# Sacred Heart Identity

## And Structural Implications Of Identity



# Sacred Heart School Identity

Sacred Heart Schools are an essential expression of the Society of the Sacred Heart's mission in the world. In the Goals and Criteria, the Society of the Sacred Heart defines the mission of the school as part of the Society's educational mission in the Catholic Church.1 Our institutions are Catholic - independent - Sacred Heart. This three-dimensional nature of our identity creates a framework for our schools in our work on behalf of children and young people of all faiths. Rooted in Catholic theology and philosophy, the schools extend through education the Society's mission to reveal the love of God in the world. Sacred Heart Schools ground educational practice in the love of Jesus Christ and seek to form our students in the attitudes of Christ's Heart. Our independence means that each school is governed by a board of trustees that serves each school community in light of the Goals and Criteria. Our three-dimensional identity raises the essential question: What does it mean to be concurrently Catholic, independent and Sacred Heart?

As we accompany children and young people of all faiths, our hope is to educate Sacred Heart graduates to be their best for the world.2 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, authenticity and hope. Our perspective as Catholic - independent - Sacred Heart Schools impels us to encourage our students to embrace fully their human diginity for the sake of others.

1 Foundational Principle 1, *Goals and Criteria* (St. Louis: Society of the Sacred Heart, 2005).
2 Conclusions and Proposals, *V Conference of International Directors of Schools* (Mexico, 2015).

## The Catholic Dimension of Our Identity:

As learning environments serving children and young people, Sacred Heart Schools are focused on the development of each child in the context of community. Anchored in the mission of the Society of the Sacred Heart, this education is inherently Catholic. Sacred Heart educators are inspired by an understanding of Jesus Christ, His Gospel and the Holy Spirit. In and through the visible world in which we live, we come to know and experience the invisible God working through persons, events, and physical things. Through invoking our spirit, mind and imagination, we discover the intelligibility and coherence of all reality. As participants in God's grace, we experience the love of Jesus Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. God's grace initiates our actions and assists us in becoming people of service grounded in love, mirroring the attitudes of Christ's Heart such as respect, compassion, forgiveness and generosity. God comes to us as communion, through the communities in which we live. This community includes liturgies, prayer, service and the spiritual, intellectual and theological practices that mark the life of the Church. The emphasis on community in Catholicism is the source of Sacred Heart's commitment to relationships and the building of community as an essential value.

A Catholic school draws its inspiration from Jesus Christ as the source of all wisdom and from the conviction that in Him all things can be brought to their full potential. For us Sacred Heart education is never the end; rather education serves as the means by which students come to know and experience God's love so that they can become agents of transformation. When we live as Christ-centered institutions, we are Catholic.

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## The Independent Dimension of Our Identity:

Independent schools engage in education in light of a unique mission.
An independent school is organized as not-for-profit and is governed by a self-perpetuating board of trustees or directors, as opposed to being "owned" and run by the government (public schools), by a diocese (parochial schools), or by for-profit entities (proprietary schools). In light of its mission, an independent school board as a whole makes major policy decisions, sets the strategic directions of the school, allocates resources according to strategic priorities, and is responsible for the fiscal health of the school.
Independent schools are free to design curriculum, regulate admissions, determine tuition levels and raise money. Independent schools are accredited typically by a local association of independent schools. In all cases, the accreditation process involves demonstrating that in light of the particular school's mission, it meets the level of excellence as defined in the standards established by the accrediting body.

Our educational mission as Sacred Heart Schools is articulated in the Goals and Criteria. These principles inform our independence as educators who define Catholic education in light of Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat's charism and the spirit of the Society of the Sacred Heart. As stewards of the Goals and Criteria, Sacred Heart boards of trustees work in concert with the Society of the Sacred Heart to ensure mission integrity. This exercise of mission stewardship is both a process and a relationship of mutual trust and respect through which the essential mission of Sacred Heart education is deepened.

While Schools of the Sacred Heart share the same mission and fundamental aspects of culture, derived from a shared three-dimensional identity, each Sacred Heart school has its own size, structure, history, culture challenges and vision for its future. It is the responsibility of the individual board of trustees working in partnership with school leadership to ensure continuity of vision and mission, the best educational climate for today's students and the sustainability of the school for future generations.

## The Sacred Heart Dimension of Our Identity:

Sacred Heart Schools are Catholic ~~independent~~ learning communities animated from their origins in the Society of the Sacred Heart. Our philosophy of education finds its inspiration in the vision of Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat who saw education as the primary means to communicate and reveal the love of the Heart of Jesus. Sacred Heart Schools educate from the perspective of Christ's Heart by creating cultures defined by a commitment to form relationships that are the means to experience the love of God. Within this communion, all encounter Christ. Whether in the classroom, on the athletic field, or in the chapel, our students learn to think and act according to the mind and attitudes of Christ's Heart. It is within this grace-filled atmosphere that our students are challenged to achieve their full potential as human beings impelled to act on behalf of others.

Sacred Heart Schools form young people on a path towards transformation and hope by providing an effective education and the formation of character. For Sacred Heart educators this cultivation of virtues is informed by the charism of the Society and the values articulated in the Goals and Criteria. Nothing short of excellence will ensure that the members of learning communities develop an informed, active faith, critical thinking and service to others.

Rooted in Catholic theology and philosophy, Sacred Heart Schools are called to be communities in which students are respected as integral persons. Students are helped to develop a multiplicity of skills that enrich the human person, such as creativity, reflection, imagination, and interiority. Their education cultivates the aptitudes to take on responsibilities such as loving the world, cherishing justice and acting with compassion. Faithful to the inspiration of Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat, the Society, and Catholic theology and philosophy, Sacred Heart learning communities share the desire to help children and young people become ever more aware of the truth, of love and of freedom as they discover the significance of their lives, and devote themselves to others. 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.

[3] The responsibility to ensure Catholic identity belongs to the leadership of the Society of Sacred Heart United States - Canada Province, the boards of trustees, and to the diocesan bishop of the diocese/ archdiocese. Boards and heads of schools need to understand both the bishop's authority to exercise his teaching and pastoral ministry and the Society's obligation to oversee the mission according to the charism of the Society. Each school is accountable to the provincial for carrying out all of the *Goals and Criteria* including the Foundational Principles and to the diocesan bishop for maintaining communion with the Church. Both roles are essential to the mission and Catholic identity of Sacred Heart Schools.

## Our Three-Dimensional Identity is Our Framework:

Sacred Heart Schools then enjoy three dimensions of our identity as educational institutions. In being Catholic - independent - Sacred Heart, our schools are responding from the depths of Saint Madeleine Sophie's vision to the emerging future. At the center of our response remain the students and their education. These dimensions to our identity create our framework as institutions. The nature of being Catholic - independent - Sacred Heart creates a synergy for the Sacred Heart Schools in our work on behalf of children and young people of all faiths.

Our identity is both rich in opportunity and complex in challenge. Sometimes one dimension can seem at odds with the other dimensions. Due to the current rate of change facing our world, schools are facing conundrums for which there are no pre-established blueprints for resolution. At such moments, living our identity as Sacred Heart Schools with integrity calls all to exercise the principles of discernment guided by the Goals and Criteria including the Foundational Principles, Saint Madeleine Sophie's charism, the spirit of the Society of the Sacred Heart, and the Church's teachings. This is the time for us to act from the conviction that there is a genuine efficacious value to dialogue and collaboration among those who form the communities representing our three dimensional identity. This foundation of mutual respectful relationships coupled with discernment provides a sound context to search for the common good while being true to vision of Sacred Heart education.[4]

From the very start, those who came before us realized that values taken for granted or left unarticulated can become inoperative. Patterns ofleadership in governance, the make-up of faculties and student bodies have changed rapidly. We continue as schools to feel the characteristic pressures and strains connected to change and complexity. Sacred Heart Schools no matter our geography enjoy a strong unity rooted in a shared mission. Every Sacred Heart school finds the strength of belonging to the larger whole, of sharing principles and values, broad purposes, hopes and ambitions.[5]

In the midst of today's complexity, the Goals and Criteria provide Sacred Heart Schools with a prophetic orientation that leads 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.[6]

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4 *Principles and Practices for Governance and Leadership in Sacred Heart Schools* (Washington, DC: Conference of Sacred Heart Education, 2017).
5 Preamble, *Goals and Criteria* (St. Louis: Society of the Sacred Heart, 1975).
6 Final Paragraph of Introduction, *Goals and Criteria* (St. Louis: Society of the Sacred Heart, 2005).

# Structural Implication of Identity

Schools of the Sacred Heart share in the mission of the Society of the Sacred Heart to reveal God's love in the world. 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 in France. In a time of complexity, change and uncertainty, Sophie responded from the depths of her relationship with Jesus Christ whose love was so deeply a reality to her that the Spirit remained infused in all she did. It is from this love and spirit that she received and developed her vision of education. She believed the service of education was the primary means by which the Society would carry on its mission of communicating the love of the Heart of Jesus. For her education was never an end in itself. Rather it served as the means for educators and students to come to know and experience God's love.

Faithful to her inspiration and openness to new situations, Sacred Heart educators share Sophie's desire to help people become ever more aware of truth, love and freedom as they discover the significance of their lives, and devote themselves to others (1982 Constitutions of the Society of the Sacred Heart). In the Goals and Criteria, the Society of the Sacred Heart defines the mission of the school as part of the Society's educational mission within the Catholic Church. The Goals and Criteria capture the principles of Catholic education infused by Saint Madeleine Sophie's charism and the spirit of the Society of the Sacred Heart.

The Society of the Sacred Heart, United States Canada Province, entrusts the governance and administration of the schools to local boards of trustees and administrators. Through sponsorship, which is both a process and a relationship of mutual trust and respect, the essential mission of Sacred Heart education to reveal God's love in the world is deepened. The board of trustees holds in trust the Sacred Heart and Catholic identity of the school, is accountable to the Society through the Sacred Heart Commission on Goals for adherence to the mission, and in partnership with the head of school establishes and implements policies and plans consistent with the Goals and Criteria and the individual school's vision and strategic goals.

## Catholic Identity

The Society of the Sacred Heart, United States Canada Province, states clearly in the Goals and Criteria that we carry out our mission on behalf of the Church and through the lens of the Heart of Christ. As the sponsor and canonical steward of the Schools of the Sacred Heart, the Society oversees the mission and ensures the Catholic identity of the schools.

True as well is that each school is a local entity and exists in a specific context within a specific diocese. While the province is multi-national and the Society as a whole is international in its scope, each Sacred Heart school is accountable to the local

bishop, as he exercises his oversight of the works within his diocese (Canon 678). The interpretation of what it means to be Catholic and the criteria by which local bishops define Catholicity may differ from diocese to diocese.

The responsibility to ensure Catholic identity belongs to the leadership of the Society USC Province, the boards of trustees as Stewards of Mission, to the diocesan bishop as the Pastoral Leader of the diocese/ archdiocese. Boards and heads of schools need to understand both the bishop's authority to exercise his teaching and pastoral ministry and the Society's obligation to oversee the mission according to the charism of the Society. Each school is accountable to the provincial for carrying out all of the Goals and Criteria including the Foundational Principles and to the diocesan bishop for maintaining communion with the Church. Both roles are essential to the mission and Catholic identity of Sacred Heart schools.

## Structural Relationships with the Society of the Sacred Heart and the Catholic Church

As Catholic schools, Schools of the Sacred Heart participate in structural relationships with both the USC Province of the Society of the Sacred Heart and the Catholic Church. Given today's complexity, change and uncertainty, Sacred Heart schools may find themselves caught in dilemmas resulting from different perspectives on some church teachings, which lead to conflict. At such moments school leaders need to exercise the principles of discernment guided by the Goals and Criteria including the Foundational Principles, Saint Madeleine Sophie's charism, the spirit of the Society of the Sacred Heart, and the Church's teachings. Representing the Provincial of the USC Province of the Society of the Sacred Heart, the Head of Conference works with school leaders during such moments of discernment.

In the spirit of Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat, Schools of the Sacred Heart attend to relationships. Dialogue and communion are sacred practices within the culture of our schools and the Society of the Sacred Heart. So, too, communion is a fundamental strength of the Church. Recognizing that there is a genuine efficacious value to dialogue and collaboration, Sacred Heart school leaders are committed to engaging in relationships with both the leaders of the Society and of the local diocese.

This foundation of mutual respectful relationships provides a sound context to search for the common good.

In the process of discernment and dialogue, the province and its leaders remain responsible to assist the school in living mission. The Province provides this support through the Conference and its work in the areas of education to mission, accountability for mission and governance for mission.
School leaders work collaboratively with the Conference in on-going formation to mission. As the delegate of the Provincial, the Head of Conference facilitates this collaboration and serves as the primary liaison for school leaders with regard to the relationship with the Society of the Sacred Heart.



SACRED HEART EDUCATION