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VALUES AND MISSION OF THE SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART

Trish, Alumnae of Australia and New Zealand who have prepared the Congress, Alumnae/I, School Principals, Sisters, and Friends,

I am indeed delighted to be here among you! I am an alumna like you, one whose Sacred Heart education is one of the most precious gifts of her life, one whose religious vocation was born in a Sacred Heart school, nourished there, and brought to fruition in a Sacred Heart College. I am sure that Madeleine Sophie is delighted that the meeting of School Principals is deliberately taking place at the same time as this one, giving the possibility of interaction between Alumnae and principals. I look forward to my time with you tomorrow.

As I think you know, Madeleine Sophie's earliest intuition about the Society of the Sacred Heart included students. Much as she would have liked to have entered Carmel, had that been possible, she never envisioned what she often referred to as "this little Society" as religious only. When, later in her life, reflecting back on her "original idea" of the Society, she saw "a multitude of adorers from all the nations, to the very ends of the earth", she had you in mind, and perhaps even Australia which certainly, for her would have qualified as being at the very ends of the earth!

When Trish asked me if I would speak on the "Values and Mission of the Society" I thought that many of you could do the same out of your own Sacred Heart experience. The very basic values and mission that you have carried into your adult lives have not changed since you were students, but the way of carrying them out has, in response to the needs of each age. What I can offer you is my own experience of having lived in the Society for 42 years, crucial years in its history, and my present privileged knowledge of the international Society from having lived and worked at its center for the past 8 years.

At the outset, I want to say that I am heartened and impressed by the theme of this Congress, "Matters of the Heart: Reconciling Ourselves with our World," as well as by your focused preparation for it. I trust that each national association has made use of the study plan, which invited you to embark on a journey of Reconciliation. I do not know the particulars of what each national association has done, but I have read the report of the Italian Alumnae's Tenth National Congress in Assisi, last October, and was extremely impressed by the quality of reflection and interaction. As, no doubt, you know well, Reconciliation is not something we "do" once and for all. We are all on a journey of reconciliation with ourselves, our families, others who are part of our lives. Some of us need reconciliation with our country (and, as a citizen of the United States of America, that has come home to me powerfully since the events of September 11th). Who among

us does not need to be reconciled with some aspect of our world? And then there is our God who is always there, taking the initiative to be reconciled with us: the "prodigal father", the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine in search of the one stray. The gospel is full of parables of reconciliation. So this Congress is a "stopping place" on the journey, an oasis of refreshment and nourishment, a moment to recharge one's energy, gather up courage to continue the journey.

Now to the Values and Mission of the Society of the Sacred Heart. When someone asks an RSCJ "what is your charism?" she is sometimes hard put to express it in a few words. It is rich, it is deep, it is a matter of the heart, and words fall short. Trying to explain it is not unlike any one of you trying to explain to someone else the gift of your husband's love. For that is what a charism is. It is a gift. In our case the gift was received by Madeleine Sophie and passed on to her daughters for the good of our Church and our world.

Our post-Vatican II Constitutions, written in 1982, the only Constitutions to be written since the original ones of 1815, which continue to be, in the words of Helen McLaughlin "our primitive text, our initial and original gift", present our charism as having four dimensions:

•an end: the glory of the Heart of Jesus

•a mission: to discover and make known His love

•a spirituality: to be united and conformed to the Heart of Jesus in complete openness to the Spirit, and

•a service in the Church: education.

This was our charism in 1800 and it has remained our charism throughout the 202 years of our history. I don't think this is the moment, nor do I think it is any longer necessary, to review the changes in the world, the Church and the Society of the Sacred Heart over the past forty years since the convocation of the Second Vatican Council. The fact that you are here means that you have either weathered the storms of change or are too young to have known them. The fact that "Reconciliation with the World" is your theme indicates an openness of spirit, a common search for justice and peace, a willingness to take the initiative to bring healing where there is division, understanding where there is confusion, and pardon where there is injury. Since there is no reconciliation without forgiveness, let me take this opportunity, in the name of the Society, to ask pardon for any ways in which we, individually or as a congregation, have acted hurtfully. I hope that whatever wounds any one of you may carry have been healed over time, but should any vestiges remain which need a word of humble acknowledgement and a request for pardon, I offer that now.

Every six years we have a General Chapter, a meeting of delegates from each of the countries where we are present. The whole Society prepares for the Chapter and the

deliberations and reflection of the delegates set the direction until the next Chapter. The opening words of the 1994 Chapter document (which contains the section on Education to Reconciliation, one of your resources for this Congress) expresses well the purpose of a Chapter:

"The Society chooses to let the world set its agenda, to name specific calls of the world and the Church in our present moment. Only thus can we be where the piercing of the heart is taking place; only thus can we be where God's fidelity and mercy are being revealed."

Actually, "letting the world set our agenda" is nothing new in the Society. Madeleine Sophie "let the world set her agenda." She saw the dire need in France to give girls a solid education basedon faith, permeated with God's love symbolized by the Heart of Jesus, and oriented to equipping them to contribute to repairing the torn fabric of society.

Many of you know that the theme of the General Chapter of 2000 was "Our Educational Mission: a pathway to discover, a space to announce the love of the Heart of Jesus". To focus the Chapter on our service of Education was the unanimous choice of the thirty-two provincials gathered in Chile in October 1997 for a 2-week Assembly. There was a common desire to focus specifically on this dimension of our charism, which over the past years has experienced a great deal of evolution as we have tried to "read the signs of the times".

For the first time, Trish Burns and sixteen other lay participants came for a week of our 5-week meeting. In the words of the Introduction to our Chapter Document: "They challenged us to own our place in the Church; they expressed their renewed confidence in our spirituality and our service of education and they gave us energy and hope to go forward." They worked with us as we struggled to articulate the calls we were hearing. We ended up expressing three calls under three titles which, though distinct, are intimately related:

An Education that Transforms, From Collaboration to Reciprocity, and From a Meeting to a Dialogue of Cultures. It is not unusual that we came to the Chapter with a desire to re-express our spirituality in language that is more comprehensible to the contemporary world (a desire voiced by the Directors of Sacred Heart Schools during their Joigny meeting in April 2000), for one cannot speak of Sacred Heart education without speaking of the spirituality that informs it. This desire was not achieved as some had hoped it would be. Although our spirituality was the thread that connected and was woven through all the topics we discussed, in the end, we realized that the time was not yet ripe for a rearticulation of it. Our conclusion is expressed in these words:

"We are convinced as a Chapter that our lives, given in love, are the strongest expression of our spirituality. Living these Chapter calls day by day will yield a new language, whether in words, art or symbol, to express our spirituality of the Open Heart of Christ in the Church and for the world. The journey continues."

I think the obvious Chapter theme to dwell on in this assembly is that of Collaboration. I think you would find yourselves in the Chapter document "From Collaboration to Reciprocity" in a way you never have before. As you well know, the Society of the Sacred Heart has lived quite an evolution in understanding collaboration since pre-Vatican II days. Even in my own experience as a student and young professed teaching in a Sacred Heart school, our collaboration with the laity took the form of hiring a few lay teachers when there was no RSCJ available or capable of teaching whatever the subject was. Later, we began to wake up to the fact that children need a variety of role models, not just religious, and that it was healthy to have a more diverse faculty. But it was still "our work", "our turf". There was a certain "we-they" attitude and rarely were there lay administrators, rarely were our lay colleagues on an equal footing with the religious as far as decision-making was concerned.

Little by little we came to realize that we did not "own" the charism, which Madeleine Sophie received and gave to us as a Society. Rather, as the 1994 Chapter, in speaking of our spirituality said, "It is a gift to be shared, a treasure others help us to discover." (María Teresa Porcile cited this same quotation during her conference to the AMASC Congress in San Luis Potosí four years ago. She loved Sacred Heart Alumnae and I know she is present with us in spirit as she gazes on the face of God in the company of Madeleine Sophie.)

In the 2000 Chapter document "From Collaboration to Reciprocity, the Society is called to "work together and with others in partnership, to foster life and to contribute to the building of an alternative society… it is a desire of the lay persons who are close to us and with whom we work. It was also a specific request of those who participated in the Chapter and in the sessions at Joigny."

The document goes on to say that Collaboration is a way of being and a way of doing. "[Collaboration] requires attitudes of trust and mutual support, vulnerability and openness. It recognizes the need to learn from others and requires flexibility and imagination in discovering new possibilities together. Collaboration implies team building, delegating and assuming our co-responsibility for the common good, working on common projects and developing together new processes in our service of education." Chapter 2000, pp. 27-28

There are seven strategies to concretize our carrying out of this call to collaboration in reciprocity and the last two concern you particularly:

• To strive for a better interaction among our school networks, projects for the excluded and popular education networks.

•To join forces, make proposals and take action with alumnae/i, parents, friends, in common projects for the benefit of persons and groups who are the victims of marginalization or injustice.

To what end do we want to collaborate? Isn't it to try to make a concerted contribution to the healing, the reconciliation of our world? Have not the events of September 11th only underscored, intensified our realization that our world is sick and without major changes it will perish? We can hardly stand to watch the graphic images on our TV screens: malnourished or orphaned children, stories of outrageous bonuses for company executives who are already part of the 6% who possess 59% of the world's riches, global warming which causes simultaneously the devastation of massive flooding and the death of crops for lack of water; desperate refugees who have left all security behind because anything is better than the terror they have been living with; ethnic conflict out of control… The list is endless.

There are so many Alumnae of the Sacred Heart and so many RSCJs with a deep commitment to justice and an instinct for collaboration. Trish mentioned some of them in her talk at the Chapter. I am not so naïve as to believe that RSCJs and Alumnae of the Sacred Heart can single-handedly transform the world, but we cannot allow the feelings of powerlessness to lull us into inaction. One person's intuition, idea, effort can make a difference. We all know and have been inspired by stories of grassroots people who not only have had a dream or a cause but have found a way to communicate it to other. That is how networks, coalitions, campaigns are built.

Helen Prejean, author of Dead Man Walking, has had an enormous influence on the death penalty moratorium campaign by collaborating with all kinds of civil and religious groups including the Rome-founded Sant'Egidio community, which can mobilize its 40,000 members in over 60 countries. Helen's anti-death penalty journey began with her response to a request to write to a death row inmate.

Jodi Williams, the Canadian who began the anti-landmine campaign, has had such success by building a grassroots coalition that she, with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, was a co-recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.

Perhaps one of the most beautiful and hopeful stories of recent history is one about the origin of peace cranes. Sadako Sasaki was only two years old when the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan in 1945. She was not directly affected. Ten years later she developed leukemia, and was hospitalized. While in the hospital, her best friend told her of the Japanese legend, that if a person could fold 1,000 paper cranes the gods would grant them a wish. Sadako wished only to get better. She started folding cranes. Unfortunately she was able to fold only 654 before she died at age twelve.

Her friends thought it would be nice to erect a statue to honor her and all of the children killed by the atomic bomb. Their sincere efforts let to the building in 1958, of the Children's monument in the Peace Park in Hiroshima. On the top of the statue is a young girl holding a golden crane high above her head. Inscribed at the base of the statue is a prayer: "This is our prayer. This is our wish. Peace in our world."

I tell this story for itself and also because of how I came to find the description I just read. I only vaguely remembered the details of Sadako's story so I did a search on the Internet

using the words "Peace Cranes Japan". In an instant I had my choice of 5,632 entries including the "1,000 Cranes for Peace Network" where I found the account of Sadako's life. When I opened their website I read:

"Welcome to the home for an international project which is engaging communities in collaborative activities to promote peace, non-violence and tolerance. Networking shows that every little bit helps, that every effort made for a more peaceful world helps to achieve that goal - however small that effort may seem at the time. It also demonstrates that working together helps every individual to achieve so much more: 'Many hands make peace work'!"

Little did Sadako dream that her 654 cranes would have such an effect!

And who could have imagined that a few mothers wearing white headscarves, walking in a circle around the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, Argentina, demanding to know the truth about what had happened to their children, the "disappeared" of the 1970's would end up having such an international impact, forging a solidarity born of a common suffering, with bereaved women and truth-seekers all over the world?

I could give other examples but my point is that sharing a common vision and working together to achieve it can have far-reaching effects.

How can we collaborate more systematically and efficiently? Practically speaking, much happens on the local level, but together we need to seek better ways of coordinating our effortsinternationally as well.

When I speak of coordination at the international level of the Society of the Sacred Heart you may think we RSCJs have many people, a large staff, to connect with and coordinate our efforts in 46 countries of the world. Actually, we are very few given the size and geographical spread of the Society: a General Council of five who are together in Rome only four months of the year, a Secretariat of three, a General Treasurer and an assistant, a General Archivist and an assistant, and one person who assures food on our table, welcomes guests and does a multitude of things necessary to running a household.

Recognizing our paucity of personnel at the central level, we are in the process of creating a commission of three which we are calling the "Sophia Commission" who will provide the infrastructure we lack, and coordinate the carrying out of the tasks mandated by the Chapter &endash; tasks that are all about integration, and networking:

• Systematically pursuing our efforts to integrate Education, Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, Finances, and Communication

• Networking with Church and civil society organizations and with Society-related networks such as AMASC, networks of Sacred Heart Schools, our popular education network, etc.

Communication is the backbone of these efforts. Certainly, electronic communication has made a huge difference in the life of the Society over the past several years. Although there are many Sacred Heart-related websites, we do not yet have an international web site (AMASC is ahead of the international Society in this!) which, among other things, would serve as a means of networking connecting people across the world. Setting up a website will be one of the tasks of the Sophia Commission.

Another decision we have made is to apply for NGO status with the Department of Information (DPI) at the United Nations. The application process takes two years and so we will not be immediately setting up an office in New York, but we are planning for it. This is another area where RSCJs and alumnae can collaborate with others of common purpose to help provide a voice for those with no access on matters concerning children, women, education, peace...

At the Chapter, Trish said clearly "We want to collaborate with you in your projects." I welcome this support. There is so much to be done and if this great international family of the Sacred Heart can work together -- the RSCJs, the alumnae and students, faculties and staffs, parents and past parents throughout the world &endash; and connect with others beyond the Sacred Heart family, with whom you are already collaborating, we can generate an energy for good that we can hardly imagine now.

What I have been talking about are strategies, concrete actions. They are important, but we cannot remain at that level. Collaboration is on the level of "being", not just "doing". I think the call to Collaboration in Reciprocity implies a relationship that goes deeper than the level of task. It implies the mutuality of friendship.

On the night before He died, Jesus said to his apostles: "I shall not call you servants anymore, because a servant does not know his master's business; I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father."

This is the ideal that we must keep before us, I think. Its realization varies from person to person, from place to place, from association to association. Each act of trust, each gesture of love helps the friendship to grow. Relationships, friendships of all kinds were central to Madeleine Sophie's life. She was a "woman of relationships", a "woman of the heart". She would have loved to have had e-mail! She would probably have written 100,000 letters instead of the 14,000 that we have. She would have been the expert in various kinds of networking. Relationships were so primary for Madeleine Sophie that she even made them one of the Society's apostolic means.

So let us look to the future together and beyond ourselves. Let us "look outward in the same direction" as one definition of love expresses it. Let us "embrace every means in our power" to help our world to become God's world. Each one of us has only one life and the years pass all too quickly. We have no time to waste and we cannot lose our hope that our world can be different, that as dark as things might seem, every moment is a moment of grace inviting us to discover God's indefatigable love and communicate it to others.

I would like to close with some lines from Christopher Fry's play A Sleep of Prisoners. Written over 50 years ago, in 1951, the words communicate a willingness to risk and a solidarity among all searching people of faith and good will who want to make a difference in our world:

The human heart can go to the lengths of God. Dark and cold we may be, but thi
Is no winter now. The frozen misery
Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move,
The thunder is the thunder of the floes,
The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring.
Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere.
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul men ever took.
Affairs are now soul size.
The enterprise
Is exploration into God.

I like to think that God's heart is pleased, knowing that we, along with so many other concerned and generous people, are engaged in that exploration together!