

THE JOSEPHITE AND ROMAN CATHOLIC INPUT INTO THE ETHOS OF THE JUNIOR SCHOOL

Just before he died in 1999, Cardinal Basil Hume OSB shared his vision about the purpose of Catholic Schools:

“Schools should produce young people with ideas and dreams, with a vision of what they want to achieve in life, who have a strong sense of care and compassion for those in need, and who have above all of a love of life, a zest for living life to the full.”

The vision of the late Cardinal resonates very much with the values-led education proposed by Constant van Crombrughe, the Founder of the Josephites, for his schools.

During his life Constant van Crombrughe was a Canon of Gent Cathedral, a Headmaster, a member of the Belgium Constitutional Congress and the National Assembly, as well as being the Founder of three orders of religious sisters and the Congregation of the Josephites – a Religious Order of Roman Catholic Priests and Brothers dedicated to the education and evangelisation of young people.

The primary work of the Josephites was to be, and still remains, the “education and evangelisation of young people”, while at the same time helping to bring about the Kingdom of God where there is no more harm, no more hurt by “Acting justly, loving tenderly and walking humbly before our God” (The Prophet Micah).

Constant never wrote a formal treatise about his educational philosophy but he did successfully fight for the freedom of education at the Belgian Constitutional Congress. He also left a legacy of letters, including some written to his parents during his own time at a boarding school, and other writings and speeches about educating young people including an address to the parents of pupils attending the College Prize Giving when he was Headmaster at Alost.

In a letter to Brother Stanislas, who later became Superior General of the Josephites, Constant van Crombrughe articulates aspects of the “Josephite Spirit or Ethos” which he is seeking to implant in his schools. The first two paragraphs of this letter, written in October 1832, are reproduced below:

“The zeal which God has given you to work for the education of youth is a source of consolation for me and allows me to believe that you will easily understand the observations I am sending you with the recommendation to make them known to the other Brothers.

Work with ardour to fill yourself with the same sentiments as our divine Master. To the extent that you get to know Jesus Christ you will become more and more aware of the misfortunes of our young people whom you are called to help. Your love for them will grow day by day and you will speak up ceaselessly in their support. Whatever you obtain for your children you will consider a benefaction for yourself. You will patiently put up with their failings so that you will correct them with gentleness. You will share their joy and share in the pain of their suffering. Knowing their weakness you will foresee their needs with that goodness which always finishes by triumphing even with the less fortunate of character.”

A number of qualities are to be found in Josephite Schools. These include *politesse* in the sense of “appropriate and right living” which is more than simple “politeness”;

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douceur meaning gentleness or tenderness and the excellence of its pastoral care and moral standards.

While competition was encouraged, there was to be a genuine mutual affection and esteem between the pupils. The essential hallmark of a Josephite School is the all-pervading “family spirit” for Jesus himself “grew in wisdom and stature” within the family of Mary and Joseph (Lk 2:40). Constant van Crombrugge was also insistent that teachers needed to realise they were called to be “Instruments of God’s mercy” when dealing with young people.

Another similar and very important quality required by Constant van Crombrugge was for Josephites to exhibit both paternal and maternal attributes when teaching children. This is explicitly stated in the final paragraph of the “Pedagogical Guide for Josephites” which is a collection of Constant van Crombrugge’s reflections.

“Here is the greatest method of education: All of you who have devoted yourselves to the sacred work of education, love, love the children. But there is love and love. I am speaking here of real, deep and enlightened love; pastoral and paternal love; this love is everything and accomplishes everything. In a word, be like fathers to them, and that’s not enough; be like mothers. You must love the children and make them feel that you love them; not only be avoiding, in your dealings with them, all hardness, unjust coldness and discouraging severity, but by caring tenderly for them and having a blessed and cordial affection for them; letting them see that you have devoted your life to them, that you are happy to be with them and will always be so. You must also identify with them, not only at work and study, but in everything else and in every details of their school life. But I must add one thing of greatest importance: To love the children and to identify with them, teachers must love another. Be of one heart and mind – *cor unum et anima una.*”

In the main entrance hall at St George’s College, there is a plaque beneath a full length picture of Constant van Crombrugge. The words in the plaque are as appropriate for the Junior School as they are for the Senior School.

“The goal which one proposes in this house is to cultivate the mind and heart of young people the young people admitted to the College receive a careful and complete education, adapted to all states of life. It is therefore education’s task to form the good man and the good woman and to prepare them for society, consequently its task is to form in youth both the heart and the mind, to perfect reason and to adorn the imagination.”

Such a vision calls for ways of educating that engage pupils as active agents in their own learning, instead of passive recipients; that help them to develop all their gifts and abilities, especially their capacity for freedom and responsibility; ways that are designed to inform, form and transform participants and society toward wisdom of life and social well being.

It is very much a characteristic of those who teach in Josephite Schools that they will always meet the pupils “where they are” and not “where they are supposed to be”. Josephite Schools never expect their pupils to have already achieved a state of perfection but the teachers are to help the pupils in every way they could to improve and become more perfect people.

Every Josephite School should be a community comprising the serving ministries of the Christian Church.

1. A welcoming community (*Koinonia*) An inclusive community of faith, hope and love

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| 2. A word-of-God community | <i>(Kerygma)</i> | To preach, evangelise, teach God's word |
| 3. A worshipping community | <i>(Leitourgia)</i> | An assembly of faith celebrating God's covenant with us. |
| 4. A community of welfare | <i>(Diakonia)</i> | Caring for people's spiritual, psychological and physical needs |
| 5. A witnessing community | <i>(Marturia)</i> | To be a credible Christian witness in and to the local community by living through lifestyle and example what it preaches. |

In a very real sense, the Josephite School is very much part of the kingdom of God since it is a community comprising members of God's family. Sadly, however, one of the characteristics of society today is that many parents, unlike their own parents and grandparents, do not value the spiritual development of their children as highly as their career development. This is perhaps one of, if not, the biggest challenge which Catholic, Christian, Josephite schools have to face today. It is for this reason that the Junior School is not, cannot be and must never become just any old school – no different from all the others.

It is the underpinning "Josephite Spirit or Ethos" which creates the very characteristic and positive atmosphere which exists in all schools founded by the Josephites be they in Europe, Africa or America. As the number of Josephites working in schools continues to decline so the need to hand on the distinctive "Josephite Spirit or Ethos" to those taking on the responsibility for these schools increases. The Governors of St George's College and the Junior School have made it very clear that they wish to maintain the identity of St George's College Junior School as a Catholic, Christian and Josephite School.

The fundamental "Josephite Spirit or Ethos" is able to transcend the differences which exist in the wide variety of Josephite Schools which now exist in Europe, America and Africa. This is a very important characteristic especially as Josephite Schools have always been able to adapt themselves to the changing situations in which they find themselves.

This has been clearly illustrated by the transformation of St George's Junior School from a "Year 3 to Year 7 all boys days schools with some borders" in the mid-1980's to a "Nursery to Year 6 fully co-educational day school with no boarders on a different site" at the start of 2000.

By offering an extensive, well rounded education, the Junior School is able to give all pupils the chance to achieve genuine success across a range of activities. This success does not, of course, come without commitment and effort from the pupils themselves. The commitment and effort required by the pupils is best summoned up on a notice in the foyer of the Junior School which states:

"In every human activity a few people, through concentration and practice and a deep desire, can become so skilled that they excel all others."

The Junior School has clearly evolved into perhaps the outstanding Roman Catholic Co-educational Independent School. It has a very impressive record of achievement inside and outside the classroom. From January 2000 to July 2014 Year Six pupils won a total of 148 scholarships and other academic awards to senior independent schools. During the same period, Junior School pupils also won two national academic competitions and ten national championship titles – four hockey, four athletics and two rugby ones as well as reaching the finals stage on numerous occasions.

In conclusion, there is, however, another set of criteria which the Junior School uses to determine the success of the School. These criteria relate back to the underlying

core values of the School. If, during their time at the Junior School, all pupils are happy, self-reliant young people with very high personal self esteem:

- who enjoy coming to school to learn with a spring in their steps
- who are honest and open with each other and their teachers
- who are tolerant; treating and supporting each other with care and compassion and having no time for those who bully
- who take a real and active concern for those who are in need
- who have a personal relationship with God and are living out the Good News of the Gospel in their daily lives

then the Junior School can claim to be successful and fulfilling its mission to be a Catholic, Christian and Josephite School.