Educational endeavors after Vatican II

A:

From its inception, the main ministry of the Society of the Sacred Heart has been education, originally of girls, through schools for the middle and upper class families, as well as through educative programs for girls from the lower class. Saint Madeleine Sophie, foundress, felt that educating women would bring about change in the family and therefore in society.

B.

With the openness of Vatican II, I felt called to move out of our (the Society’s) institutions in order to work in schools that were addressing: the inequality of American education – in particular quality education for the poor and marginalized; openness to broader than Catholic religious values; new approaches to education; desire to work outside the “cloistered” world of the congregation. I worked in the Society’s sponsored school which was open spaced and ecumenical and open to all class levels ; in all African American private, as well as, archdiocesan schools; in an all-male technical high school; with Catholic Charities in their family shelter system setting up a program for the children not in school; in an all girls’ high school situated in a gang ridden area taking on the principalship because another religious congregation did not have anyone who could do this.

C.

The message of Vatican II freed, unlocked, the desires of many rscj educators allowing them to act on a broadened idea of our “ministry of education and making known the love of our God,” so they often initiated programs, even schools, for people who were on the margins bringing to bear all that they had received in their education.

D.

The calls of JPIC from the Council beckoned people to recognize the humanity of all persons and the fragility of all creation. Religious responded to these calls by working: in the inner cities; with marginalized communities in rural Florida; with persons who lived with disabilities; with single mothers ostracized and isolated; with new modalities of learning – music, projects, experiences with reflection; etc.

E.

When Vatican II pushed religious congregations to chose whether they were going to be active or contemplative congregations, it was difficult and it was freeing. We gained freedom to bring our charism, not just to people like ourselves but to those whose lives called out to us to walk with them. It is still a struggle for our membership to recognize where we remain “cloistered” and to take steps to, in many different ways, learn from so many of our brothers and sisters who have different life experiences from us. Our educational mission stopped being schools and became more inclusive. (Chapter Recommendations: We are called to live our service of education as a process of humanization, rooted in the Gospel and in educational intuitions of Madeleine Sophie. An education that humanizes is relational and inclusive. This education fosters a critical vision of the world. This orientation marks our mission at all stages of life, looking increasingly to be present in the peripheries and where life cries out.