for maintaining them.

The values fostered in a Catholic school must be evangelical values, which, presumably, are also acceptable to those who, while not sharing our Catholic or Christian faith, still wish to be educated --or educators--in a Catholic school. The administration and every member of the faculty and staff should be aware of this. So should all prospective students as well as their parents and guardians. The authorities in each of the institutions for which we carry a large part of the responsibility need to ask themselves whether they are assuring that it is --and will continue to be-- a Catholic institution in which the entire faculty and administration collaborate in providing a Christian education for all the students.

Challenges

Though I have already suggested that the changed situation in which we carry on our educational apostolate today poses a number of significant challenges and have mentioned some of them, I want to indicate others too and to examine them with you under three headings: the challenges posed by the transformation in our institutional presence, those posed by the changes in society and those posed by the first mission priority of the last general chapter.

1. *Transformation of our institutional presence.* As indicated above, institutions formerly staffed, administered and often owned completely by ourselves are no longer ours in the same way today. At times they are completely independent of us, and Holy Cross religious are simply hired by them. At the very least, the number of Holy Cross religious in almost

all of the institutions is proportionately less. In addition to the changes in our presence in these institutions, there are now a fairly large number of our members working in institutions that have never been ours. Our presence in the schools today is, therefore, much different from what it was. The changes we have experienced challenge us to reflect on what our presence –group presence or individual presence-- means, what kind of influence we should have in the institutions in which we are present and how we can assure that this influence will be exercised.

The smaller our numbers become in any given school, the greater the responsibility incumbent on each individual to exercise a certain leadership. While in the past it might have been left to administrators to indicate to a large Holy Cross presence the direction to be taken, today each religious has a more pronounced personal responsibility. However, the responsibility is never exclusively personal. We are an apostolic community, and even individual religious who work outside a group activity are there legitimately only when they have been sent by superiors as the community response to a need. We have come together as a community because, as Father Moreau wrote in his first circular letter, "in union there is strength" and a group can assure a quality and continuity which isolated individuals cannot. There is also the added impact of a community witness. Hence, the challenge that I have identified above is a community challenge: the challenge to reflect and discern as a community on what our presence means in the variety of ways in which it is realized.

Some of our provinces are attempting to elaborate a Holy Cross philosophy of education. This is a valuable — I would even say, necessary — step today. Since, however, the institutions which we are engaged in administering differ so greatly from one another, a provincial or inter-provincial philosophy of education needs to be made directly applicable to the particular circumstances of each educational establishment. Mission statements or similar documents often achieve this purpose. However, they are effective only to the degree that they are owned by the personnel of the institution.

A Christian philosophy of education and its concrete application to a particular establishment will recognize that the collaboration of each one in the common endeavor will differ according to his or her role in the institution as well as according to his or her religious convictions. But it will insist on the collaboration of all. The risk in an age of specialists is that, after excessive professional training, the educator may be inclined to provide quality instruction in his or her specialty without any further concern. This is a risk even for those whose specialty is religious education. The religious educator, like the instructor in every other discipline, must envision his or her role in the broader context of a holistic education.

Such a philosophy will also recognize that the education offered will differ from student to student. The gifted student will require something different from the student with learning difficulties. The student with leadership potential will have his or her special needs. So too will each student according to the differences in his or her religious convictions. It is important to reach agreement on what needs to be provided for all and what needs to be provided for each.

A Holy Cross philosophy of education must also concern itself with the role of the religious working in institutions where other Holy Cross religious are not present or in those which do not profess to be Catholic or even Christian. As pointed out above, a religious can never be present simply as another professional instructor. He cannot justify his presence except as that of a Christian educator — not a proselytizer nor a preacher but a Christian educator. This assertion is simply a specific application of the statement with which this letter began: the *raison d'être* of all our activities as religious and even as Christian is evangelization by word and action. To recall this principle helps to focus attention on the value of the presence of a religious, perhaps especially when he is the only religious in an institution whether as a teacher, a campus minister, an administrator, a board member or a person rendering auxiliary services. Many Holy Cross religious have told me how much colleagues value their presence when they are the only religious in a Catholic school or in an institution that does not profess any religious affiliation.

Our religious commitment and our spirit as religious of Holy Cross decidedly mark our presence, whether it is a sizable presence in an institution that we regard in some sense as ours or the presence of a single religious. The descriptions we have of institutions which we directed in the early decades of our history, whether these descriptions come from Father Moreau's pen or that of others, show how much of an impact the dedication of the religious, their family spirit, their collaboration with one another and with the families of the students, their insertion in the local or national Church had on their non-Holy Cross collaborators and especially on the students. These are elements that might well be included in a Holy Cross philosophy of education.

Finally, it seems to me, a philosophy of education can be drawn up only in the context of the broader Church and of society. The needs of the local or national Church are sometimes distinctly perceived by Church authorities and sometimes not. The priorities of the local and national Church in response to these needs are sometimes clearly spelled out and sometimes not. When this distinctness and clarity are lacking, it is our task, most especially in institutions of higher learning, to help clarify the needs and determine the priorities. It is our responsibility to see that the education

we offer responds to the needs and is in accord with the priorities.

2. *Changes in society.* The radical and far-reaching social changes that have marked the present century have provided us with a thoroughly different clientele to whom we offer an education and at thoroughly different society for which we prepare them. I am thinking particularly of the changes occasioned by technology: the universal education it encourages and the democracy this favors, the irreversible secularization process* technology fosters, the urbanization it promotes, the mobility of whole populations it facilitates, the increasing interdependence it leads to (one that sometimes means a repressive domination of some by others), the consumer society it produces, the dangers it occasions to the environment, and so on. These changes are "signs of the times" which, the Second Vatican Council insisted, the Church must discern and evaluate in the light of the gospel (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today, no. 4). What is God calling us to by these signs?

These signs form the context in which the second priority of the last general chapter was formulated. They form the context in which we must ask ourselves how this priority is to be implemented.

The chapter phrased its priority as follows:

A clear proclamation of evangelical truth which deepens appreciation for the meaning and values of human life, especially by leading people to discover that integral liberation is only fully attained in communion with one another and with the Father.

The priority is important not only for technologically advanced societies. Often enough the conditions of less developed societies are simply the reverse side of those of more developed groups: they are poor because the others are rich. Besides, technology is foreign to no country and will certainly continue to exercise an increasingly greater transforming influence over every society.

This priority addresses the question of the "spiritual poverty" of so much of contemporary society. By "spiritual poverty" I mean not merely ignorance of and alienation from God but lack of a real "appreciation for the meaning and [true] values of human life" which not rarely afflicts members of the middle and upper classes, especially those caught in a consumer society, even more than it does the materially poor.

That education has a very special role to play in the implementation of this

* By "secularization process" I mean the growing "autonomy of earthly realities" vis-à-vis religion, which the Vatican Council recognized as altogether appropriate (Pastor Constitution on the Church in the World of today, no 36) and Pope Paul VI described as "irreversible."

priority seems self-evident. The challenge lies in determining how that role is to be played. A particular aspect of this challenge especially important for us is the challenge of the evangelization of the middle class, whom we serve in most of the schools in which we work in North America and Europe.

In my estimation relatively little organized reflection has been done explicitly on this question. Of course, whatever consideration is given to the education of students who in fact belong to the middle class implicitly touches the question. But the challenge is too great, I feel, to be addressed only indirectly. We must ask explicitly just what the needs of this group are which the Christian education offered them must address. We must examine how best to address those needs: how most effectively to evangelize them through a Christian education.

This question might well be addressed in a philosophy of education, but I suggest that it will need much reflection and discussion before any kind of consensus is reached.

3) *Preferential option for the poor and oppressed.* The first priority of the 1980 general chapter was

a clear and prophetic option for and solidarity with the poor and oppressed, especially by involving people in their own development, awakening and deepening their consciousness of oppressive structures and laboring to change those structures.

Let me recall that this option is not simply an option of our general chapter or of the Latin American bishops. Pope John Paul II has repeatedly pointed out that it is a “necessary” option for the Church and even, in particular, for every Christian family. To repudiate it is to disassociate oneself from what the pope has identified as the position of the Church.

Let me point out, as I have done before, that what is new about this option is only the appreciation that the poor are also most often oppressed: that they are not simply without but are unjustly deprived of much of what they should have. The vast majority of apostolic religious foundations have been inspired by the needs of the poor. Today it would be: “the poor and the *oppressed*.”

What Father Moreau writes in his *Christian Pedagogy* (p.10) about the preference the individual teacher should give to certain students describes quite accurately the preference of many founders like himself:

If you must sometimes be seen to have a particular attachment to certain children, they should be the poorest, the most abandoned,

the most ignorant or the least endowed by nature ... If you show them special care, it is because their needs are greater and it is only just to give more to those who have received less.

The same principle applies today: the help given should be greatest where the needs are greatest. Among the materially poor, the vast majority of the human family, we find the highest concentration of all sorts of needs: lack of food, shelter, employment, health care, education, freedom ... although they also frequently have much spiritual and human wisdom to share. They are also the least served. It is true that our mission, because it is Christ's, is a mission to all of our fellow human beings in need. But the best way to test how effectively universal our fulfillment of that mission is will be to ask to what extent it reaches those who have the greatest need and are the least served.

Every area has people of differing economic levels, some less well off than others. From one area to another there are differences in resources available and people's ability to obtain them. Most of those whom we serve in our various ministries know that there are many others poorer than themselves. Do we encourage them to cultivate a sense of solidarity and to share with the neediest in their own area or elsewhere? Do we do the same? How willing are we to lower our own standard of living in order to do so?

The option for the poor ought naturally to be expressed most especially through our ministry. As educators we can ask what impact our ministry has directly or indirectly on the situation of the poor of our particular area or country. We can ask the question about our total educational apostolate in a province or district or area; we can ask it about a particular institution or activity. An attempt to list the ways which some such influence is exercised may show that much is being done and may suggest ways in which more can be done.

A question to which we can easily find the answer is how many of the poor are directly served by our particular ministry. Holy Cross religious have been seen as having a special gift for educating all social classes together. In many of the schools for which we are responsible there exist provisions for some type of financial help for a limited number of those unable to meet the full cost of an education. Are we doing all that we can? As the cost of education rises in many countries, it lies increasingly beyond the reach of the poor, and even some of the middle class may need a measure of assistance.

Have we searched for ways in which our institutions and works can help meet the education-related needs of the poor of our area who cannot participate in the usual program of our schools? A number of institutions

have evening classes which are meant for the poor and are financially supported by the regular day program. This is one way of responding to their needs. However, greater resources than ours are necessary to respond adequately in most places. Have we considered contributing our individual and institutional expertise and influence to the elaboration with others of regional plans to meet those needs?

The most telling question, however, concerns what the education we offer does to our students' view of and relationship to the poor. If the option for the poor is an option of the entire Church, then it should also be the option of the students to whom we offer a Catholic education. It is our task as educators to help them discover their responsibilities by coming to appreciate the plight of the poor, the structures that oppress, their own involvement in these structures and their duty in the face of all this. In an attempt to do this, many of our schools have academic or nonacademic programs which bring the students into direct contact with the needy. These programs can be very effective as part of an integral program of social responsibility; otherwise they might well foster an unfortunate paternalism towards the poor.

I trust that the preceding questions show how the option of the poor can be quite relevant even to educational institutions that serve mostly the middle class. However, it would be a mistake to think that these questions apply only to such institutions. They can and should be asked of all of our educational activities --of schools, of instruction given outside of institutions which we consider to be in some sense our own, and of the work of informal education too. The last question in particular should be asked of activities which minister directly to the poor, who themselves often need concretization regarding their own situation or that of the poor in general as much as do those who are not poor.

Here then are a number of challenges that face us as a religious community whose principal activity is the apostolate of Christian education. I have grouped the challenges under the headings of the changed situation in which we exercise that apostolate today and of the general chapter's mission priorities. In various ways we are attempting, to a greater or less degree, to address these challenges and others that I have not mentioned. I trust that enough has been said to show the wisdom of the approach which the general chapter urged regarding the implementation of its priorities:

The chapter calls on the entire congregation to reflect, discern and take action. This process ... should involve social analysis and theological-pastoral reflection.

We must, in other words, read the signs of the times in the light of the gospel, asking ourselves what God may be calling us to through these signs and how we may best respond. More particularly, we must assess the situation in which we

find ourselves today: the students that come to us and the society from which they come and in which we would like to see them become agents of social change, our own capabilities and limits for providing the kind of Christian education needed today, and the structures and methods most likely to be effective in achieving our goal.

We must do this together — in dialogue — and, because the changes we have already experienced will be followed by other and probably more extensive changes, the dialogue must be a continuing dialogue. I know that in many institutions, in some districts and provinces, and in certain inter-provincial and inter-district initiatives the dialogue is underway. I urge that serious thought be given to structuring the dialogue in a way that will regularly involve all the religious in the educational apostolate perhaps by the establishment at district and provincial levels of something similar to the educational conferences that existed in Father Moreau's time and that functioned in various forms in Holy Cross until the very eve of the Second Vatican Council. This sharing could equip us in an ongoing way easily to face the challenges of today and tomorrow as a community of educators. At present, when many of us minister alone or in small groups where we often lack the challenge offered by a number of others who share both our ministry and our Holy Cross commitment, such educational conferences could furnish the additional benefit of providing this support.

May the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, to whom fell the responsibility of educating the Savior of the world, support our educational apostolate with their prayers. May they aid us to appreciate that our role as Christian educators, like that of the apostle (Galatians 4: 19), is to help Christ be formed in those to whom we minister.