



S.M. 3 OFFICES

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*To All Members of the Society of Mary and
To Those in Leadership of All Works of the Society of Mary*



GLOBAL PACT ON EDUCATION

An opportunity to renew the privileged means of our mission

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a privileged means of the apostolate of the Society of Mary (cf. RL 74). On October 15, 2020, when Pope Francis unveiled the main lines of the Global Pact on Education (GPE) and opened a new era in the world of education, he touched on a subject that is also very dear to us.

This GPE which calls for "reinventing education" is not a sudden idea of the Holy Father, but an event that is in line with his speeches and teachings since his accession to the throne of St. Peter. Whether one speaks of his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* or his two encyclicals *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, everything points towards a renewed vision of education as an instrument of social transformation.

We are currently going through unusual times. The Covid-19 pandemic, the consequences of which are hurting education systems around the world, is one aspect of these unusual times. But it is only one instance of the many concerns raised by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato si'*. In addition to the pandemic, we must consider the question of the damaged harmony among human beings, between human beings and nature, between human beings and God that is at the heart of the debate.

In the midst of this fog, when no one knows where we are heading or what tomorrow will bring, there is one certainty: the transformative power of education. Even if it does not provide all of the answers on its own, it has a power that can make a difference. This is why the Pope wants to count on it to ensure an alternative future for our humanity.

In these circumstances, and even if we think, quite rightly, that our pedagogy is good, we must see this GPE as an opportunity to try to go further. In the following pages we will try to address the calls in favor of this pact, starting from our Marianist actuality. Unanswered questions may, no doubt, emerge. But, at this point in time, we will voluntarily leave them open. It will be up to each level of personal or collective responsibility to consider responses as it sees fit.

2. THE GPE IN ITS DIFFERENT COMPONENTS

The Global Pact on Education, long advocated and unveiled on October 15, 2020, by Pope Francis, contains in itself the objective it pursues, the commitments it implies and the lines of action to be followed. Let's try to identify these different components.

a) The antecedents of the GPE

As I said earlier, the idea of GPE is neither new nor sudden. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, for example, Francis already invited the whole Church to set out on a missionary "journey" and to be a community that knows how to take initiatives that affect all the processes of personal and social life. This invitation is based on education and training as priority activities that help people to become direct actors and builders of the common good and of peace. With the encyclical *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis relaunches this idea by recalling that "education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature." (No. 215). For those who accept this conviction, the need becomes obvious that it is necessary to start from a concept of education that can make a difference in the development of future generations.

b) The targeted objective

In his message of September 12, 2019, announcing the event, the Holy Father speaks of "*Reinventing the Global Compact on Education*" and states that "Never before has there been such need to unite our efforts in a broad *educational alliance*, to form mature individuals capable of overcoming division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity."¹

As we can see, it is neither an educational action to be carried out nor a program to be developed, but a "pact," an "alliance" to be forged. And whoever speaks of "pact," thinks of the commitment of different people for a common cause. It is on this basis that the Pope asks us to seek partners for our educational work. Diversity is therefore desired, because it is perceived as an opportunity. The indispensability of each person's contribution in tackling the educational emergency must be recognized. Being attentive, together, to the formation of future generations, to their ability to orient themselves in life and to discern good from evil, being attentive to their health, not only physical but also moral, this is how we can contribute to this project.

It is a pact that must involve everyone: young people and their families, certainly, but also representatives of religions, international bodies and various humanitarian institutions, as well as representatives of the academic, economic, political and cultural worlds. Given this diversity, the commitment to build the "educational village" must be shared.

c) The commitments of the GPE

The new educational alliance must be woven around a set of seven interdisciplinary commitments², as follows: 1. putting the dignity of the person at the center, 2. listening to children and young people, 3. universalizing girls' education, 4. recognition of the importance of the family, 5. education on the need for acceptance and openness to the most vulnerable and marginalized, 6. seeking other ways of understanding the economy, politics, growth and progress, 7. and the preservation of our common home. This is how the road to the pact is marked out. Everything is focused on the human person!

¹ See the website of the Vatican [www.vatican.va] or our website [www.marianist.org]

² Speech of the Pope, launching the GPE, October 5, 2020: cf. www.vatican.va or www.marianist.org .

d) Three lines of action

Since the launch of this GPE, we have had the opportunity to participate, sometimes with other Marianists, in seminars, forums and workshops that try to identify the best way to make this pact a reality. Three lines of action are outlined, summarized by three verbs: focus, welcome and involve.

- 1) *Focusing* involves knowing how to concentrate on what is important. What is really important is the "human person": a person's value, dignity, specificity, beauty, uniqueness and, at the same time, their ability to relate to others and to the reality around them. We must never lose sight of this goal.
- 2) To achieve this goal, a *welcoming* attitude is necessary. This welcoming involves knowing how to listen to each and every one of the children and young people who are the beneficiaries of our services. However, young people themselves and the main agents of education at all levels must also accept the responsibility to listen to other sounds of "music" in order not to rely only on themselves, but also, to open themselves to the cry that springs from every human being.
- 3) The last line of action is the key: *involvement*. Listening cannot be understood as passive listening or forcing. It must take place in spaces and platforms that allow everyone to make their contribution and actively engage in the dialogue from their own specificity and responsibility.

3. TWO IMAGES TO ILLUSTRATE THIS DREAM

To illustrate his dream of seeing the world become more human through education, the Pope chose the image of the "educational village," which he drew from the African proverb that says that "to educate a child, you need a whole village."³ We are particularly sensitive to this image to which we would like to add color, by speaking of the "palaver tree" which is the place in these villages of Africa, where, by tradition, consensus is sought for the common good.

³ Speech of the Pope, announcing the GPE, September 12, 2019 cf. www.vatican.va or www.marianist.org.

a) The "educational village"

In order that education may be a creator of peace and a bearer of fraternity among all, the Pope therefore asks to "create an educational village." In other circumstances, he explains what this educational village is by using the pedagogical method that associates the head, hands and heart, that is to say all our different dimensions, connected to each other, for the benefit of the same person. This image of the "educational village" refers to another complementary and very important image of these traditional villages: that of the "palaver tree". From Africa to Brazil and other parts of the world, several traditional societies have used this institution to unravel issues of common interest. This institution is a tool for discernment that can, to a certain extent, inspire us in the creation and functioning of our "educational village."

b) "The palaver tree"

The "palaver tree" is a gathering place, in the shade of a tree, where villagers from traditional African societies come together to discuss all issues related to their social life. Children come here to play or listen to an elder tell them stories, which are meant to convey values. If there is any problem, conflict or crucial need of the village that disrupts its harmony, its restoration becomes everyone's business. Once the alarm is sounded, villagers - men, women or children - without being specially invited, come and participate, sitting in a circle, all at the same eye level, a sign that they are equal among themselves. During discernment, the flow of thoughts is not linear. Participants simply try to circle, so to speak, the "best solution." No one can contradict another or accuse another of lying, but the word of the other can be supplemented. Interventions are free and participants speak until a consensus emerges, a consensus to which everyone then knows they are bound.

To build our "educational village," do we not also need a similar platform for consultation that respects and takes into account the contributions of all?

4. THE GPE ILLUMINATES AND POSES A CHALLENGE FOR OUR MARIANIST EDUCATIONAL SITUATION TODAY

The concerns of the GPE affect us as a congregation committed to education. During the two centuries of this commitment, the Society of Mary has already made a journey and has a certain tradition that takes into account many of the commitments of this pact. But we must recognize that there are some "best practices" of the past that are no longer valid today and that some revision may be necessary. A few simple examples will suffice to illustrate how much the Society of Mary, while being on the right path, still needs to go further in some areas and, perhaps, to act differently in others.

a) Working with the Marianist Family and expanding our alliances

The capitulants of the 2018 General Chapter asserted that the need to be "in mission with the Marianist Family is the central call that God is addressing to us today. The Chapter literally stated that "the future of Marianist religious life will be as a family or it will not exist" (#3). Such a call is now confirmed by the GPE, which calls for broad alliances in the service of education. In doing so, it even pushes us to go further than the Marianist family, to reach a diversity of other participants, with a varied approach, a sharing of tools, of thoughts, of discoveries. It is therefore an opportunity to develop more consciously, according to our own convictions, something which we have only slightly discerned.

At this point we would also have the opportunity to question ourselves. As Marianist educational institutions, as Units of the Society of Mary, and as a congregation, with whom are we really in partnership to carry out our educational mission? With whom should and can we build these open alliances that can support our work today? The young people themselves, certainly, but also their families and all educators. But beyond this immediate circle, where do we stand in our partnership with the various grassroots institutions, as well as with the various international institutions and with our countries?

b) We must place the human person at the center of our educational commitments

As we have already pointed out above, the concept of "pact" about which we are speaking, refers first and foremost to people. "Putting the person at the center" of educational processes is a conviction that is familiar to us, well engraved in the Marianist vocabulary and in many of our documents such as the *Characteristics of Marianist Education*, the *Main Characteristics of Marianist Administration* or *Assuring the Marianist Identity of Our Apostolic Works*. The "education on the need for acceptance and openness to the most vulnerable and marginalized" and "the preservation of our common home," objects of the 5th and 7th Commitments of the **GPE** also find their echo in the concerns of the General Chapter of 2018 which recalled, more specifically, the priority that must be given in all our works to the questions of "JPIC" (Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation) and to the "attention to the poorest...". (No. 59c).

Nevertheless, on the broad area of Commitments 2, 3 and 4 focusing on children and young people in general, on girls and young women in particular, and on families, it would seem that there is still room for further development.

- 1) **About young people in general.** Our Marianist mission puts us in contact with thousands of young people every year. However, when we know that a large part of them spend years with us and leave without ever being touched in any way by our educational and pastoral style, we have to ask ourselves, with the Synod of Bishops on Youth, if we really know how to understand the needs of young people and to seek with them a meaning to the events of their lives. On the other hand, and despite the high number of contacts we already have with them, there are whole areas of the youth population that we do not know because we have never met them. Because of the orientation of some of our projects, some young people remain, a priori, out of the way and far from our reach, either because they are "rich" and do not fit into the priorities of these projects turned towards the poor, or because they are too "poor" and do not have the means to access our structures which are too expensive. How, in short, could we envisage reaching, in a better way, more young people than we do now?

- 2) **About girls and young women.** The third Commitment of the GPE calls for their full participation in education. Isn't this a need to be taken very seriously,

under our "palaver trees"? Although this is not a major concern in some parts of the world, it is a serious concern in other areas where, if not given special attention, girls can always be left behind! As Marianists, can we live peacefully knowing that this situation still exists?

- 3) **About the families of our students.** We are well aware that one of the fundamental ways to improve the quality of education, at the school level, is to obtain greater participation of families and local communities in our educational projects. Some families, in their role as their children's first educator, would need help to understand, in the new global context, the importance of this early stage of life. In some of our educational institutions, there are initiatives that take this into account by introducing "parents' schools." Would this be something to support and generalize?

So, globally, we cover well all the commitments of this GPE. But this first step on the common path of the "educational village" must be followed by the courage to invest our best energies with creativity and responsibility and the courage to form available persons, religious and lay, to serve our educational communities. This is how we could move forward, with the new generations, towards the fulfillment of the 6th commitment of the GPE, which is "the search for other ways of understanding the economy, politics, growth and progress". The future generations have to be at the center of the new educational "pact" to be "reinvented",-because they - the children and young people - are those who will change the world. It is up to us to know how to ensure that those entrusted to our care become "better women and men" than we are, in the service of the values of peace and universal brotherhood, with respect for human dignity and the common home.

c) Revision of our pedagogical and missionary style

Our pedagogical and missionary style is certainly not inadequate. However, the current invitation to reinvent the global pact on education is an opportunity that cannot leave us indifferent. In a prophetic way, the General Chapter of 2018 already asked the "Unit Councils to revise their current Missionary Plans, in light of the calls... and the actual needs of the world so that, with boldness and courage, they make the necessary adaptations in order to respond to these calls" (No. 54). If, for one reason or another, a Unit has not yet begun this work of updating, then it should see the Holy Father's invitation as an encouragement and an opportunity to do so. If our

educational spaces remain incapable of generating and pointing out new horizons, wouldn't we be missing the rendezvous with this historic moment?

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the publication of the Characteristics of Marianist Education (CME) in 2021, work has already begun in the different Zones to update them. It is a beautiful way of "reinventing" our educational style for today, and it is very much in line with the idea of "reinventing the educational pact." During the current pandemic period, the 5th characteristic (*educate for adaptation and change*), for example, has been applied in an exemplary manner to respond creatively to the various challenges of the moment. But it is one thing to "react," to respond to circumstances that urge us from the outside to act; it is quite another to act to build the future about which we are dreaming. The new Pact, if it is well understood, asks us to act in this direction, and even to go beyond the spirit of this characteristic. We do not train people to know only how to adapt to the world; they must also and above all be capable of transforming it.

When the pandemic required a rapid educational response, computerized platforms had to be used. But this solution, as effective as it has been in some places, has helped to expose the wide disparity of educational and technological opportunities and the "educational catastrophe," as Pope Francis calls it, which has deprived more than 250 million school-age children of access to an education to which they too would be entitled. This is one reason more to say that it is always better to "act," by anticipating and planning our action according to our goals, rather than having to "react" only under the pressure of external factors. The resulting answers are never the same!

5. THE MARIANIST "PALAVER TREES"

a) The "palaver tree" is an institution that can inspire us

If the idea of an alliance presupposes a diversity of people collaborating towards the same objective, it also presupposes the existence of a structural framework that makes it possible to bring together these contributions and to lay the prescribed bases for the common work we have to do. The existence of platforms that help pool efforts, tools, resources and means that make our "educational village" effective is therefore indispensable. The image of the "palaver tree" fits well with the image of the

"educational village" and can inspire the platforms that must be found, at all levels, to allow for fair consultations that are capable of bringing together all the good will acquired for our cause.

As examples, I mention two, below. But in the impulse of the GPE that invites us to creativity, we must seek and discover all the Marianist models that we can adapt to our situations and the people with whom we are called to form alliances.

b) The networks of Marianist establishments

The existence of Marianist "networks of establishments" is fundamental for broadening horizons and learning from one another, because even though we all have the same objective and goal, we have different starting points, different resources and a diversity of opportunities to achieve it. We therefore encourage the various SM Units and our educational institutions to continue to promote this kind of alliance wherever possible, and at all levels.

Each school as such, with its students and their parents, educators, and alumni, offers the opportunity to develop such an alliance. The Society of Mary as a whole, with its one hundred or so formal educational works, its 112,000 students and its 8,000 educators, religious and lay, opens a second level of alliance. The Church in the localities where we are and at the universal level further expands this alliance. The neighborhoods where our schools are located can open up to unlimited and fruitful alliances with the families in those neighborhoods. So, let's start by consolidating all these local networks that will serve as a springboard for further levels of networking and alliances.

What about working with other congregations and with the public administrations of our countries? All these levels need to exist in order for the "educational village" to exist and be consolidated. Since the launch of the GPE, one level that has worked fairly well is the USG-UISG⁴. This should inspire responses at the other levels, for a search for collaboration with other congregations and other religious bodies.

⁴ Union of Superiors General & International Union of Superiors General

c) Schools of Marianist pedagogy

In the present context of "reinventing education," what would it mean for the Society of Mary to think of resurrecting, in one form or another, the tradition of the "normal schools" that were so important at the beginning of the Society of Mary's involvement in education? Father Chaminade considered them as "works specially inspired by God," because they allowed him to "multiply the multipliers." In the Units that have vocations today, the professional formation that their religious intended for education know is of an academic order only, received in public institutions, without any specific reference to Marianist pedagogy. This is a need to be met, in addition to the fact that a school of Marianist pedagogy would also help to form, more specifically, the multitude of lay colleagues who collaborate with us in our educational institutions where the reduction in the number of religious does not always make it possible to assure them the expected formation. This concern could also be part of the programs of the continental centers for Marianist studies.

6. CONCLUSION

It is almost impossible to be aware of the orientations of the Global Pact on Education without making an immediate link with our own Marianist situations in the sense that these calls are, to a great extent, in line with the objectives that we pursue and for which we work every day. But, as Léopold Bruni writes: *"If the garden you're cultivating doesn't coincide with the whole earth, it's still too small. If the roof of the house you live in doesn't touch the sky, it's not high enough."*⁵ Isn't it that our garden of education does not yet coincide with the whole earth? Isn't it true that the roofs of the houses of our "educational village" do not yet touch the sky?

This is not the time, then, to rest on our laurels! Taking the challenges of our times and places of mission as a backdrop, we must continue to identify and consolidate our strengths, without losing sight of the opportunities for improvement. "Reinventing education" is a task that engages and influences us across all fields and as well as all the other people involved with us in the educational processes. As

⁵ Bruni, Leopold (2018), *Elogio de la autosubversión*, Buenos Aires Ciudad Nueva, p.58-59

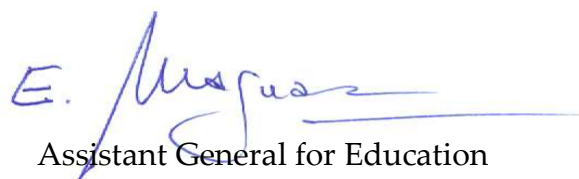
institutions and as a congregation, will we know how to take up this challenge and renew our education, "*the privileged means of our mission*"?

On our website, www.marianist.org (section on *Global Compact on Education*), you will find several resources available to help you deepen your understanding of what the Global Pact on Education is all about and to spark your own creativity. In particular, you will find all the messages delivered by the Pope, both at the announcement of the GPE and on the occasion of its launch. You will also find a multilingual book published by the OIEC (International Organization of Catholic Education), which collects a number of opinions and testimonies of several experts and personalities from the world of education on the opportunity that the GPE represents for today. You will find a comment from our Superior General on page 209. The book also presents a multitude of examples of inspiring projects from various institutions around the world. An example of a Marianist project is given on page 317.

We would be very happy to share with everyone, through VL 22 published monthly, your current achievements or those in progressive creation, in response to the calls of the Pact. You are therefore warmly invited to share your experiences and initiatives on this Global Pact on Education with us, by sending them to the following address: gensecsm@smcuria.it

Happy Patronal Feast to all of the institutions that bear the name of our Blessed Founder and may all of us enjoy a festive celebration on the occasion of the 171st anniversary of his death. With my fraternal greetings to all of you.

Essodomna Maximin Magnan, SM


Assistant General for Education

Rome, January 22, 2021

On the 171st anniversary of the Death of the Blessed W.-J. Chaminade