

**SOPHIE BARAT’S EDUCATIONAL VISION  
INSPIRES OUR RESPONSE TO THE EMERGING FUTURE  
150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Sacre Coeur Wien**

Good evening.... I am deeply honored to be with you this evening on such an important, joy-filled occasion. This jubilee commemorates 150 years of profound commitment by Educators of the Sacred Heart to young people and their formation as adults endowed by grace and wisdom. For generations, here in Vienna, children and young people have been accompanied by educators who have shared a mission that is timeless – the mission of Sacred Heart education.

This mission finds its source in the vision of Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat who began her work as an educator in 1800 when she founded the Society of the Sacred Heart in France. In a time of complexity, change and uncertainty, Sophie responded from the depths of her relationship with Jesus Christ whose image and love were so deeply a reality to her that the Spirit remained infused in all she did. It is from this love that she received and developed her vision of education. She believed the service of education was the primary means by which the Society of the Sacred Heart would carry on its mission of communicating the love of the Heart of Jesus. Today Educators of the Sacred Heart across the globe engage in this same service so God’s love may be revealed in the heart of the world.

From then until now, from Paris to St, Charles, Missouri to New York to Montreal to Santiago, Chile, to Sydney to Tokyo to Cairo to Vienna, Sacred Heart educators have believed that in and through the act of educating, one experiences being loved by God and loving God in return. Faithful to the inspiration of Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat, the spirit of the Society, and Catholic theology, Sacred Heart educators have shared Sophie’s desire to help people become ever more aware of the truth, of love and of freedom as they discover the meaning of their lives and devote themselves to others<sup>1</sup>. Sophie’s spirit appeals to the parents of our students. They can see that to learn in our school culture means to allow one’s life to be shaped by an active faith. Ours is a sacred imperative to educate the whole child and through the dynamic of this education, the students and we come to experience being loved and loving God.

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<sup>1</sup> Society of the Sacred Heart, *1982 Constitutions of the Society of the Sacred Heart* (Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 1987).

As a Religious of the Sacred Heart speaking with you this evening, I am filled with profound gratitude to you and all who have come before you for your fidelity to Sophie's vision.

As I was preparing to be with you, I kept wondering what Sophie would say to you on this occasion. While I am confident she would echo my gratitude, I am quite certain she would urge all to consider the reality which is our context. We live in a moment of complex change and uncertainty in which values and beliefs are constantly challenged. Sophie would want us to look at our world which is our context as educators with compassion and solidarity, attitudes of Christ's Heart which Sophie greatly valued.

Let us look for a moment at our world. Please consider what you believe are the three to five most pressing challenges facing us as global citizens. What issues can we see in the emerging future which will affect the children and grandchildren of our students? I invite you to pause and consider this question. (I will wait for one minute...maybe two)

Thank you for taking the time to consider this necessary question. What are your insights? (I will invite some ideas from the audience.)

Before I share my most pressing challenges I want to reference the [World Economic Forum's Global Shapers Survey 2017](#). As you know, 50% of the world's population is under the age of 30. Anyone who wants to know what young people across the globe are thinking about the challenges facing all of us, this report is essential. The Shapers Survey is a combination of: 1) how young people see the world (perception); and 2) what they want to do about it (action).

For the survey, 31,495 individuals responded from 186 countries and territories around the world. The final analyses presented in the report I read were based on the answers to 24,766 surveys. For the third year in a row, "climate change/destruction of nature" is ranked as the most serious global issue with 48.8% of votes. "Large-scale conflict/wars" and "inequality (income, discrimination)" are ranked 2nd and 3rd with 38.9% and 30.8% of votes, respectively. Young people were also asked what they see as the three most pressing issues of concern in their own country. This year again, "government accountability and transparency/ corruption" ranked 1st with 46.9% of votes globally. It is followed by "inequality" (38.1%) and "lack of economic opportunity/employment" (30.5%). Several interesting trends in Europe can be observed. Young people here identify inequality caused by unequal income distribution as their number one concern. (51.1%) Challenges caused by aging population (45.5%) and climate change (33%) are the second and third most pressing

issue for European youth. The fourth involves the lack of governmental accountability. When I was spoke with a class here, their first concern was economic disparity. Their second concern was war and violence. They all agreed climate change is most serious.

Why mention this survey? As Educators and Parents engaged by young people, we need to know what their hopes, dreams and concerns are. This study's summary document features key messages and insights in a manner that is both informative and encourages users to "listen more deeply" to young people. Certainly, Sophie always urged those first Sacred Heart Educators who were Religious of the Sacred Heart to listen to the children. She wanted us to be attentive and respectful of young people.

In this study I heard echoes of my own sense of pressing challenges. I worry about *water* and its future. Can we human beings work together to ensure there is sufficient water for all people to have WHILE at the same time will we collaborate in addressing global warming so that the grandchildren of our current students may enjoy the earth in all its splendor? Will we see cities like Hamburg disappear into the oceans and plains become deserts?

The study also pointed to the *migration of peoples*. You and I watch news media and daily see the increase in the migration of people most of whom are poor and struggling. I lived in Miami for most of my adult life. There and across the globe, we see people are searching for safety, for a home. Many are women and children. Their desperate roaming calls out to me and speaks to me of profound suffering. Some would say that this is a political issue, but I think in the spirit of Sophie, the deeper question which goes beyond politics is - How will we as fellow human beings respond to our suffering brothers and sisters?

The volume of information with which we are daily assaulted raises a question about how we can manage all that we read and hear. How do you handle "fake news"? Don't you wonder sometimes where the truth is amid all the noise? Where is truth? How are we to be people of discernment with so much coming at us?

Recently, I participated in a program at the Sacred Heart School in Miami on Global Health Equity. The days provided stunning revelations into the impact of *poverty* on access to *basic health care*. Children are dying from diseases that have been eradicated in both our countries simply because they have been born into poverty, a poverty whose violent impact assaults the human dignity of these innocent young people. How do we manage understanding that epidemics in Africa or Asia or the Americas need not threaten anyone if we would address poverty and access to resources?

One might be very disheartened by these matters as we look to the horizon, but as members of the Family of the Sacred Heart inspired by Sophie's vision, we cannot give into despair. So, what gives you hope? Let's take a moment of silence and consider hope. What gives you hope? What or who inspires you? (Pause for audience participation.)

I, and I am sure all of you, see hope in the eyes of the young people with whom we work. Those who accompany young people will not be surprised to learn that in the World Economic Forum's Global Shapers Survey I referenced nearly half (48.8%) of the survey participants chose climate change as their top concern **and** 78.1% said they would be willing to change their lifestyle to protect the environment. The study overwhelmingly demonstrates that the generation aged 18 to 35 cares deeply about global issues, and that they're determined to tackle them. I heard this in the students here. They are people of thoughtful action.

Faithful to Sophie's vision, Sacred Heart Educators celebrate young people and see in them great hope as she did in the young people whom she knew. As we know, every day we walk into a classroom, a school, onto an athletic field or into a theatre to work with students, we touch the future. So do parents and grandparents each time they pause to listen to the young people in their lives. We who claim Sophie's legacy must always be mindful of the emerging future. We must steep ourselves in our own reality to comprehend the challenges facing education now. Daily we are invited to look in depth at the complex reality we live in, a globalized world that has changed and is changing our way of being, of understanding, of acting and of thinking.

To be true to Sophie and all who have come before us, we must remain clear *-young people are our priority; they carry the seeds of the future.* When the International Heads of Sacred Heart Schools around the globe gathered for our [Fifth Conference](#) in October, 2015, we observed that the very young people with whom we work daily will be faced with making strategic decisions not simply for themselves but for the peoples of the globe. The more we considered the realities of the world and the profound challenges youth face, our deeper question became... "in what way are we igniting the flame of hope first set by Sophie who envisioned "a world without frontiers in which all people enjoy freedom and equal rights"? (Pilar Cardo, RSCJ). Were Sophie alive today and facing our realities, what would she do? What type of interventions and transformations might she initiate?

In Mexico, we concluded that as members of the Family of the Sacred Heart that we must see ourselves as the Stewards or Holders of the spirituality of the Open Heart of Christ." Attentiveness to this open heart is a call to.... "contemplate the Heart of Jesus through the pierced heart of humanity". **This sensibility is at the core of who**

**we are as members of the Sacred Heart Family, as educators.** Our choice of this vocation is rooted in reality. It is never passive. “This open heart shows us the situation of the torn, broken Body of Christ in the entire Humankind.” We who educate within the Family of the Sacred Heart are called to contemplation. This is not a passive act. *Contemplation is actually attentive listening.* Such silence allows us to sense the movement of the Spirit within our very core. We develop a contemplative stance or perspective from which we unite ourselves simultaneously with Christ and with humanity. Simply said, the responsibility of being Sophie’s spiritual heirs compels us to be people of prayer.

Our perspective as contemplatives in action inspires in us the desire to demonstrate a sensitivity and receptivity to God as manifest in all of creation and the courage to walk in light of what we know to be true given our experience of God. As heirs to Sophie’s vision, we are called to practice *espacio* and to allow silence to breathe into us a deepened capacity to listen to the murmuring of the Holy Spirit. By *espacio* I mean, we carve from our daily schedule and from our consciousness the time and space to be silent so that we can open ourselves to God’s grace. In this way silence becomes a way of inwardness and reflection.

As Sophie’s heirs, we want to be the educators and parents whose presence transforms the young people with whom we have been entrusted. Listening that begins in silence supports the young people in their journey towards freedom because they come to hear God’s voice within their hearts. The youth are then free to respond. Any education that leads to transformation must begin in silence so that the transformation may have integrity. Structuring silence into our daily lives enables us to be true to our heritage as Sacred Heart Educators. In and through silence, we develop the capacity to discern the essential from the non-essential. Silence is required if we and our students are to grow in the inner life. Listening in silence allows our hearts to be inhabited by the Transcendent One.

As we accompany children and young people of all faiths, our objective is to educate Sacred Heart graduates to be their best **for** the world, not just the best in the world. Committed fully to educating the best for humanity, we strive to develop a nourishing educational framework focused on transformation. Exposure to the brokenness of humanity and creation without formation in interiority is not sufficient if the end is social transformation. Drawing from Sophie’s vision, Sacred Heart Educators recognize that the attitudes of heart inherent in people of discernment and the habits of mind essential to persons who think critically are essentially the attitudes and habits of Christ’s heart and mind. We hope to form young people who contemplate the

wounded world through the eyes of Jesus so that the transformation which they effect is one that builds the Body of Christ.

The philosophy of Sacred Heart education is framed by the assumption that education is transformational because students and educators are engaged in learning for the purpose of coming to self-understanding as those loved by God. Such self-understanding is not possible without intentional formation in critical thinking. Our education of young people is inspired by the conviction that it is only in coming to know one's true self that one can become an inspired agent of transformation. Focused on the development of the whole person, Sacred Heart education engages each student's heart, mind and will. In orienting students towards the discovery of their own unique gifts, the graduates are set on a path of discernment, equipped to serve the world with compassion, critical-consciousness, and authenticity.

We believe that the quality of the future depends on the choices that will be made by the young people with whom we are now working. **It is essential that they are critical thinkers so that they can handle increasing complexity as they navigate a future of constant and complex global change.** We know that Sophie believed that faith needs to be informed in order to be active. To develop a critical and hope-filled view of reality requires an education of both the *heart and the mind*. In this way the *will* becomes engaged. Our graduates ideally become people whose mind, heart and will are aligned.

To be true to Sophie, we must carve from our daily lives *TIME* and *SPACE* to pause, to reflect and to open our sensibility to the Spirit of God dwelling in our hearts. This *ESPACIO* is fundamental to comprehend Sophie's vision of education. All that she did was rooted in her experience of seeing herself as being loved by Christ. If we are to be act with integrity, then we must also root our practice in silence and contemplation. From that space deep within our consciousness we will be able to examine both our philosophy of education and our pedagogical practices. Steeped in the reality that surrounds us and from this perspective of silence and reflection, we will most effectively answer the questions:

- To what are we forming youth?
- For what end are we educating young people?
- How and why are we educating as we do?

Our perspective as Sacred Heart Educators impels us to encourage our students to embrace fully their human dignity for the sake of others. Across the globe we the inheritors of Sophie's vision are inspired by the *Goals* of Sacred Heart education. These *Goals* capture the principles of Catholic education as infused by Saint Madeleine

Sophie's charism and the spirit of the Society of the Sacred Heart. The essence of a Sacred Heart school is that it be deeply concerned for each student's total development-- spiritual, intellectual, emotional, physical-- that it emphasizes serious study, educates to social responsibility and lays the foundation of strong faith. The grace of Sophie's vision is that she continues to inform our educational praxis.

Tonight, we are enjoying a glorious jubilee of 150 years of Sacred Heart education here in Vienna. Let us pray for one another that we may all continue to be inspired by Sophie as we commit ourselves anew to her vision. My sense is that were Sophie here this evening, she would encourage us to ask ourselves some questions ...

- Will we commit to work towards eradicating poverty in all its forms everywhere?
- Will we form our students to be the decision makers who work to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture?
- Will we model for our students how to live healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages?
- Will we work on behalf of sustainability?
- Most important, will we accompany our students in such a way that their instinctive response is firmly grounded in honoring the dignity of all human beings?

As we anticipate the emerging future, may we respond as Sophie did from the depths of our relationship with God. May Christ be the source of our inspiration so that we sense the Spirit infused in all that we do. May we never lose sight that the mission of Sacred Heart education has and continues to be to educate to an informed, active faith, critical thinking, and service to others. May we find joy in our service within the Church of education. May Sophie's vision serve as our prophetic orientation in the midst of complexity, leading us to hope, a hope that believes in the goodness of each individual, a hope that believes in the goodness of humanity, a hope that believes in and trusts the love of the Heart of God.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Goals and Criteria* (St. Louis: Society of the Sacred Heart, 1975, 1990 and 2005).