

Summary of educative transformation experiences published on assumpta.fr 2015

English version



“The last word of love or of truth is never spoken... we always desire more ...”

(Notes intimes 154/06)

***Reaffirm our charism of transformative education in all our apostolic actions.
(Transformative Education 2006)***

Through the educative transformation experiments published on www.assumpta.fr we can admire the Assumption charisma in work and contemplate its beauty, its dynamism. Yes the Assumption educative charisma is alive and gives life.

But, still more, it is our own way to answer God's and world's call, our specific way to incarnate the Gospel.

This summary is the evidence of the huge work carried out in the Congregation all over the world to appropriate again this educative charism quite more, to define it for today.



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BUSINESS FAIR

**Instituto Asunción de
Querétaro, México**



The Business Fair is a relevant *professional experience*, for the school as well as for the students and teachers. We guide the students along the year with the required knowledge, in order to make it a successful experience. Through this important event, the students live the real business life, the implications of incorporating a company and running it, through the elaboration of some products, the marketing research and mission and vision of the company. We put the students face to face with a real business: its problems, complications and possible solutions, as well as managing time as a relevant issue.

Through the work in “teams” they discover their abilities to use them in favor of their team (company). Very important aspects are introduced as they are in a real b life situations such as costs, profits, purchase and sale, financial statements, profits and loss, taxes (Accounting); market research, design, slogans, etc. (Marketing and Advertising); assembling, disassembling and materials (logistics); neatness, customer service, command of stress, timing, etc.

Procedure:

- Integration of teams
- Choose the possible topics and raffle.
- They start the research about the topic.
- Assignment of positions corresponding and real accounting principles.
- Marketing, costs and profits are fixed per product.
- Publicity is carried out based on the market that each product and/or business will be targeted to.
- Assembling of each booth in accordance with previous decoration projects and internal rulings.
- Opening takes place and businesses start.
- Disassembling and cleaning.
- Evaluation

The above mentioned is graded through partial deliveries agreed in advance by the teacher’s team involved as well as the percentage(s) and the subject(s) that will be graded until the final project is handed in.

This experience takes some aspects from our MPPA as Character Formation, Christianization of Intelligences, Community, Justice and Respect, among others.

Some comments from students:

“We learned a lot working on this project, not only about the subject but teamwork and cooperation, if our opinions were different we had to learn how to listen to everyone’s opinion and choose what was the best for the team, even though it was not exactly what we wanted. I also think this project got us to know our classmates better; it was one of the most enriching projects we have had because we had to put in practice what we learned at school, it was different and dynamic.” (Isabel Garcia Pimentel)

“The Business fair has been the most stressful, painful and complete learning experience I have had throughout high school. It definitely showed me how difficult life can be and how much you have to work to sort out and get results, even if they are different from those expected. It is amazing to see the things that you have been studying in class in real life. You get to use all the capacities that you have reached during the year. I think it is a lifetime experience, really.” Andrea Garcia Perez

“This project was the biggest I have ever worked on, and it was definitely a great experience. It helped me to grow and to be more organized in so many ways. There were a lot of moments of pressure, stress, anger, disagreement but at the end, I feel like we all got to the end with great teamwork. We were all well organized and I am sure we all learned a lot of new things with this new experience full of challenge”. (Begoña Gomez Cors)

“The Business Fair was an experience that before this year I had only experienced from the outside. This year I had the challenge to make the business fair happen with my team members. Personally, I really loved the activities that I had to do. I enjoyed working with each one of the team members. My only comment is that it was an enriching, rewarding and entertaining project.” (Juan Pablo Verda Davalos)



High School English Teacher
Rossana Padilla B
Claudia Adriana Vázquez
English Coordination
Assumption Querétaro, México

* Pedagogic and Pastoral Assumption Model in Mexico

Transformative Education through the Assumption Volunteers Program (England)

The English province of the Religious of the Assumption has a small volunteer programme which has been running for 15 years. Following St Marie Eugenie's conviction that "each of us has a mission on earth" the Sisters of the Assumption want to help people discover the meaning of their lives and how they can be of service in our world. They offer ten places each year for young adults over 20 years old to share for one year in the lives of the poor, the young and the marginalised in an unfamiliar culture in projects connected with the Religious of the Assumption.

During this period 106 young people have been able to share their gifts with others and have gained more than they could have imagined. About half of the volunteers have gone abroad to serve in the Philippines, Thailand, Tanzania, Rwanda, Lithuania, USA, Mexico, El Salvador and Brazil and half have come from abroad (the Philippines, France, Belgium, Germany, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Brazil, Mexico, USA and Canada) to serve in the UK.

One of the volunteer projects in the UK, Kids Kabin in Newcastle, was originally set up by the Sisters and offers young people creative alternatives to boredom and destruction. Catering to children from the ages of 8 - 13 it offers woodwork, pottery, painting, arts and crafts, cooking, gardening and bicycle repair on the premises and in the outreach activities in different locations around the city.

It also runs residential trips, day outings and camping expeditions. The international volunteers bring energy, ideas, and the gifts of their own cultures and have helped it to expand and reach more local children while living in community brings all the challenges and joys that inter-cultural friendships entail.

In this exchange of gifts the lives of the volunteers and the children are transformed. The volunteers especially have been able to reflect on the changes that have happened in their lives through implicitly living the gospel values of service. These are some of the reflections we have received:



- "This year of growth and exploration has been a true blessing and gift from God. The freedom I've found to be myself, the love and complete fulfilment from my work, and the community of friends I've built are all things I don't want to leave behind. One big thing I've learned through this experience is trusting in God. Saying goodbye to Newcastle doesn't mean I'm leaving all this growth behind. I'll take my new found personal freedom and greater understanding for my calling and direction in life to continue finding fulfilment and peace through each door God opens."

Lauren from USA to Newcastle

- “A very enriching opportunity for me, it widens my perception in life and made me see the other aspect of being poor. I have come to realize that the people whom I’m serving are not financially poor but spiritually poor.”

Gilda from Philippines to Newcastle

- “We have just got back from an unbelievable trip to Rupert's Wood, where we stayed overnight with the children. I want to point out that some of the kids we had on this trip were considered in the past problematic ones, but their behaviour was absolutely brilliant. I enjoyed every minute I spent over there despite the drizzly weather, especially food cooked on the fire, the games we played at night, hot chocolate, swing jumping over the river, sleeping in the tents, night wind, toast with ash... Thanks to Kids Kabin and to the Assumption Sisters for this amazing opportunity to be here for a second year and contribute something to local society.”

Igor from Ukraine to Newcastle



- “I have learnt so much more than I can possibly give, the value of looking beyond and into a person, and just being grateful for all the small things but above all else not to worry about what I can bring, or what I can offer because by just bringing ourselves with an open heart we are already giving more than what is required.”

Chris from UK to Philippines

- “I thank God for giving me this opportunity to experience Jesus in the people who have touched my life. Those who have known me before know I was not a very committed Christian. I do not pretend to be so now. However my relationship with my God has improved immensely since

September. This group has given me the gift of simplicity and humility; they have opened my eyes to my shortfall in an affectionate way and made me a better man.”

John from UK to Philippines

- “I have really enjoyed and learnt such a lot from my placement here, some teaching skills and a new culture and language, but I have also learnt a lot about myself, and especially about relationships with others and community. I think that the biggest lesson for me personally has been to see and be part of a real community day to day, at school with teachers and students, and with Sisters/Samaritans*. The experience is quite challenging sometimes but very worthwhile.”

Rebecca from UK to Lithuania



Each year brings us new people, varied skills, fresh energies and, in the exchange of gifts, appreciation of their uniqueness and vocation in life and a contribution to the extension of the Reign of God. More details about Assumption Volunteers can be seen on the website www.assumptionvolunteers.org.uk.

Helen Granger,

Volunteer Co-ordinator

* “Samaritans” is the name of the youth hostel administrated by the Sisters in Vilnius

March 2015



Our « being together » in Our Lady of Assumption College in Daloa

The call to communion challenges us to learn how to harness its great potential in order to further our prophetic mission of transformative education and training so as to build a more human and just society which is itself the family of God.

(“The dynamic of communion” General Chapter 2012)

Daloa College in Ivory Coast was founded in 1959 on arrival of the first Sisters of Assumption. Indeed, four sisters: Isabelle, the Superior; Cécile Bernard, the Head Mistress; Thérèse Elisabeth, the Bursar and Agnès Emmanuel (Meybel), teacher. The opening of a 6th form class, with 25 pupils shows the birth of what will become the « Collège Notre Dame de l’Assomption » (CNDA) of Daloa. Following that, the Secondary School (College) has shown a constant development and growth up to this day.



This lovely flashback to the history of CNDA of Daloa brings up to something new that is happening in the College life : we want to point out our «being together» as Assumption educators, men and women. CNDA has educative team of 34 members at the service of 564 girls, who are 9 to 16 years old.

To materialize this «being together» challenge and call that we all feel, we have worked out a project that is living in the teaching staff.

For that project, we have thought over several questions:

- How can we become together, what we are able to be as completely as possible?*
- What stands out in being of Assumption educators during this 2014-2015 school-year.
- What are the strategies to elaborate among us and with the pupils to greatly improve knowledge received by students?

Slide projections, team work and other helps on the team-work; eco-theology as well as the Reference Text, presented by sisters, have stimulated the thinking. Little by little we produced a life project for the educative team.

We felt a call to:

- ✓ Grow in mutual trust and personal involvement in the life of the College...
- ✓ Celebrate life: keep up links of fellowship and conviviality...
- ✓ Celebrate faith, strengthen Life and open ourselves to Hope...



because « *God leads everything and no wiser and loving hand could be able to lead our destiny .* » (Holy Marie Eugénie)

Then, with the pupils, we shared our project and worked on a common strategy, an ACTION PLAN:

Specific Aim	Activities to be displayed		Responsible for setting
	Main activities	Secondary activities	
Commit oneself in building the family spirit	Strengthen solidarity	Class meetings, sharing (Advent, Lent) visit to families	Certified Teachers/ pupils
	Organise School trips		Pastoral Team
Increase a taste for effort	Weekly Tasks	Tasks, tests 7 th / 8 th what? Training 5 th /6 th Congratulate the best students	Headmaster, Teachers
	Take part in OISSU (Office ivoirien des sports scolaires et universitaires)	INTERCLASSES	Physical Education teacher
	Fighting against cheating	Test without supervision Awareness at the flag ceremony	Committee in charge
Awake sense of the sacred	Human and religious formation (FHR)	Mass, recollection, morning prayer, lessons about other religions	Pastoral team and volunteer or selected teachers
	Interreligious dialogue	Meeting and discussion with the religious leaders about Peace	Pastoral team and outer people.
Taking care of Creation	Keeping care of the environment	Competition / clean class, sweeping, use of dustbins, posters to sensibilize.	Volunteer Committee Headmaster team
	Sensibilize to hygiene	Invite a specialist. body and clothes cleanness	Headmaster Volunteer Committee

During the General Meeting of pupils and parents, we shared our project. With the New Board, we said « ABOVE ALL, DO NOTHING WITHOUT THE OTHER » what is the special point of the pastoral year in the Diocese... we are more intelligent together, said it!!!

Sister Sylvie Pascale, r.a. Headmistress
And the Teachers Team in Assumption Daloa.

*Word of Holy Marie-Eugénie.

My Pastoral Experience Working With Non-Believers

“In the furrow of yesterday, the seed of tomorrow”



I am fortunate, along with the rest of the teaching staff of our school in Malaga, to collaborate in the mission that St. Marie Eugenie chose to be the first foundation of the Religious of the Assumption in Spain, in 1865.

It has been 150 years of dedication and passion having been entrusted with this work of “Christianizing the intelligence” (St. Marie Eugenie) that we have dealt with in various ways, approaches and strategies that, as in the case of our school, have been convergent and complementary, depending on the type of students that we serve.

Within our school, there is a part that is very special and unique. Aside from the Nursery, Elementary, Middle and High Schools, there is also what we call the “Vocational Formation Cycles”. I say that this is a unique feature of our school because it offers characteristics that are different from what is offered in the rest of the school, namely:

1. The Academic work in a child that usually begins in nursery and culminates in Senior High School or Secondary School is like a good “stew” that is cooked with slow fire and made to simmer. My colleagues have the good fortune of 15 years of work and accompaniment of the students, planting the seeds little by little, nurturing these and witnessing their growth in the values that the Assumption intends to inculcate in each of its students.
2. The choice of Academic Institution is done by families and not by the students. And the choice is determined not only by the good, high Academic standards offered but also because of its being a Catholic institution. Even if there are some families that are non-believers, these are families that are not against education that is religious.



In the Vocation Formation Cycles, however, the reality is quite different. Most of our students here come from public schools where religion, if at all, is secondary or even put aside with hardly any foundation. The choice of the institution is usually done by the students themselves (not by their families); and for most of them, the institution is not their first choice, in fact they see its being Catholic as something negative, especially for some who strongly reject anything that has to do with the church.

The students in this cycles are those who have had a past history of failures and academic difficulties and for whom this cycles may even be their last and only option left for them to get any kind of formation/education. Our obligation, as mentors is to invest ourselves unconditionally for these students whom in most cases are at the “margins of the path”, but... what can we do in situations like these where the wind seems to be blowing strongly against us? How can we make transformative education happen according to the values of St. Marie Eugenie? The challenge is great because at best, we have a year or a year and a half to achieve our goals.

Underlying all these is how we form and educate in the Assumption, where we integrate and put together love, listening, understanding, demanding and in this case, an extra dose of motivation, as these type of students usually are wanting in

self-esteem. On our part, it is fundamentally the work of accompaniment that will at times necessarily implicate one's personal history. We must be like Simon of Cyrene, ready to lighten the weight of the cross of the one whom he encounters on the road.

In principle, we face very difficult challenges. Foremost of which is to dismantle, the many negative preconceptions (so common on our society) with respect to Catholicism, the Church and its values, so often repeated without examining whether or not these arguments are valid.

If all goes well, unless rejection is provoked by the religiosity of others, I believe the more complicated and challenging part for those of us who work with them begins, which is to witness to what we say and to be examples of the values we inculcate and propose to live, each one according to one's own possibilities. In society it is common to hear speeches full of empty ideas, of people that act contrary to what they propose, and this obviously reaches these students. And this is what strikes them a lot, in a positive sense, this coherence between the message and the living of this message. It is from here that we are able to connect with them and see how they can be more receptive to what we have to offer.

Then, we get to the moment when we invite them to participate in the pastoral activities with the rest of the students of the school. Many times, those in the Vocation Formation Cycles are not too convinced/confident and most of the time they are have uncertainties/insecurities within in them for which we are able to provide channels/outlets with the activities that we offer. Certainly, they begin with the motivation to "be with" or belong rather than for anything spiritual, but in time they discover that all our activities are founded on the message of Jesus Christ, who is the "motor" behind all our action and that is when they begin to raise questions.



The rest of the students in our school who participate in these activities, play a crucial role. If there is something I value especially in the students of our school, it is their great capacity to integrate with each other, however different they may be. They play a very important part in the Pastoral work, because they make our students in the cycles feel fully integrated as participants in the movement of the big, common project of the Assumption.

In education it is difficult to see the results of your work, because many times processes take a long time. But when we are lucky to see them, it is something that gives meaning to all the sacrifices invested/endured. In our case we are very proud to have managed to integrate many students (objectively, even without the conditions for us to do this) in the school and we see that they continue to participate, even after they have completed their studies at the center.

Not only to have more self-esteem, the goal in itself and for itself would have been worthwhile, but when they begin to find answers and meaning to a life that, before coming to the school, was one that carried them from one place to another without much awareness, they begin to have a solid foundation on which to build their future and they know that they can count on us, in this very important pastoral work of accompaniment that is ours.

As I had said earlier, it is true that it is not an easy task that requires hard work and motivation of a great team of people, and of course God's help, but if you really want to transform reality, we invest in people and their potentials, regardless of whether or not the conditions are there for this to happen. "Utopia is the principle of all progress, and the essay into a better future" (Anatole France).

Pablo Bravo
Professor and Member of the Pastoral Team
Málaga, España

The Assumption Technical Centre at Nyange

The message of peace is not about a negotiated settlement but rather the conviction that the unity brought by the Spirit can harmonize every diversity. It overcomes every conflict by creating a new and promising synthesis. Diversity is a beautiful thing when it can constantly enter into a process of reconciliation and seal a sort of cultural covenant resulting in a "reconciled diversity". As the bishops of the Congo have put it: "Our ethnic diversity is our wealth... It is only in unity, through conversion of hearts and reconciliation, which we will be able to help our country to develop on all levels" The Joy of the Gospel" (n° 230) Pope Francis

After the genocide of 1994 the Sisters of the Assumption returned to Rwanda. At Nyange they undertook an agricultural project to assist young people living in a poor rural area, who were in the least favourable position for finding employment.

The Sisters started with a small centre to teach dressmaking, carpentry and agro –pasturage, since these are possible careers for young people. This was a pilot centre for the region which developed by degrees, and since it was adaptable, it met evolving professional needs.

Since 2008 we have improved this project with its aim of providing a framework for impoverished young people who haven't been able to study at Secondary level. Training them at local level curbs the rural exodus by giving them access to genuine work.

After the genocide Rwandan society was wounded, torn apart and traumatised. Even today, families remain disunited and there are many orphans and widows. A certain air of vengeance and suspicion remain, in addition to the poverty and the misery.

To change this situation, the Sisters of the Assumption have, for many years, worked alongside and in collaboration with other institutions and NGOs for the promotion of justice, peace and reconciliation The Technical Centre has evolved so that now we equip young people in 4 trades: Dress making, Construction, Carpentry and Welding. We are a team of educators consisting of Sisters and Laity. Lay people are specialists in the 4 areas and give the courses generously. We sisters share in animating the Centre, in management and directing Catechises.

Our presence in Nyange has given rise to group of friends -"Assumption Together"- which sustains us and places our Centre at the heart of village life.

Currently 150 young people, of whom 60% are boys and 40% girls, are in training, at different levels, each in their chosen trade. At the end of the year they receive a certificate which enables them to find employment. This is of maximum importance to them, giving them joy since it meets their desire for a better life and enables them to support their families.



In addition to gaining a certificate, both young people and their families appreciate the structure the Centre offers with a solid, professional training and most of all its Christian values which encourage them to live together in a permanently



difficult context -a situation which demands pardon and the overcoming of hatred and suspicion by confidence and solidarity,

All members of the educative community at Nyange live in solidarity and commitment to work for justice.

With joy we live as the voice of the voiceless bringing a witness of Faith and Ecumenism, since the Centre is open to all.

Through this small educative project we experience working with others which allows us to overcome fear and other barriers, with the conviction that unity creates strength.

We ourselves are transformed by this experience and are impelled to go into the future carrying our stone for the building of a Society which is more just and more neighbourly.



Bukeye Agnès
Communauté de Nyange
Rwanda



June 2015

Assumption Educational Resources Centre (AERC)¹

Transforming and reinventing charisma

In schools, that are members of the Assumption France network (“Tutelle”), an invisible wave goes through what we do and preserves a research process in the light of the Assumption project². The Assumption project include: following through the course of a study, planning and supporting class time with the pupils, using innovative methodologies that incorporates pupils with different capacities, teaching pupils self-sufficiency, as well as assessing them.



Three times a year, the Educational Resources Center (AERC) members meet to extend their research keeping in mind the will to constantly innovate while remaining faithful to the creative spark from which it all started.

Founder Marie-Eugénie and the first Sisters had already looked for an educational system corresponding to the needs of their time.

At the heart of the charism is the need to listen to the contexts in which we operate to respond in an ever new way ... *"I could understand and feel ... I felt the urgency to try everything ..."*³



The Assumption Educational Resources Centre gathers about 30 teachers from nursery school to twelfth grade who come from all Assumption schools in France. They work for two years on a theme they choose. Their work consists in mutualizing their practical teaching experience and elaborating numerous experiences that they conduct once they are back in their schools. Their work preserves a research dynamics within the network and stimulates their colleagues' creativity.

The research body (AERC) was created on June 3rd, 2010. It sprang from the desire to strengthen the educational dynamic in the Assumption schools and equip the existing professional training centre with a research centre. We gradually acquired more members, so much so that today almost all our French Assumption schools are represented. What always strikes the newcomers and visiting observers is the working atmosphere: benevolent and kindly ears, mutual interest, creative exchanges and overflowing dynamism often make us

¹ AERC = CRPA (Centre de Ressources Pédagogiques Assomption)

² PAEA (Projet Apostolique et Educatif Assomption-France)

- Love your time
- Think big
- Extend intelligence
- Work towards the transformation of our society
- Work towards the advent of justice
- Act against poverty
- Act with audacity and humbleness
- Always look for the complete transformation of the person and the community
- Form men and women of faith and action
- Live, in faith, our passion of humanity

³ Letter 1504 from St Marie Eugenie too M. Gros

forget to take a break... The quality of these relationships often goes on in the evening, when we exchange with a community of sisters, especially with the one of Lübeck.

During our two-day work sessions, teachers from all subjects and all levels exchange together. We share our practical teaching experience and discuss the different educational theories and trends while making a connection between reality and the purpose of the Assumption project. Joy, family feeling, benevolence as well as rigour set in the tone of our arduous exchanges on a given matter.



Between two meetings, each member works on a field experience in order to refine the tool created by the team. This work can be about observing, describing an experience, writing a fundamental text or elaborating an issue.

Last September, we took a step forward by professionalizing our research and work, working with the Catholic Higher Education Institute for Education in Paris (Institut Supérieur de Pédagogie de Paris - ISP, Université Catholique de Paris).

A sociologist and lecturer are helping us set up a field survey about two themes: assessment (which causes us to be dragged along by Marie Eugénie's anthropological view) and working in collaboration (which emphasizes the significance of the community and collective intelligence, the very essence of the project Assumption). An agreement will be signed with this university in 2015-2016. This allows the group to enjoy access to the resources of the Catholic Higher Education Institute.

Here are some of the themes that the members have already worked on through the experiences shared at the AERC. In parenthesis, one aspect of the project that the question refers to:



- How do we give personal support to the pupils in Haute-Savoie? (every person is significant the way they are)
- Which innovative method was set up in Cogolin to make the pupils revise their lessons? (implication and involvement in the studies)
- How is autonomy the way to success for the pupils of Orleans and Bordeaux? (the freedom which allows each pupil to find in himself the resources for his own transformation)
- Why do we draw a tree with our class teacher in Montpellier? (discovery of oneself and of the particular grace)
- What makes the school library in Lübeck so relevant? (adjusting

our critical look)

- How do we help the pupils find their personal career plans in Lyon? (the growth of each pupil)
- How can we help the pupils from technical colleges become autonomous with their experience from a work experience/training period? (shaping our personality and our project)
- At last, how can assessment become a tool to give confidence to the pupils in Chambéry (respecting each person's own rhythm)

Since the AERC was created, several themes have been developed:

- 2010-2012: personal support to the pupils in Assumption schools (in relation to the notion of competence and motivation)
- 2012-2014: the autonomy of our pupils
- 2014-2016: assessing and working in collaboration

The working dynamic is not limited to the time dedicated to work together. Once back at school, each teacher created a similar dynamic in order to awaken a desire for research, the ability to bring into question our practical experiences, to mutualize our experiences, go deeper into specific lesson plans, and reflect on educational methods which are specific to Assumption etc. Internal AERCs have even been created in some schools. In other places a joint work from the teachers led to the publishing of a document for the personal support of the pupils. Elsewhere, members of the AERC have led a pedagogical day for their colleagues.

When you ask the members what they get from the AERC, here is their answer:

- Meeting people who really want to work, want to meditate, to go forward, and who love their job
- Exchanging our practical experiences, calling ourselves into question to look at our work in a different way
- The experience of a great friendship, the desire to go further, beyond ourselves
- Open-minded people, warmth, the desire to move forward... It's really rewarding
- Sharing our knowledge and experience with a variety of people who all share the same values, managing to go forward with the same viewpoint and direction, with a meaning and a common goal.
- Openness, reflecting in relation to the values specific to Assumption
- Intellectual oxygen
- When you get to know the AERC, you never want to leave
- I feel like I belong to a professional family...

And when the members tell us how the AERC has transformed each and every one of them:

- We would like to go further in the international exchanges which can only enrich us
- It gave me back the will to teach
- Something in me has changed. I have more confidence. I have finally found my place!
- I found a new source of motivation, new work directions
- This helps me question my teaching practices; find other strategies, other methods to teach. Our job is in constant evolution.
- I had been to professional training centers before. What I feel here is different: we see together our teaching practices and the values of Assumption.
- Teaching essentially happens in a classroom but I was interested in seeing what could be done with an inspired project
- The AERC brings about a debate with some colleagues... to clarify what the government wants us to do and what the Catholic Education wants us to live.
- I really want to come back. It really helps us realize what an education is at Assumption. The most difficult for me is to be concrete, to produce tools and to pass them on.
- Thanks to the AERC we have mutualized the experiences of various schools and we have created concrete tools which can be used right away by everyone.

- We learn to spread information and tools in our schools: our headmasters and colleagues are more receptive. Our goal is to have a main educational line common to our different schools.

We gradually develop an interest for research, an openness to renew our educational practices and the desire to know more about the Assumption pedagogy. Several “resource people” have been trained in that structure. They are now members of the board of directors or trainers in our network. Our tools are now available on an online public multimedia library where we publish the results of our research: <http://www.pedagogie-assomption-france.org/> . It is open to everyone.



In February 2014 this experience was widened with the creation of the Pastoral Resources Centre. Its first meeting was two years ago. We follow the dynamic work which enables us to bring up to date the Assumption charisma.

“Intelligence discovers new admirations every day, and our heart discovers new contemplations. The last word of love or truth is never said, we feed of it every day and our appetite is never satisfied; we always want more...” (Marie Eugénie - Notes intimes 154/06)

Sœur Véronique Thiebaut
Sœur Ana Senties
Teachers of AERC



July 2015

In Congo, an experience of Assumption transformative and environmental education with local youth

"Nothing is more important than the land itself"

A peasant proverb



The experience of preparation for perpetual vows in Auteuil 2014, enlightened me on many levels. The most touching aspect was ecological; each of us was asked to take care of our "Mother Earth" that carries us, and to take care of nature. After the session, I felt a call to work for the transformation of people and society in our small sphere, namely our neighbourhood. "Every person is an administrator of the earth and nature". We are invited to be at the service of nature and to take care of it, to listen to it and not to kill it, and above all to respect it. We know that if we do not take care of our earth, it turns against us. The unsafe environment is the cause of many diseases in our country and Africa in general.

I would like to share our experience with the youth of our district, in the municipality of Lemba, Kinshasa. On returning from the session in Auteuil, seeing the garbage bags, pieces of broken glass, plastic bottles and, everything that was lying in the street and in the gutter of our street, I had a meeting with ten boys from our neighbourhood. This meeting was to reflect on how to work to clean

up our neighbourhood and how to make our neighbours aware not to throw garbage in front of our gate. I took the time to listen to each young person and to collect their ideas. We had to begin work on conscientization with them, to help them realize that cleanliness begins at home, in a person's house, in their neighbourhood. That it's not the City Council or, the state that will bring cleanliness in our neighbourhood or in front of our homes. It is for us to start doing it with our means. After that, I asked each of the young people if they wanted to volunteer to work with me on the cleanliness of our neighbourhood. Nine have agreed. On 6th September, 2014 I started working with them, counting on the encouragement of the entire community.

Among them is a student who is studying the environment and three high school students. Four have finished high school; they are unemployed and, lack means. One did not have opportunities to study. The group are aged between 14 and 25 years.

The Young people made themselves available for this work. They also render service to the school and community according to their ability. When they work in the community, the Sisters motivate and encourage them by giving them a small sum of money. During the closing of the jubilee, they provided security throughout the festival. It is a great joy for the Sisters have young people close to us who are able to help us. The young people themselves say they feel valued by the Sisters, as they are usually aimlessly hanging around on the streets. They witness to the love, respect and trust each one receives



from the Sisters. Even the community of Limete⁴ invites them to bring cleanliness to their community and gives them a small amount of money to encourage them. They have therefore helped beyond our neighbourhood.

To understand, it is necessary to stress that working gratuitously does not exist in our societies which are seeking opportunities to survive. These young people have accepted the idea of working for free for the cleanliness of the earth. Today we have started together to plant vegetables in our garden, for which they are responsible. They harvest the vegetables to eat with their families or to sell and have a little money. It is the fruit of their labour. They are proud. I help with my knowledge because I started study agronomics this year. The passion for the land that the session has created in me prompted me to ask for this possibility in my studies of my Region⁵.

It is necessary to emphasise that the sisters greatly encourage the young people, as they are negatively influenced by their friends and even their families to abandon this gratuitous service. From time to time I helped them to discern whether to stop or continue. They choose to continue working. We work with the poor resources of the community because the town hall told us they did not have materials to give us (hoe, machete, shovel, spade, rake, watering can, boots ...). Still, the group cleaned part of its territory. One fine day the Mayor himself came to encourage us. He is happy with this work but no more than this. For the young people, they learn the value of gratuity and the passion to work for the cleanliness of our earth. This is already a victory!



Sister Lutangu Bamanisa Céléstine
Lemba Community, Kinshassa (CONGO RDC)
REGION OF CENTRAL AFRICA

⁴ Another Community of the Assumption in Kinshasa

⁵ The Central Africa region comprises two countries: Congo & Cameroon

Our experiment in transformative education in Niger

As Sisters of the Assumption, we have had a long love-story with Niger. We arrived in Niger in January 1966 - young and less young -, we have dedicated our life: youth, strength, faith, and hopes... to this humble, poor people, thirsty for wellbeing, life and education.

For forty nine years, the Assumption has done all it could to enable this people to stand on its own two feet. We have been inspired by the saying: "The glory of God is man fully alive".



For that reason, we first opened the **Tchirozerine** community, in the Agadez region. Later **Tahoua**, and **Zinder**. The latter is in the South-East of the country, about a thousand kilometers away from Niamey. Tchirozerine and Tahoua were subsequently closed.

Therefore, in the 1990's, the archbishop of Niamey asked the Assumption to take over and animate **Mariama High-school**, a big school founded by Canadian sisters. The 'Tutelle-France' (France-Mentoring) took on the leadership, and a few years later, when lay members had been trained, the West Africa Province picked up the baton of accompanying the team.

Looking back, we realise that our community experience has often been 'inter': age, culture, diversity of origin. It has been a source of joy and a witness to communion, inspiring those who came into contact with us either from here or from far-away. They have often said how much they appreciated this rich and diverse presence of the Assumption in Niger.

At Zinder, the archbishop gave us the mission to found **Fatima High-school**, later passed on to the Niger state. For many years women were trained and they became leaders in building their country and educating their children; many Old Girls vividly remember this time, and we are still in contact.



Around 1980 the Church entrusted us with animating the '**Ecole Mission Catholique' (Catholic Mission School)**. We got involved in training people who could become leaders in their towns and their country. This project has grown, and at present the Mission-School hosts more than six hundred pupils from pre-school to primary school, notwithstanding race or religion. We give these children an education inspired by gospel and human values, an overall education according to our Assumption calling.

Pupils are helped by a committed and dynamic team of teachers. As well as the official school curriculum, children are initiated in IT, joinery and sewing. They are encouraged to develop a taste for reading and to become aware of the world through visiting the library.

We also work in the '**Centre de Formation Féminine' (Women's Training Centre)**, part of the Catholic Mission project at Zinder. Through worldly and professional training, women become responsible for their families and their people, inspired by worldly and godly values.

Around 1984 we also founded the '**Centre Socio-Educatif et sanitaire de Kara-Kara' (Kara-kara Social, Educational and Health Centre)**, in a lepers' district, which is at a distance from the town centre. It was both a dispensary clinic and a kindergarten. We train active citizens, responsible and proud of their dignity. They are educated for their future through an integral development (for dignified living-conditions: habitat, employment etc...).

At the clinic, we aim at improving the health of leprosy patients, and of their families (curative and preventative care). We also welcome and care for other patients from the town or elsewhere. We work in several areas:

- With nursing personnel, we organise talks on health education, in order to make them take responsibility for their own treatment and preventative measures. Often these talks come with demonstrations and home visits.
- We organise pre-natal and infant visits (vaccination, weight and development monitoring). The medical laboratory is of great help in improving patient care and follow-up.
- We also organise a nutrition clinic where we train people, and we give advice and cooking demonstrations, as well as preparing fortified flour. We make sure to follow up and to do home visits in order to encourage them.

The presence of the Assumption in Zinder has encouraged other small structures for human advancement to appear:



- **Women's groups:** microcredit schemes for Income Creating Activities (AGR - Activités Génératrices de Revenus) with the people of the district. Meetings, discussion groups, aunties' networks have been created and are managed by all, as well as improving the cleanliness of the district.

- **Community works** with youth and young adults (men and women) to improve the surroundings: road and school yard.

- We have started a **recycling course** in order to make paving blocks out of plastics.

- In all these structures we strive to **improve housing** and house-building. We work in partnership with the heads of families.

- **Children's schooling:** we guide the children of the district into schools: primary, middle and high-school; to professional schools or workshops for those who have left school, as well as to sports groups.

Within the **parish**, we take part in the religious and human education of the young, and also leading the worship all year round.



Our joy is deep when we meet people, saying they are proud to have gone through our schools or groups.

In a word, in Niger, for all these years we have shared the lives of our brothers and sisters, we have taken part in the growth of many people, with the Lord's help. In fact, the Lord is the ultimate teacher; it is He who makes grow within each of us - trainers and trainees - the seed of a fairer and more humane society.

For the last forty nine years, our education and transformation experiment can be thus summed

up: We gave all and we received all.

Niger remains for us the place where we 'give and receive', this beautiful 'inter' that has made us all grow in humanity. Through the years in this land, a belief has grown: life is God's gift. We have to manage this gift with patience, determination, steadfastness and hope. It is all for His glory, because a small seed has been planted in this land and it is certainly growing, God's way, and it is sending out small shoots of hope.



Zinder Sisters

Dolores ASTORGA

Josée Myriam LOUGOUI

Edith Emmanuel FAGBEDJI

Véronique KOUETEVI

Sidonie Joseph SESSOU

West Africa Province

The Cumanayagua community, in Cuba



"We have been founded for tomorrow's society,
Calls to impregnate it with the Gospel"

MME

On March 24, 1996, the sixteenth anniversary of the martyrdom of Monsignor Romero the first three sisters of the Assumption arrived in this land of Cienfuegos Cuba; the Church had entrusted them with the mission of responding to the cry of and the Cuban people, in this night of theirs, this long-suffering people thirsty for God.

In 2002 the community decided to move the village of Cumanayagua located at east of the Bay of Cienfuegos on the hilly slopes of the Escambray.

The educational mission of the sisters is part of the pastoral work in the diocese of Cienfuegos, alive through very simple actions: visits, small talk, catechesis, formation of catechists and pastoral workers, prayer workshops, music and crafts, pastoral of adolescents and youth. Little by little, over the years, the presence of the Assumption has marked the daily life of many families of the village who have recently expressed:

"We welcome the presence of the Assumption in the heart of this small town that is helping to revive and strengthen our faith, joy, hope of those who believe in Christ and those who do not believe yet. The close, loving and cheerful of the sisters' presence has a positive impact that leaves a mark on the people".

At the rate during these years a group "Assumption together" has grown. It meets regularly for formation, exchange and prayer. The group expressed its deep appreciation to the "Sisters of the Assumption" accompanying them, awakening in them an attitude of hope. During this journey they have been strengthened in faith and have received an enriching formation as Catholic Christians, as well as the identity and spirituality of the Assumption.

There are now three groups of Lay Assumption who live in the Christian communities of Cumanayagua, Guaos and San Juan de los Yeras. Four members of the Cumanayagua group and four members of Guaos group have chosen to engage in the "Way of Life".

One of the things that has helped them, they say, is the belief that everyone has something good that needs to be brought to light that can be put at the service of others. Each one has important talents that contribute to the happiness of others. Most lay people are committed as Christians in the pastoral of the parish and in the village.



Recently, during one of the last meetings of "Assumption Together" they expressed: "WE ARE NOT ALONE... SANTA MARIA EUGENIA is with us!"

The Province in seeking to strengthen the presence of the Assumption in Cuba, decided to found a community in the town of San Juan de los Yeras, Diocese of Santa Clara, in order to establish the novitiate there, this came true. The presence of this community allowed a group of Lay Assumption that are keeping alive the spirituality of Holy Mother Maria Eugenia to be born, even though the community of sisters is no longer there.

From the community Cumanayagua the sisters remain a presence of the Assumption in the Esperanza Parish (which belongs to the Diocese of Santa Clara), where they collaborate in pastoral formation, catechesis, youth ministry, prayer groups and visits.

Last January 2015 the second community was established, and in September it will be enriched by two sisters from the Province of Mexico. "I appreciate very much this effort because even though we are few, we have been open to new answers and the call of the Church" said Herrera Odessa, Provincial of Central America - Cuba, she adding:

"I think Cuba is a really challenging because the person, man and woman, is seeking "the meaning", a trace of the "Mystery of God", and then makes choices. For those who accept a life of faith it is because they are giving a free and personal response".

Asked about the presence of the Sisters of the Assumption in Cuba which will soon celebrate its 20 years, she said, " From our first contact twenty years ago, we have been making a journey: it started with an approach and gathering knowledge, by listening to persons and the reality. Then we went on to take steps in greater accompaniment and formation. I see that these spaces are growing. In Cuba new spaces are opening up and it is important that as a Church we are aware of it, and can give new answers. Formation in values, human accompaniment, education ..."

Pope Francis will visit Cuba in 19th to 22th September. He will be the third Pope to visit the island in the last 17 years. In preparation for this visit, the Cuban bishops write:



"Mercy, dear all, is nothing but "throwing open our heart" to others, not a stone or an insult or a blow. Mercy is also to "put heart into misery". And there is so much misery around us! Sometimes it seems that we live in a heartless world. Everywhere we find moral social miseries, spiritual, intellectual, psychic, material... and we also found people who are desensitized to human pain. Many complain of the harshness with which they treat others. Mercilessly language increases among us. Violence is near the surface. There is aggressiveness in families, workplaces, communities, etc. And Pope Francis, Missionary of Mercy, invites us not to get tired of practicing mercy".

We entrust this visit to your regards and prayers, so that we can feel reassured and encouraged to continue our mission in this beautiful and welcoming Cuban land, and so it can become more and more "A PLACE OF GLORY TO GOD"

The sisters of Cumanayagua Community,
Cuba. Central America Province

The “Entertainment Week”

in "COSECHA"⁶, a Social and Educational Centre of the Assumption: a space where Assumption Transformative Education is evolving



"To educate a child takes a whole tribe"

This African proverb could well be applied to the “Entertainment Week” organised by COSECHA (Assumption Social Work Education Centre, Chile).

For several years the Sisters of the Assumption have run this Centre in ÑUÑO A, working with the population of Salvador Cruz Gana, a slum in Santiago, Chile. The social context is difficult, as there is a problem of drug use and excessive consumption of alcohol among the population. This means that while children play in the park, they see many adults using alcohol or interacting with drug dealers. In this situation, for the children the Harvest Centre represents an educational

oasis in the desert.

The sisters offer a library service and organise various workshops: Bible study, weaving, cooking, crafts, etc., as well as a club for the rehabilitation of alcoholics. Through these activities, different sectors of the population, from children to the elderly, are sheltered at the Harvest Centre from the problems of daily living. Harvest is a place where all can live together in an atmosphere of respect, listening and finding the love that everyone needs to grow in a healthy environment.

In addition to these daily activities, twice a year the Sisters of the Assumption organise "ENTERTAINING WEEK". This is a series of fun activities (workshops, reflections and prayer), the purpose of which is to educate the children of the population. During this week, the whole community participates at Harvest, including sisters, volunteers, people of Assumption Together, and parishioners of Santa Catalina. And it is precisely in this community experience that the African proverb quoted at the beginning is fully incarnated.

The various chapels of the parish contribute money to defray the cost of materials for the workshops, as well as food for the mid-morning snack. In the vicinity of Harvest, friends of the Assumption, people of Assumption Together, participants of this activity in the previous year and parish volunteers are all available to the Sisters to help organise all that is needed for “Entertainment Week” In this way, the neighbourhood becomes a cooperative community where all find a space to offer the best of themselves for the sake of the children.

This winter, from 20th to 24th July, Entertaining Week aimed to raise awareness among children - and through them among their families - that the earth is a gift from God and that we



⁶ “COSECHA”, HARVEST is a social and educational centre in Santiago de Chile, founded and run by the Religious of the Assumption (Province of Ecuador-Chile)

therefore have a responsibility to care for it and so to give glory to the Father.

The week was attended by about seventy children between four and fourteen years old. Each day there were workshops for each age group in cooking, crafts, movement and sports.

In these workshops, through different types of activities, the children deepened the theme of the day, always in relation to the overall aim. They did so informally, building, dancing, playing and enjoying themselves together. Each could thus participate in the week in their own way, helping the participants to live together, to respect one another and to reflect. Above all, in this space everyone could find a way to live differently in the circumstances to which they are accustomed in the neighbourhood.



Each day was guided by a slogan. The first was "*God gives us a house: our planet*". The aim was to prompt an awareness that Creation is a gift that God makes us with his infinite love, a gift for all which we should value and appreciate. The theme was presented during the first hour of the morning in the chapel through songs and reading the Word, enlivened by dramatic presentations.

After this initial reflection, all the children went to their workshop for the rest of the day. Guided by their group of helpers, they participated in fun activities like drama, singing, choreographing and practising a dance, building, playing sports, baking bread, cooking cupcakes etc. It is noteworthy that the group of helpers consists of young people who have participated in the Entertaining Week and who, having grown up, continue to participate in it as leaders, supported by a responsible adult.

On the second day there was a change of workshops and the new slogan: "*The Earth is a place of glory for God.*" We wanted to highlight the importance of valuing the gift from the Father and to realise that through taking care of the earth's resources, respecting the plants, the streets, the neighbourhood and the people close to us, we give glory to God.

The third day we continued with the next slogan, "*Let us join hands and take care of the gift.*" Through this reflection, the children came to realise that a personal gesture, insignificant at first glance, can change our small environment and thus the world, you just need everyone we propose to.

The fourth day, the reflection focused on the *personal commitment of each*: small gestures like sorting rubbish, recycling or reusing items, turning off the tap when brushing your teeth and using less water when taking a shower. This commitment was worked on throughout the morning to prompt an awareness amongst the children that they must take responsibility for caring for our planet through small routines. That afternoon, the families of all the children were invited to participate in "Entertainment Week". They could enjoy the exhibition of crafts that the children put on, sample the home-made cakes, buns, cupcakes and breads, and watch the dances the children had prepared with enthusiasm. After the exhibition, the families participated in a reflection in the chapel where they were shown what had been worked on during the week. They were also invited to delve into ecological awareness to improve their homes and neighbourhood for the family.



Through this week marked by lively and entertaining activities, it was possible to evangelise children and families, spreading the inspiring message that Pope Francis gives us in his encyclical "Laudato Si". The week seemed to us to embody the concept of transformative education which is part of the charism of the Assumption because:

- it is a transformative activity which mobilises the entire community.
- through children, the message extends to their families and all the members of the parish.
- the community is inspired to collaborate with the Sisters for this activity.
- the experience, marked by a healthy coexistence and by joy, dialogue, hope and respect, makes this small space of land that is Ñuñoa a place of glory for God.

As usual, the week closed with an outing, this year to the Aeronautical and Space Museum, where the children received a bracelet with the slogan "*our waste, our responsibility*" to be worn as a reminder of the experience during the week.

The young people returned home with the impression of having shared fun moments with other children, outside the context of their problematic neighbourhood, and marked by an atmosphere of great love, joy and mutual respect. All left with the desire to participate in the next Entertaining Week in the summer, but also with something planted inside: the awareness that creation is a gift from God that we must respect and care for. This awareness grows in daily life, through our small actions at home and in the neighbourhood.

In this way we sow seeds for the children's future. So the Sisters of the Assumption in ÑUÑO A are planting a small seed of God - like a grain of mustard - but certainly in the future it will give a good HARVEST (COSECHA).



Religious of the Assumption
Community of Santiago de Chile
Province of Ecuador - Chile

A PRECIOUS INITIATIVE

The Gijon Assumption school solidarity beyond their borders

“In our educational work, we will endeavour to approach everything human in a new way”⁷

“Sometimes I wonder, relative to my children’s education, in primary, secondary school or college, what knowledge really remains in their brains. Will they remember the irregular verbs in English, Maths formulas, or how to analyse a sentence? I sincerely hope that they will retain as much as possible. But I just hope that the lessons learnt with this ‘precious initiative’ will mark their lives and remain forever in their hearts.”



Thus began the mother’s message which we received in our platform Educ@mos, regarding the participation of her daughter in the JES project (Young Social Enterprise).

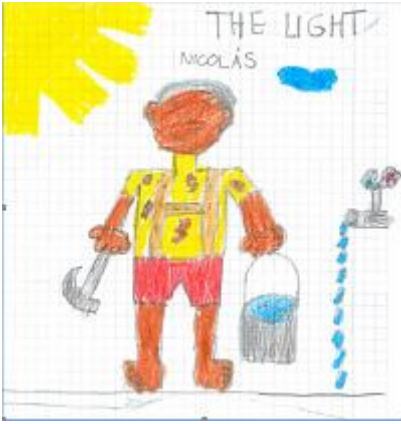
So, what is JES? We will try to explain it, although it is best to live it!

This is a project of Valnalon (Industrial City of the Valley of the Nalon in Asturias, Spain). We decided to support him in the context of *Education for Citizenship and respect Human Rights* course. This addresses a very real need: to find a way to make tangible the ethical and evangelical values such as detachment, brotherhood and compassion.

The project consists of creating an ONG (in our case, we have created three). This was done by the following process:

- 1) Decide if ours would be a development cooperation project, or one that gives response to local need. In our case, we chose the first option.
- 2) Next, we discovered which the countries of our “partner groups” were. In our case it would be Bolivia, Ecuador and Thailand. It is to them that our attention should focus throughout the school year. To know more about them we made and analysis of reality, depending on the aspects that might be interesting for our objectives.
- 3) Our “partner groups”, made up of school children in these countries, and organised in a similar way, should also make their own analysis of reality and assess their own needs. Once done, they will send us the data that might interest the project we would try to co-finance. This means they too are committed to participate in the financing of part of the project with the activities organised by them on the spot.
- 4) We analysed the projects and imagined what could be the name and corporate image of each ONG. We also sought

⁷ Assumption Reference Text, Chapter II: TODAY’S CHALLENGES – ASSUMPTION RESPONSES



to identify us by a logo. We built together a “vision, mission and values” of each project and we wrote our statutes. It is with the constitutive act that we were established as ONG: “Little Solidarity Persons”, “Assumption in Action” and “Birman’s Smiles”.

5) At that stage, we should organise activities to get to co-finance the project. We had quite a few ideas: raffles, gymkhanas, tournaments, selling food during breaks etc. Our classmates from the 5th year, who were also working on the project EME (Enterprise in My School) decided to give us a percentage of their profits.

6) One of the most successful activities was the “Solidarity lunch”. We were preparing treats (cookies, cakes, pie etc.) at home and then selling them in the school yard during break times. For this, we have previously visited all the classes to explain our project, which has helped everybody to get to know the project. The smaller ones were the more receptive, a little one of the CP drew a Burmese child, and our partner group of Thailand enjoyed being called “The Light”!

7) For the first time during this year, Valnalon organised the Meeting of Educational Associations in Oviedo, and we were 8 students per ONGs to participate. The teams were made up of the President, the Secretary and Treasurer, the other 5 team members were chosen at random.

The meeting was prepared by each institution participating with their various projects. Each institution were given several task such as drawing the invitation, creating a blog, the organisation of the reception and the closing ceremonies, etc. The aim of the event was to share experiences, to discover what others are doing and what difficulties they have encountered. We experienced a very rewarding morning and this has helped us to believe in our project.

8) But it still lacked the “icing on the cake”. The Cooperative Market and Educational Associations which usually take place on the Place of the Mayor of Gijon. All the present Gijon institutions that had created such projects as the EME, JES or EJE (Young European Company) were there.

Each had a stall to sell its products, either prepared by us or purchased. For example, in our case, we sold things done through workshops and self-help institutions like the Economic Kitchen, Covadonga Hostel or Sew and Sing Association, which meet regularly in the local places of “Enredando”⁸. Although the morning was well “soaked” (something quite in common in the Asturias Region), the experience was very successful, and we returned to the school very satisfied with the work that we had done, because we were thinking of those who we had done it for.

9) Once we had finished these stages, it was evaluated: what was likely to be improved, what were our strengths etc. It was also the first thing to thank the teachers who helped and contributed so that our projects became a reality. Thanks also to the families who supported us by making sweets and many other things that we were able to sell either in the snack foods or in the market. Finally a word of thanks for our classmates for their understanding and solidarity.



⁸ Popular Education Project Assumption in one of the neighbourhoods of Gijon.



10) Once we had collected the fruits of this experience and we did the accounts, we sent the surplus to benefit others in the Ecuador project. We took advantage of the presence of the President of CEFORCOM⁹, through ONGs between “Assumption in action” and Ecuador. Indeed, it was in Asturias, so we were fortunate to receive him in school. He explained what his mission CEFORCOM was to him and we shared our projects with him. So we have given him personally what was harvested for Ecuador. He accompanied us in a very simple closing ceremony of the KES project.

We would like to return to the message from the beginning of this article: “Solidarity, commitment, effort, involvement. That is what we learnt: ‘values’ is a beautiful word that often remains forgotten, but which, in moments like this, took all his strength and, somehow, it comforts us.”

Thank you dear classmates, families and the whole school for you involvement in JES!

Students involved in the JES Project
Gijon Assumption High School, Spain



⁹ Corporacion Ecuatoriana de Formacion Profesional Compartida <http://www.ceforcom.org.ec/>

St. John's School Thabom, in Thailand

AN EXPERIENCE OF TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

The Educational Project in Thabom Village in the northeast of Thailand is a partnership between the Assumption Sisters and St. John's Company for Education (now a Foundation known by another name).



St. John's High School started as the extension of Holy Redeemer School, a grade school owned by the Diocese of Udonthani. It was sowing time for our RA missionary community, a time for immersion and dialogue of life with the people in the village and the existing educational community of the diocese. One year level was added the next year and on the third year of their presence in Thabom, the Sisters and the students moved to the newly- built school building across the road. On its fourth year, the Ministry of Education granted the high school a separate status with its own name –

St. John's School -Thabom .That same year the Bishop of Udonthani requested St. John's to administer the existing diocesan Kindergarten and Grade School . After a discernment process with the community and with the approval of our Superiors, we undertook the administration and animation of the diocesan school as an expansion of our mission of education. We saw it as a timely opportunity to share the charism of education of the Congregation on a wider and deeper level. Three critical areas were attended to – the formation of the faculty and staff, the improvement of school facilities to create a more conducive atmosphere for learning, and the financial system which was needed to support the school programs.

After 8 years, the Diocesan Grade School was ready to be administered on their own and we concentrated on the high school level which now consists of a Junior high school (M.1 .2.3) and a Senior high school (M. 4, 5, 6)

The lay faculty and staff are our closest partners in this work of transformative education. Only 10 per cent of the Faculty and staff and the student population is Catholic but when there are religious activities such as Masses and feasts, celebration of Assumption Day and Christmas, everyone is involved. In the same manner, the whole school supports and participates in significant Buddhist feasts and activities. The parents whom we formally meet twice a year are very cooperative and our School Board is made up of both Catholic and Buddhist parents and officials.

This partnership contributed to the growth and development of the Assumption charism. The experience has strengthened our faith in God who is so present in this rural out-of-the-way place where we can almost touch Him in nature around us, in the simplicity of life and poverty of the people and of our own students who choose to study with us in spite of distance and at great sacrifices on the part of their parents.

Our mission in Thabom is an experience of the incarnation, particularly that of inclusion. While we often



think of breaking (our) barriers to welcome and include others, our experience is the other way round. We feel it is we, the Sisters, a religious Community that has been welcomed, included by a people and a culture. While we are convinced we have something to give or share, it is we who are continually receiving and to the measure that that we keep our minds and hearts open. We have given importance to the person and dignity of each one especially the materially poor among our students, and our cooks and janitors who in the past have felt out of the circle of teachers and other personnel. We have also given them a more just wage for the service they render. Compassion, Truth, pardon, love without conditions are lessons to learn in the ordinary circumstances of every day life. Most of all we experience the power of the Gospel, of prayer- personal and communitarian – which we call the poor and powerless means of Jesus Christ.

Our community had chosen one strategic direction: “to create spaces for dialogue where “what is different is welcomed and placed at the service of life”.

Among our teachers is a former Buddhist monk. To start off the week, we gather the school community in assembly and he leads the students and faculty to quiet down and to be in touch with their inner selves. The students and teachers, mostly Buddhists and a few Catholics readily enter into this silence and bodily quiet. After some moments a passage from the Gospel is read. One feels the Word of God landing on very fertile soil, prepared by the silence using the Buddhist way of quieting down facilitated by this teacher. The learning for us is that our differences in religion could be a help rather than a hindrance in our work of transformation. We only need acknowledge each other’s presence and values and gifts and put these at the “service of life”

The Assumption charism is founded on the Truth that is Jesus Christ, on the love that moves one to serve without limits



, without conditions, and especially to serve the less privileged. Teamwork, being a community-person, humble collaboration are very much part of the Assumption spirit. Recognizing, giving opportunities to develop what the other has to offer is just as important as giving what one has to give; welcoming the other with his/her particular gifts and differences is “ allowing the good in that person to break through the rock ... and bringing it to the light where it can shed its radiance.” In the process, we are all transformed.

What transformation has taken place?

We have become more welcoming of persons as they are, not as we would rather have them be, welcoming what is different as something that we can learn from and enrich us , becoming more appreciative of persons, of another culture, of other traditions, of other ways of doing things, that we can be ONE through our differences . We trust more in the power of THE WORD to touch hearts and lives, we believe in the presence of the Spirit in the hearts of those we speak the WORD to. We are taught to be more humble in relating with others in everyday life, be more positive in language, gestures, actions. Hope is constantly renewed in daily contact with the young – hope that change, transformation is possible if we have a bit more patience, and more love which alone transforms. Experience teaches us that working with others expands our hearts and our minds to the dimensions of the world and beyond our own limits.

From the time we started this educational project, we were consciously building up a culture of peace, of sharing, of respect and dignity, of nurturing what is best in the Thai culture and traditions as well as openness to the dimensions of the world.

On Orientation Day as each school year opens, we introduce all teachers and staff, making everyone sit in front of the students. The first time we did this, some teachers asked “also the cooks and janitors??” Thai culture is strongly hierarchical. Our response: In the Kingdom of God, everyone sits at the same table.

At the end of each semester and before we go on vacation before New Year holidays, we gather together so all teachers and staff give a blessing to the students. By now, the students look forward to this ritual, not wanting to miss it. The blessing of elders, especially in rural areas, is very meaningful for the Thai people. Mass media bringing in strong western influences has led the younger generation to neglect many of their beautiful cultural traditions. The young have responded positively to our efforts to uphold meaningful cultural practices – Mothers’ Day, Fathers’ Day, Teachers’ Day and others. They express greater appreciation, pride and love for their own traditions, music, art. And as a providential turn of events, the Thai government has strongly advocated the implementation - at all levels, especially in education - of programs re-inculcating “12 Thai Values”.

Since the beginning, we have set aside a time for “WORLD PEACE DAY” activities. Starting off from the 9/ 11 event we have inculcated each one’s share in peace-building. Students and teachers work together to know something about the countries of the world, what ‘peace’ might mean in our own local situation , peace-builders and keepers of peace and how each one can be an instrument of peace. A particular theme is chosen every year and this year being Year of Consecrated Life, students and teachers gathered information about Religious congregations, Secular Institutes and Apostolic Societies and what their role is in peace-building.

This year World Peace Day activities coincided with the U.N. Peace Day on September 21. We invited members of Consecrated Life living and working in our diocese - the Missionaries of Charity, Daughters of Charity, Camillian Sisters, an SVD priest, 2 OMI priests, a diocesan priest. Our school community welcomed them, listened to their sharing and expressed appreciation for their selfless service to society. Our Community also shared a meal with them bonding us in thanksgiving for our own religious vocation.

Where is this experience leading us?

We are challenged to go deeper into knowing and appreciating and allowing ourselves to be transformed by what is good and beautiful and true in another culture. At the same time, we feel just as challenged to really know and live our own charism of transformative education so that our Thai lay partners and the young will own it and express it in their own Thai way, making our Assumption charism so much the richer and more beautiful and much more effective as a transformative process for persons and communities. It demands of us strong faith and a humble stance at all times.



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