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Rome, 9th February 2024

MISSIONARIES OF HOPE IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE REDEEMER

Year dedicated to Community Life

Const. 21-75; EG 026-049; Lk 6:12-16

TO ALL REDEMPTORIST EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Dear Confreres, Coordinators of Redemptorist Schools and Colleges,

Dear Partners, Teachers and Students who are in our Educational Institutions, Dear Confreres, Coordinators of Redemptorist Schools, Colleges and Educational Institutions,

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1. Through this letter we would like first of all to send you our fraternal greetings, together with our best wishes for this New Year that the God of life has blessed us with. Secondly, we wish to encourage you who are teachers and collaborators in this sacred mission that you so wisely carry out, namely, of being artisans of education and of forming future citizens for social life with all that it implies. We know that educating the young is an arduous and complex task, and even more so in the context of today's world. In a society that looks for quick results, the task of educating the young is a gradual process of human construction in which both the inner and the outer world, with all that they entail, interact with each other. There is as well the challenge to work with the various sciences and pedagogical techniques to form a positive and wholesome vision of reality. In this sense, education is not simply a product consolidated by the educational institution on the basis of its philosophy and pedagogy but rather the realization of the human capacity to form itself and to transform the world. For this reason, every person who enters into a process of training encounters different artisans who give it their unique touch and contribute to that wholesome education so that, on completing certain stages, the young student has not only reached a technical competence, but has also travelled a path of human development and continues to do so in the society in which he or she lives. No one trains alone! We all learn and teach something together, so that no individual existence is empty and void.
2. Teaching is an act of profound dedication. It is a calling to share a reality that has been learnt and elaborated and at the same time to offer the other a key to reading the world. It is to make the Word Incarnate itself in the intellect, the memory, the conscience and



the heart of someone. It is to communicate a bit of oneself to others. We can have the best technological resources and we must have them, but however good the technology is, it is important not to forget that the school is an environment for human relationships, for learning, for the exchange of experiences and for the possibility of growth as a human person both of the individual as well as the other. Human development occurs when we can touch the other person with the gaze of other centredness because the being of each person increases and develops the qualities of the other and helps to correct the deficiencies in a fruitful dialogue of mutual self-improvement, experiencing presence and welcome.

3. We are very conscious of the social contribution that our Redemptorist Educational Institutions, Schools and Colleges have made in the different contexts in which we are present and it is therefore our intention to continue contributing our efforts in making our Institutions promoters of knowledge and the transformation of the social reality in which they are immersed. In order to value, accompany and encourage this work, Fr. Jairo Díaz Rodríguez, C.Ss.R. has been appointed reference advisor to the Redemptorist Educational Institutions. *Our Colleges and Schools are homes of redemption, in order to provide spaces for formative dialogue and temples where we can evangelise in the plurality of ideas, starting from the fundamentals of the Gospel, without imposing them or proselytising (seeking to convert people).* It is an opportunity to meet with children, adolescents and young people, with their joys and their dreams. This is a group with which the Church does not have unfortunately too much capacity or a language conducive to dialogue with them. 2
4. We are not a Congregation, by nature, whose charism is education, but education has entered our history as a way of proclaiming the Gospel. St. John Neumann (1811-1860) had this intuition when he founded parochial schools. Within two years, the number of pupils rose from 500 to 9,000. In these Schools he promoted devotion to the Eucharist. In this way, within the richness of our charism today, Redemptorist schools and colleges, present in various parts of the world, can offer an important service to society in the formation of the conscience and the communication of values. *For this reason, the confreres and all collaborators who are involved in this work are missionaries who evangelise within the world of education without losing what it is to be a Redemptorist. It is important that the people who collaborate with us in this mission are nourished by our charism and spirituality.*
5. The XXVI General Chapter chose as its motto for the six-year period "Missionaries of Hope in the footsteps of the Redeemer". In the context of the Redemptorist Schools and Colleges, it is a question of building a poetry of hope. As human beings we are situated in time and space. We live in this time with its upheavals and its beauties. However, there is a negative dimension of reality and a vision of the human being as incapable of living in harmony with society. The reality of evil, violence, and wars creates this grey area of human disbelief. Therefore, the role of the teacher and educator is to be a poet of hope. *Poiesis* in Greek means to produce, to create, to make and in a broad sense, to compose. Therefore, every encounter and each lesson becomes a composition that communicates a doing and a being.



6. The Theologian Jürgen Moltmann states that “the vital force of hope directs our senses toward the life that is fulfilled. We wait in suspense for hitherto unknown experiences of life. We open our senses for what is coming toward us. Thanks to hope, we do not abandon ourselves in the face of the powers of death, of disappointment, or of humiliation. Hope of the fullness of life awakens our senses every morning.”¹ *Hope is linked to the meaning of life and of things.* If we do not train people to interpret and make sense of life and to have a vision of the world that transcends fatality, it is difficult to transform society. *Hope is the tool that takes us out of our comfort zone and makes us see the pain of daylight that makes us cry. But it is this pain of the light that allows us to continue living and interpreting our reality, and enables us to draw strength from it to renew ourselves every day.*
7. In the face of this reality, we must ask ourselves: What is the contribution of our charism? Are we being faithful to it in the educational context? What is our unique differential educational and evangelising element? What steps should we take to respond to today's challenges? It is important that Redemptorist Schools and Colleges continue to meet not only physically but also virtually to exchange learning experiences, teaching and pastoral work. *The plurality of cultures, of educational methods and of working with children, adolescents and young people is enriching. It is possible to develop a creative synthesis based on dialogue with different realities. It would be important to draw up a profile of the schools which would then be applied according to the contexts, but without losing the Redemptorist identity.*
8. One of the elements that cannot be overlooked in the profile of our Educational Institutions is the formation of conscience. This is a Redemptorist task that involves confreres, lay partners in our mission and collaborators. For this reason, it is important to have a formation that keeps pace with the changes of today's world. St. Alphonsus contributed to the change in the theological mentality of his time, perceiving its social and ecclesial context, understanding them in depth and offering an altogether different key to the interpretation of reality. Shaping conscience in the age of communication, social networks and artificial intelligence seems an impossible task, like the young David and the giant Goliath (cf. 1 Sam 17: 4-50). However, we should not be discouraged. Perhaps we will be like the hummingbird who, faced with a forest fire, carried drops of water in his beak to put out the fire. When he was told that it was impossible to put out the flames with those droplets, he replied: "I am doing my part". If we carry these water droplets in our schools and colleges to raise awareness of critical thinking and to build a better society, we will be able to offer a critical thinking and thus build a better society. Yes, we are doing our bit, remembering that we can never be complacent and never give up. This is part of our mission.
9. Dear confreres in charge of our Educational Institutions and our collaborators in the different areas of education, do not allow yourselves to be discouraged in this important service that you are rendering to society! In a complex context of devaluation of people, education in our Schools and Colleges must be an opportunity for the communication of values and as well as a place for critical awareness of reality. We do not want people disincarnated and indifferent to reality, but rather artisans of social transformation,

¹ MOLTSMANN, Jürgen. *Hope in These Troubled Times*. Translated by Margaret Kohl and Brian McNeil. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2019, p. 118.



architects of justice, gardeners of fraternity and poets of hope to proclaim to the world the new song of humanisation and joy. You are contributing to this. Go Ahead with Hope!

10. May St. John Nepomucene Neumann enlighten the work of each one of you and may Our Mother of Perpetual Help guide you all in the ways of the Redeemer.

Fraternally,

Fr. Rogério Gomes, C.Ss.R.

Superior General



Fr. Jairo Diaz Rodriguez, C.Ss.R.

General Consultor