



Notre Dame de Sion School Team

Congregational School Team Summary of the Third International Schools Meeting “Educating for Social Justice”

Rio de Janeiro, May 3-10, 2015

Report to the Schools

The third international Schools Meeting was held in Rio de Janeiro from May 3-10, 2015. Fifty-seven educators gathered from the Sion Family in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, France, Hungary, United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

The week was filled with presentations, group discussions, a visit to two of the city’s many favelas and to the Sion School in Rio and the famous sites of this beautiful city, including Christ the Redeemer and Sugar Loaf Mountain. We also enjoyed a Brazilian cultural evening and many opportunities for socializing renewing friendships and making new friends

Featured speakers of the week included Sister Judite NDS, Carlos Rodrigues Brandao, Brother Elio Passeto, Leonardo Boff, Cesar Kuzmann, as well as a panel of Sion graduates. Sr. Judite spoke of Sion’s history, role and continuing presence in Brazil. Carlos Rodrigues Brandao emphasized the difference between educating for an awareness of being a human and a member of society and educating for the economy and for work. Elio Passeto related how while Alphonse began a technical school, this was only one aspect of his vision. For him, it was a space to form the human being. Alphonse indicated that he didn't go to Jerusalem to be with stones on stones; he wanted to rebuild humanity. He talked about the beauty in diversity and said “To be different is to be rich.” Leonardo Boff, whose presentations connected ecological injustice with social injustice, spoke of a number of values that need to be passed on to the students to bring about transformation. He highlighted the need for compassion, taking care of the earth and each other, solidarity, and self-moderation. He emphasized the need to dialogue with those who have differing points of view and praised the “richness in the different faces of our charism.” Cesar Kuzmann spoke about the prophetic message of the Beatitudes and emphasized that to be Christian today means that we have the same options that Jesus had as he tried to bring justice to the poor and that we must “come down from the mountain” and walk among the people if we are truly following Christ.

At the conclusion of the assembly, the Superior General of the Fathers of Sion, Fr. Donizete, celebrated Mass and we offered each other a closing blessing.

The following are the highlights of the comments offered by the participants at the closing session of the week.

- The overwhelming warmth of Brazilian hospitality and the welcoming attitudes of the Brazilian people;
- The creativity and quality of the prayers offered by the language groups;

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- The ambiance created by the natural beauty of the land;
- The quality of the speakers and the impact that their message had upon the group;
- The joy of seeing the Sion Students and teachers in their wonderful school environment;
- The Marketplace Presentations and exchange of ideas by all the schools and the schools sharing their programs related to social justice;
- The timeliness and universality of the theme and the speakers' ability to weave the common thread of the theme into their presentations;
- The informal opportunities to exchange ideas, network and build relationships among Sion educators and strengthen the Sion family;
- The presence of a highly qualified and very flexible facilitator;
- The emphasis on educating the whole child and what it means to be truly human;
- The experience of the internationality of Sion coupled with the unity of our Sion experience;
- The richness of having the Sisters and Brothers of Sion with us for the week;
- The opportunity to experience Shabbat with our colleagues;
- The awareness of the necessity to care for ourselves, each other and our world;
- The exercises, which enabled us to reflect and deepen our understanding of, and commitment to the charism of Sion.

The participants offered the following constructive comments about how future meeting might be even more successful.

- Attention should be given to the quality of the translation so that all participants get clear understanding of the presentations and of the comments of the groups;
- More time for reflection, interaction in small groups in order to digest the input offered by the speakers;
- More time for prayer and worship together;
- More time for interaction and conversation during the Marketplace exchange;
- Need for a general agenda to be distributed before the meeting begins and as much communication to the schools as is possible;
- Ensure the introduction of all schools to the larger group.

The participants were asked how the Congregational School Team and the Congregational Leadership Team might assist them in their important work in the schools. Some responses are:

- Create a website that could be used for sharing resources, sharing school news, providing a link to all the schools, etc.
- Use Sr. Patricia Watson's book *Spaces for Dialogue* as an important resource for life in Sion Schools. Currently the book is only in English but translation to French, Spanish and Portuguese will be completed in the relatively near future. An electronic version would be ideal.
- Continue and expand exchange among schools should continue. In some cases, these are student exchanges and in some teacher exchanges or both. It would depend upon the schools and how they can work it out together.
- Have the Congregational School Team and members of the Congregation of Our Lady of Sion visit schools whenever possible in order for the schools to know them and for them to really know what is happening in the schools.
- Provide resources for the teachers in Charism formation. This effort might result in designing a curriculum document to be used with all faculty in Mission Education and formation.
- Coordinate worldwide as the Sion Family for projects for UNANIMA, Project Hope, etc.
- Design a common LOGO for Sion International. It was suggested that each school submit ONE such logo designed by a student and that the Team will choose the logo at its March 2016 meeting. It was suggested that this might be done through student competition. DEADLINE TO SUBMIT LOGO DESIGN: JANUARY 1, 2016 and it should be sent to Sr. Mary Reaburn at reaburnmr@hotmail.com

Additionally, the school representatives offered suggestions about the theme for the 2018 meeting, the time of year of the meeting, and the possible location. The CLT and the CST will make no decision until further reflection, fact-finding and conversations can be done.

All participants expressed a desire to develop the vision and the experience of what has been learned at the Rio meeting into the life of the school. It will be important that the schools communicate with the Team and each other about what is going on in and among our schools.

The CST asked the educators to articulate Action Steps for going forward as Sion Family worldwide. The following is a summary of the steps that were suggested. Note that the Team has indicated who among us might wish to assume responsibility for beginning the process of moving to address these Action Steps and facilitating communication among the schools.

The main points are:

1. Launch a “Sion for Change” project worldwide and unite around a (1) project for the year, possibly in cooperation with UNANIMA. (2) design a common logo around the theme and our international commitment to that theme (schools are encourage to have a contest in their own schools, select one winner and submit to the CST for the Team’s next meeting. Deadline: January 1, 2016), and (3) possibly have a song in four languages that all schools use to demonstrate our international unity. We encourage the schools to communicate among themselves on these items.
2. Set up a project to assist Sr. Valdete at San Miguel School to fund teachers’ salaries for three years. The cost for the salaries is a total of \$R6,400 per month (Total of \$24,600.00 US per year.) Box Hill appears interested in working with this and Oonah will talk with Sr. Mary Reaburn about this.
3. Provide copies of all of the speeches that were given at the conference and create a common document for schools to access. Currently, the speeches are only in Portuguese so the CST and CLT will look into getting them translated and posting them to our new website.
4. Create a document regarding how the schools are working in the area of Social Justice and share that information with all the schools. The CST would ask the schools to send this information to the website (when it is launched) for sharing. The Marketplace presentations could be posted on the web to give a visual presentation of what schools are doing worldwide.
5. Encourage exchanges among teachers and students so that we can share in our charism and how it is lived out around the world. The schools would be expected to do this between and among themselves and keep the CST informed. Initially, we would like ALL schools that currently have exchanges (with other Sion Schools and non-Sion Schools) to send the CST a list of those exchanges and for whom they are designed.
6. Continue and further formation programs for school personnel. Resources for use with Boards, Faculty, Staff, etc. regarding the charism of the Congregation and developments in the Congregation and the writings of Fr.Theodore could be shared from the Congregation with the schools for their formation programs. Again, these resources can be posted to the website when it is launched.
7. Study the Encyclical from Pope Francis regarding the environment/care of the earth when it is published in June. We are asking all schools to read the encyclical and to use it in their programs and to share among themselves what they are doing with this document. There is a possible connection with UNANIMA here and through Sr Sylvia Obrigewitsch (clean.sjbo@sasktel.net) and/or Sr. Celia (Ces) Martin (celiam03@yahoo.com) who work with UNANIMA.
8. When and where possible, CST members should visit schools in their area or if they are visiting a city/region, CST members should set an appointment to spend time in the school

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to meet with Board members, Directors, teachers and students to share the work of the Team and the schools worldwide. The same is true for the members of the Congregation.

The Sion Family left Rio in tears of joy as we go forward in new and renewed friendships, fresh energy to share and model our charism with our own school communities and faith that Christ the Redeemer is watching over Sion worldwide, just as He does the lovely city of Rio de Janeiro!!!

Sincerely,

The Congregational Schools Team

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