

*Educating the Mind and Heart
in the
Visitation Tradition*



*A Guide for Educators
in Visitation Schools
in the United States of America*



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Introduction

For more than two hundred years, Visitation schools throughout the United States have shared a heritage which has created a unique, sometimes intangible, spirit within the school communities. This heritage, rooted in the Gospel and growing from our Catholic faith, has come to be known as Salesian spirituality. At this time in the history of our schools, we recognize a need to articulate this Salesian spirit more explicitly.

In responding to this need, the Second Federation of the Visitation Order has established a National Network, with each school developing its own local network. The vision of the Visitation Salesian Network is to enable our schools to become communities which believe in, practice and perpetuate the Salesian charism so that together all members of the community may embrace our human and Christian task: to carry Christ to those whom we serve and with whom we work.

This booklet serves as a guide for all engaged in the educational ministries of our schools. It presents our Visitation educational philosophy and our mission as educators in this tradition in terms of six Goals that reflect the charism of the Visitation.

We call all members of Visitation school communities to a deeper appreciation of our Visitation philosophy of education as expressed and lived by our founders, Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal. More specifically, we hope to see our schools deepen this spirit in all their members: students, faculty and staff, administrators, parents, graduates and board members.

The National Visitation Salesian Network offers the fruit of our efforts in this booklet: *Educating the Mind and Heart in the Visitation Tradition*. The ideals embodied in the six Goals will be achieved as members of our school communities translate these principles of Salesian spirituality into action and embrace a commitment to live the Salesian spirit as they minister to the young women, girls and boys entrusted to their care.

Visitation Philosophy of Education

Visitation schools in the United States are rooted in the Roman Catholic faith and strengthened by their shared vision of Salesian spirituality inspired by the founders of the Visitation, St. Jane de Chantal and St. Francis de Sales.

The writings of these saints reflect the best values of Christian Humanism. They offer an optimism born of an understanding of the loving hand of God as traced in the beauty of creation and a clear vision of the human person created in the image of God. These values integrate a love of truth with the pursuit of knowledge and the dedication of God-given gifts to making the world a better place.

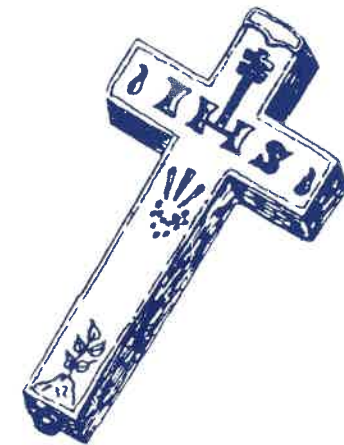
As educators in the Visitation tradition, we understand that we are forming lives as well as imparting knowledge. Through the educational process, we seek to train the intellects of our students and to equip them with skills of discernment which will assist them in making life-giving choices and decisions and in building positive human relationships. We also strive to instill a lifelong love of learning.

Our Visitation schools are committed to offering our students strong academic programs that integrate the search for truth with intellectual pursuits directed toward a faith-filled vision of life. In the classroom we encourage them to build on their strengths and bolster areas of in need of improvement.

A practical living of the Salesian virtues of kindness, gentleness, humility and thoughtful concern for others permeates our school environments where members respect the uniqueness of one another and foster inclusive and caring communities.

Salesian optimism leads us to encourage our students to reach their potential as we affirm and celebrate their achievements, both in the classroom and in co-curricular activities. Leadership opportunities enable them to become self-directed people whose broad vision of life leads them to offer their gifts of mind and heart in loving service to those in need.

Relying on the inspiration of the Spirit and a wisdom born of a long history, Visitation schools move into the future, educating our students to be quietly prayerful and intellectually competent persons who have developed a strong sense of moral integrity and responsibility.



GOAL ONE

Visitation schools foster a personal friendship with God which leads to a faith-filled vision of life.

- Administrators, faculty and staff seek creative ways to use Scripture in order to make the word of God come alive for one another and for students.
- The school community gathers regularly to participate in liturgies, retreats and prayer and reconciliation services as a means of integrating personal faith with the teachings of Jesus Christ.
- Teachers foster an environment that encourages opportunities for formal and informal prayer.
- The school articulates, respects and celebrates Visitation traditions and feasts.
- Formation in Salesian spirituality is an integral part of the professional development of administration, faculty and staff.
- A Visitation education actively promotes and supports a partnership with parents in the religious formation of their children.

Follow your own way of speaking to God, lovingly, confidently, and simply as your heart dictates.

—St. Jane de Chantal

GOAL TWO

Visitation schools integrate a strong academic course of studies with a Salesian spiritual dimension.

- The curriculum develops students' analytical and creative thinking skills and cultivates their ability to communicate effectively.
- Teachers challenge students to develop their potential and to continue the process of life-long learning.
- The teachings of the Catholic faith permeate the entire educational program of a Visitation school.
- School programs provide opportunities for students to combine intellectual achievement with an understanding of Salesian spirituality.
- The school prepares students for a highly technical world in which they can function with a deeply human touch.
- The school community helps students understand the role of faith in their lives so they may confront ambiguity with confidence.

Growing in wisdom interests me only to the extent that through it, I also grow in holiness.

—St. Francis de Sales

GOAL THREE

Visitation schools build faith communities which call their members to understand the value of diversity and to respect the dignity of each person.

- The school seeks faculty, staff and students from a variety of backgrounds whose diverse gifts enrich the community.
- Diversity programs educate students through activities such as conferences, workshops, clubs, and service.
- Policies and programs support the different academic, social and economic needs of the school community.
- The school encourages a practical living of the Salesian virtues by fostering self-respect and thoughtful concern for others.
- The Board of Trustees and administration ensure the presence of Salesian values in all school policies.
- The school participates actively in the Visitation Salesian Network.
- Adults in the school community model Christian and Salesian values.
- The school supports collaborative leadership through cooperative tasks that build community.

“The church is a garden patterned with unlimited flowers; it is necessary that they should be of various sizes, various colors, various odors and to sum it up, different perfections . . . all of them provide a beauty most pleasing and perfect.

—St. Francis de Sales

GOAL FOUR

Visitation schools promote the development of liberty of spirit which empowers students to make life-giving choices.

- The school community creates and sustains an environment that encourages students to develop an interior moral compass.
- School programs provide counseling and mentoring opportunities that nurture human and spiritual growth.
- Curricular and co-curricular programs offer a variety of opportunities for students to exercise Christian leadership.
- Faculty and staff assist students in developing Salesian simplicity and balance in the multiplicity of choices they encounter.
- The heart of Salesian spirituality frees members of the community to “Live Jesus” in their daily lives.

Lead those in your care with a kind and understanding heart; give them a holy liberty of spirit and remove from your mind and theirs any unhealthy spirit of constraint.

—St. Jane de Chantal

GOAL FIVE

Visitation schools embrace and model gospel values of peace and justice in order to be catalysts for positive change.

- The school encourages all faculty members to incorporate an awareness of current social and political issues in the classroom.
- The curriculum applies social justice teachings of the Catholic Church when confronting world situations in which oppression, poverty and injustice prevail.
- Christian service programs call every member of the school community to become aware of and respond to social justice issues with compassion.
- The school uses the Visitation booklet, Justice Shall Flourish, which reflects a Salesian response to issues of peace and justice.
- School policies incorporate the gospel value of non-violence and reflect the Visitation charism of gentleness and humility.
- The school fosters a spirit of compassion and respect for all with an awareness of personal responsibility for the global community.

To carry God on the tongue with beautiful words, to carry God in the heart with beautiful affections, is not everything. We must carry him in our arms with good works.

—St. Francis de Sales

GOAL SIX

Visitation schools encourage an awareness of and care for the gifts of God's creating hand.

The school celebrates with gratitude the beauty and diversity of God's gifts through liturgical expressions and prayerful reflections.

- Curricular and co-curricular programs foster a sense of responsibility for the world in which we live, concern for the environment and awareness that the earth's resources should be used in moderation.
- Educational programs help students to recognize the negative effects of consumerism and challenge them to embrace a lifestyle grounded in Salesian simplicity.
- The school provides varied co-curricular programs as a means of nurturing and highlighting the individual gifts of students.
- All members of the community share responsibility for care of the school environment.

Let us pray then, frankly and fervently for all the world, that it may please our Lord to spread his grace and mercies over all his creatures, that all may walk towards the end for which he created them.

—St. Jane de Chantal

EPILOGUE

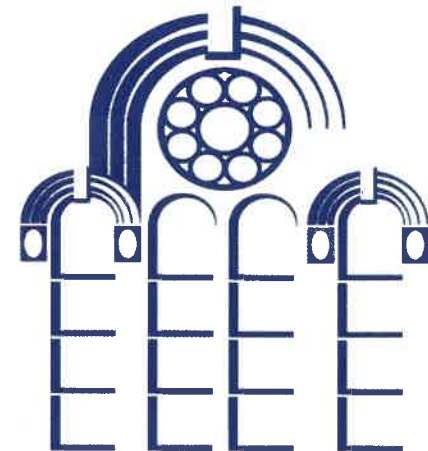


The spiritual vision present in the founding days of the Visitation Order, is alive in our Visitation schools today as we strengthen both the individual and the community by creating a school environment permeated with a spirit of gentle strength, humility, kind thoughtfulness and cheerful optimism. Herein lies the heart of our Visitation heritage and the beauty of the Christian Humanism expressed in the writings of St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal and lived by the Visitation sisters and their colleagues.

Our educational programs assist our students to develop a life long love of learning and strong moral convictions by which they choose to live. They acquire a genuine appreciation of who they are, an ability to be assertive in a self-confident, persuasive, yet not strident manner and an understanding of the benefits of being “in competition with” rather than “in competition against.” Finally, through far-

reaching Christian outreach programs, which are an integral part of a Visitation education, our students appreciate the value of offering themselves in service to others and grow in awareness of a world beyond themselves.

One of the greatest blessings of a Visitation education is the opportunity it offers students to learn the meaning of faithful friendship as each one strives to “be who you are and be it well in order to bring honor to the Master Craftsman whose handiwork we are.” It is our privilege to accompany our students in their quest for human and spiritual maturity.



Prayer Before Class

*My God, I give you this hour.
I offer you now all the good
that I shall do;*

*I promise to accept
for love of you,
all the difficulty
I shall meet.*

*Help me to live
during this hour
in a way
that is pleasing to you.*

Amen.