With the heart of an educator

The Society of the Sacred Heart

present among migrants and refugees

A reflection by

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of Catholic Women Religious in Migrant Education

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**Introduction**

I am honored and humbled by the invitation to participate in this Symposium. The topic is very close to my heart: the response of my Congregation, the Society of the Sacred Heart, to the education of migrants and refugees. I come conscious that I am “standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before us”, as a song says. I stand on the shoulders of so many of my sisters who have ministered, or are currently ministering, to refugees and migrants, especially of those who have shared with me reflections and experiences about their presence with the heart of an educator among “peoples on the move”.

This presentation is not just about my personal experience, meaningful though it is. It is about our Congregation and its multifaceted response I am deeply grateful to those who have contributed their stories. So many RSCJ answered the request for life experiences and reflections on their ministry to migrants and refugees. Several mentioned the joy and gratitude they experienced as they remembered and reflected. Another source of joy is that some of my sisters, among them Florence with whom I served in a refugee camp in Uganda, are here today. “Conscious that what we do, we do together”…, remind us our Constitutions (11). It is from this conviction that I am able to offer this reflection. I regret that I cannot do full justice to the riches contained in Congregational documents, articles from RSCJ websites, publications, and, above all, accounts of ministries and life experiences – but they are here, and we are surrounded by words and faces of some of the persons mentioned in the presentation.

Our Congregation was born at the end of the eighteenth century, in the wake of the turmoil of political revolution, fiery anticlericalism, and painful loss of values. I am here as a Religious of the Sacred Heart, daughter of Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat, a woman who responded with courage and vision to the signs of the times in which she lived, and who traced a way to “discover and manifest God’s love” as an answer to the call received in prayer, in contemplation of the open, pierced Heart of Jesus.

Sophie was passionately in love with Jesus. For her, to speak about the Heart was to speak about the person of Jesus: His love, His desires, His attitudes, His feelings, His preferences, His relationships. It was through His Heart that she looked at the needs of the world: an open Heart, home to a wounded world. The Heart of Jesus was for her, is for us, symbol of God’s love lavishly poured out, constantly, without bounds, on everyone. The desire to communicate the reality of the love of Jesus to others and to lead them to experience this love in a personal way became the driving force of her life.

What was Sophie’s intuition, and how did it translate into the charism of the Society of the Sacred Heart? Sophie wanted her life and that of her companions to be a hymn of praise to God’s glory. And what is this glory? Persons who are fully alive, alive in all dimensions. Sophie was painfully aware that the world in which she lived was “rent by sin”, that God’s glory could not shine through in the turmoil of her times. A fabric which had been severely damaged needed to be mended so that God’s glory may shine forth. The means to repair this fabric, for Sophie, entailed first of all the righting of relationships: with self, with others, with God. Sophie understood that the privileged means to bring this about was education. In her thought, not only instruction of superior quality and which encompassed the whole person - artistic, rational, and humanistic – must be offered, but much more than that. Education, *e-ducare*, according to its root, seeks to enable persons to draw from their own wells.

When as RSCJ we speak of our charism, we say in few words that it is “to make known the love of God”. Is this not the Gospel message, the call of every Christian? Yes, but for us the charism embodies the making known of God’s *love through the service of education*. Today, RSCJ throughout the world, faithful to our charism and to Sophie’s insights want to respond in various ways to the cry and needs of those whom we serve - refugees, migrants, displaced persons - as women who are present with the heart of an educator, “wherever we are sent”. We have no “migrants ‘project” as such, nor blueprints for the education of refugees. In every province we seek to be present in the world of “peoples on the move” in answer to the signs of the times, to local need, the needs of the Church, and to the calls of our Constitutions, of recent Chapters and of international gatherings of the Congregation.

Sophie did not start with a blueprint that would transform her intuition into reality. She sought, with others, for the way to shape the Congregation that was beginning, and its mission, which flowed from the open Heart of Jesus. The original Constitutions of 1815 list the four means to “mend the fabric” of society and give God glory:

* The education of children as boarders.
* The free instruction of poor children as day-pupils.
* Retreats offered to persons living in the world.
* Such contacts with people outside our communities as spring from its work.

St. Madeline Sophie exhorted her daughters to remain faithful to the original inspiration but to change with the times, according to new insights and urgent calls. Thus the voice of Vatican II did not go unheeded, nor were the new windows opened by St. John XXIII disregarded. Many RSCJ did not hesitate to move from the cloistered halls of schools and academies to the bustle of cities, barrios and migrant camps. They put aside the habit, the dress of Burgundian widows of the 19th century and opted for contemporary dress, which in many cases eased the path to relationships. Both steps had tremendous impact on the scope and quality of the presence of RSCJ in their mission and ministry – as well as some negative repercussions, of course.

The document of the Chapter of 1976,” encourages RSCJ: “Caught up ourselves in a world which is unjust and dehumanizing, we feel the need to “embrace every means in our power” (referring to Const. 1815, 10) to proclaim the Father’s love.

How have we RSCJ responded since to this call to embrace “every means in our power”, in faithfulness to our charism and to Sophie’s inspiration? The following paragraphs from our Revised Constitutions of 1982 express it forcefully and succinctly:

We are sent by the Church

to communicate the love of the Heart of Jesus.

In Him all find their true growth as persons

and the way towards reconciliation with one another.

This we believe; this we want to proclaim. (10)

Saint Madeleine Sophie chose to express this conviction

through the service of education, especially of the young.

Faithful to her inspiration, and, like her, open to new situations, we make her desire our own:

* that people become ever more aware of truth, of love and of freedom
* that they discover the significance of their lives, and devote themselves to others
* that they take part creatively in the common effort to transform the world
* that they be enabled to encounter the love of Jesus
* that they let their lives be shaped by an active faith. (11)

Conscious that what we do, we do together,

and remembering a tradition

marked by a love for young people and missionary spirit,

we, sent by our superiors, carry out

this service of education:

* especially in the work of teaching and formation
* in other activities for human development and the promotion of justice
* in pastoral work and guidance in the faith.

Wherever we are sent, whatever our work may be,

our lives will be inspired by the love of the Heart of Jesus

and the desire of making Him known, expressed in:

* a concern for the growth of the whole person
* a thirst for working towards justice and peace in the world

in response to the cry of the poor

- a passion to proclaim the Gospel. (13)

A subsequent document, “Education: A Commitment”, is crucial in order to understand a more contemporary vision of education as lived in the Society of the Sacred Heart. It was drawn up in 1988 by an International Commission, after an in depth consultation about the educative praxis in all the provinces. In the section “Education as we describe it today”, we read:

(These paragraphs are an) “attempt to describe (what) are essential elements of a process of education. There is little reference to the formal or non-formal, to a methodology for adults or children, to an approach for a structured setting or for an informal presence. Rather, all these are included in understanding education in its broad sense, which is clearly seen as the way to live our RSCJ mission and charism today. There is a recognition that every relationship is formative in some way, and that education takes place throughout life.

#### Relationship “emerges as a key element. It implies … an ambiance of love, respect and confidence that fosters growth, recognizing the value and dignity of each person. It is the forming and organization of relationships that leads to the growth of persons and communities. It is again through relationships that we experience and communicate the love of God in our lives.

The different words used to describe the relationships one enters into as educator, imply different attitudes and activities:

• guiding and animating, which suggest a helping, supportive being with as well as the action of stimulating and promoting growth;

• giving and receiving, which suggest a mutuality, a partnership and dialogue as well as an action of searching with, striving together, collaborating in building each other and community,

• a catalytic presence, hidden and unobtrusive, that suggests an attitude of appreciation and calls for the assuming of the values and life-style of the other, as well as entering into their dreams and plans of self-realization and progress.”

*Integral growth* is the second essential “For all, it includes the bringing to full realization the totality of human capacities and potential. For many, integral growth also refers to the growth that takes place from within the person and therefore requires that the person take responsibility for her own sustained growth and integration.

Many provinces… affirm that education and growth can only take place in community, as the person is integrally related to the group. In situations of alienation and oppression, of dehumanization and deprivation, the interrelatedness of the person and the group is even clearer. The recognition of one’s dignity, one’s own self-acceptance and liberation, all become part of a people’s struggle to free themselves and to build community and solidarity.

#### Spiritual dimension**:** Finally, full realization of the human implies the spiritual dimension, another essential element. The basis of human dignity and the call to growth is the discovery and experience of God’s loving, creative presence in one’s life. The full response to this call is one’s commitment to the transformation of society into the Kingdom.

*Discerning community*: As RSCJ educators, our vocation is experienced as taking place in the whole of our life. It is rooted in and sustained by our life of prayer in a discerning community. Here we experience the exigency to grow and allow ourselves to be transformed from within; to become more sensitive to the human reality, especially suffering; to be more truly ourselves in relating to others, helping others to be more themselves.

As educators, our lives witness our true values, and so we describe often in the reports the need to be more coherent in the way we live, to be able to communicate with people in ways that they will understand. Thus our concept of community has widened, and we see the need to live inserted among the people and more in solidarity with them. We have become more sensitive to the reality of the world, and this in turn has revealed to us the deeper meaning of our vocation and its radical demands.

Thus our educative vocation has led us, everywhere in the Society, to commit ourselves with others to build a more just world of brothers and sisters. It is this commitment that has led us to make options, and to take our stand with the poor, the weak, the marginalized and the oppressed. Gradually this option for the poor is shaping our other apostolic commitments.” “(p. 66)

The Constitutions and “Education: A Commitment”, are two documents which describe the presence of our sisters among “peoples on the move” with the heart of an educator. They put forth reasons why the response of the Society is so multifaceted, why it has changed its mode of expression over the years while retaining the essential traits of our charism and of Sophie’s intuition, why this presence bears a “family identity”.

The presence of RSCJ among “peoples on the move” with the heart of an educator responds to these statements, which illustrate why the response of the Society is multifaceted, why it has changed its mode of expression over the years while retaining the essential traits of our charism and of Sophie’s intuition, why this presence is marked by a “family identity”.

Sophie’s inspiration, the calls of the Constitutions, the summary of our experience of education today: how do we live these concretely in today’s world, at the service of peoples on the move? “Using examples from your congregation’s history, please explain how the charism has been embodied in educational theory and/or practice and how this has informed educating migrants.” At first, I thought the task would be easy, given the wealth of material at hand. But, on reflection, it soon became evident that it was not possible to take to take just one experience, one paragraph, one ministry, as an illustration of a line of inspiration. An attempt to do this led to frustration. I found many rich threads, threads which intertwine. A dilemma: “Where does article, this experience, belong? Women? Collaboration? Centers for Migrants? All? Some threads do have more than one color! I reflected: Is this not what repairing the fabric is all about, paying attention to the threads, to the colors of threads, to the way they intertwine, just as persons and situations interact and form a new tapestry? So I use the image of a weaving as a framework for this presentation.

I want to add that I use the term “migrants” to refer to “peoples on the move”, regardless of the motivation for their displacement, and “education” in its broadest sense.

Let us then weave some of these threads!

The first threads come from the concrete places where RSCJ live their mission: the **WHERE**? We are present with the heart of an educator in projects of formal education, in our schools, in communities inserted in immigrant contexts, in physical and spiritual peripheries, in centers for migrants, in law offices and legal milieux.

Involvement in **projects of formal education**.

Several RSCJ have been involved in formal education programs in refugee camps, working hand in hand, in most cases, with Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). The priority in the camps is to provide a learning environment, be it a tree or a tent, in situations where a school with walls and a roof was not even a remote possibility. Education is a sign of hope, not only for children and their teachers. It reaches out to parents, communities, and engages all in a process that - hopefully - will contribute to the return to and the rebuilding of the countries of origin.

How did we RSCJ engage in this process? In most instances we did not teach the refugee children ourselves. The on-going formation of refugee educators has been an essential component of each project. Our aim was to empower refugee teachers, by organizing workshops and training sessions that would enable them to become competent teachers and gain skills that they could take back to their countries on repatriation. Teachers often came from situations where war had disrupted the educational system, where there had been no teacher formation for the duration of civil strife. “We remember how we were taught, and we do the same”, are words that we heard very often in our programs. Once I asked a teacher what materials he used for lesson preparations. “Sister”, he said pointing to his head, “I use all that I brought with me. It is all that I could carry.” Most of the teachers were young men, very few women, so it was crucial to give them skills that could assure a future.

An RSCJ from Australia in the Burmese Refugee Education Program in Damak, Nepal, as well as Florence and I in Rhino Camp Settlement in Uganda were very mindful of our responsibility for teacher formation. This entailed a twofold approach: visits, many visits, daily visits to the classrooms – relationships - and the provision of workshops on both methodology and content (subject matter) of teaching.

The *importance of the multiplying factor has* always been a trademark of our mission*,* and thusat the forefront of our planning. In Africa many of our young sisters had their own baptism of fire teaching 100 children in one small, poorly lit room with a few tables and no books. They were able to empathize with refugee teachers who worked in difficult circumstances. Several Ugandan RSCJ responded to the invitation to “give what they had received” (report to Chapter 2008, Province of Uganda -Kenya) when invited to the camps to conduct workshops. One of the sisters writes: “Urged on by this same love (as Sophie had), I was well prepared to go with materials I had made in order to share with refugees, exposing them to them methods of teaching. They were educated, but needed to know the methodology of teaching used in the Ugandan schools … I am sure I gave them tools so that when they went back to their own country they could continue teaching others. This is what we mean by passing on our educational heritage to those whom we serve, in a concrete way….”

In the years that I served as Education Resource Person for Africa for JRS, mine was indeed a multifaceted task. In this capacity, I visited JRS education teams in the field, concretely, in 17 countries in Africa and two in Asia. The visit could be for a consultation, an evaluation, to conduct a workshop, to come for a time of reflection, or simply, to share together as fellow educators. I assisted regional and country directors and teams with evaluations of projects, reflection, planning, staffing. Sometimes I facilitated meetings of JRS education personnel, putting them in contact with each other and encouraging the exchange of ideas and materials. I set up a Resource Base for Refugee Education, where materials generated in the field or useful in the projects were collected and put at the service of field personnel. For seven wonderful years I had daily opportunities to give flesh to the paragraphs I quoted earlier and which gave – and give – me such life. I could give dozens of examples for each….

A very important and specific aspect of formal education that will come up in other contexts is that of learning a language. This activity is crucial for immigrants and refugees. “To be called to live interculturality is to sensitize ourselves to the significance of language in the life of each person and each culture. Language is more than words. It is a complex of signs, of which words are only one kind, that shape our identities”, reflects the document of Chapter 2000. p.34.

The guidelines for this presentation include, among others, mention of:

*The choice of curriculum*: In situations of displacement this decision rests ultimately with the Ministry of Education of the host country. In some cases this meant that teachers had to be exposed to the curriculum of the country, as was the case in Uganda and Kenya. In neighboring Tanzania it was expressly forbidden to use the national curriculum in the education of Rwandese refugees. In all cases, it was necessary to provide the books to be used as well as to offer training in their use to the teachers. It was important for us to show how to implement a given curriculum in a manner that was flexible and culturally sensitive. We took care that young children learn the history of their own country, as well as acquiring some literacy in their mother tongue. It was not always possible to fit in all these “extras” into a very full school day….but we tried!

*Dealing with inappropriate behavior*: In our original Constitutions we read that the religious in charge of the children “shall be as mothers”. The sisters were to treat the children in their care as such. No physical punishment was to be administered, ever. On the contrary: “She shall be liberal in rewarding, and no less firm when she is obliged to punish. She shall do so then with as much impressive circumstance as is necessary, although mildness must always predominate over severity.” (Rules of the Mistress General of the Boarding School, XII) “In punishing…they must never allow themselves to strike any of the children…but they must be careful to proportion the punishment to the fault…” (Rules of the Mistress of Class XVI)

Firmly convinced of the wisdom of these words, as RSCJ we tried to propose an alternative stance to teachers whose culture did not only condone but actively encouraged physical punishment. An instance of the fruit of this effort happened in the pre-school program in Lukole, Tanzania, where JRS education trainers insisted on discipline. No sticks in the hands of the teachers! *“Beat the drum, not the child!”, a slogan* borrowed from a campaign on children’s rights, were words often repeated – and heeded.Workshops were conducted on how to instill discipline without recourse to beating, insisting as well on the negative effects of corporal punishment on children, physically, psychologically and emotionally. Teachers also worked on finding alternative punishments.

In Lukole, “Four Rules of Behavior” were agreed on and displayed in each classroom. Simple illustrations reminded the children of the conduct expected from them. It was with deep satisfaction that we saw them in practice:

* I raise my hand before speaking
* I respect other persons, my surroundings, and the school materials
* I remain peacefully in my place during class
* I ask for permission before leaving my class or the school compound.

A seed …which hopefully these children carried home on their return to Rwanda.

*Peace Education:* Concretely, RSCJ worked with JRS, UNCHR, UNICEF and other organizations on designing programs for Peace Education that could be adapted to various situations of peoples on the move. In Uganda I worked with JRS in drawing up its own version of the program, based on Gospel values.

The Chapter of 1994 issued a call ‘to nurture life by educating to reconciliation”. In the concluding document we read:

we are called to respond with a new urgency

to the most pressing needs of our world

as educators:

women of communion,

women of compassion,

women of reconciliation*.*

We will hear throughout the presentation how this attitude has permeated our stance as educators, and how education for peace and reconciliation has – sometimes explicitly, more often not – been an underpinning both of programs offered to migrants and refugees, and of the attitudes of collaboration and respect so valued in our activities.

We live our call as educators **in our Schools,** of course! But are they at the service of migrants and refugees, and not just of a chosen constituency? As a Congregation directly involved in the direction – both spiritual and academic – of schools throughout the globe, we welcome migrant and refugee students into the schools and offer opportunities to the larger school community to be educated about and involved in positive actions on behalf of students who come from situations of displacement.

An RSCJ from Australia writes: “The school’s work with migrants happens largely through the community engagement programs organized for our students. Since the arrival of large numbers of refugees to Australia in recent years, the main focus is on settling and integrating them into the community. Inspired by our desire to “Build Community as a Christian Value” (Goal 4), we have been able to offer temporary housing on the school property to a refugee family and provide a permanent job for the mother, a single parent. We have also given a scholarship to a Muslim student to complete her education here at Stuartholme when she was no longer eligible to attend a State School. Staff and students have been able to attend demonstrations in support of refugees whose residency in Australia is threatened by our Government Policies. Signing petitions and raising funds for programs that help migrants is another aspect of the school’s outreach.”

Describing her experience, an RSCJ from England writes: “I was the Head Teacher of Sacred Heart Primary School in Newcastle from 1980 – 2000. I was not there to experience the present day influx of refugees but during my time was able to admit to the school child refugees fleeing from other conflict areas. In the early 1980s we took in Lin, and a year later her brother when he was old enough. They were part of the contingent of Vietnamese ‘boat people’ who arrived unannounced on the North East Coast. It was difficult to determine Lin’s age accurately as neither she nor her parents had a word of English, or to discover whether she had ever been to school before. She was welcomed by the teacher and the children in the spirit of our school’s mission statement (and the Society’s charism), that each child is unique and loved by God and deserving of our love, care and effort to ensure that each would be able to achieve his/ her full potential. Such was the dedication of the teacher and help of the other children that by the end of her first term she was able to read and write in simple English. She was fluent by the end of the year and within a few years it became obvious that she was a bright, happy and intelligent girl with real leadership potential. She became a real asset to the school, as did her brother.

The following reflection comes from a Japanese RSCJ: I would like to introduce “SOFIS” network activity in which I have been involved for about 20 years. SOFIS consists of 5 Sacred Heart High School students, and they work for the promotion of social justice issues in each school. They hold a workshop once a year in which 5 representatives from each school get together to talk about the specific issue of each year. Our students were very concerned about the issue of “Refugees,” as it is very serious and urgent in modern world. They feel sorry that Japan has accepted very few refugees, and they try to know the reason why it is so difficult for Japan to accept people from outside. In the workshop they have presentations, and discussions. They listen to talks by people who were registered as Refugees and who stay in Japan. They go to the UNHCR office or to some NGOs to learn about the actual situation. When they go back to their own school, they share with the students what they learned and plan an activity they can promote in the school.

A paragraph from the Constitutions, No.7, describes what Japanese RSCJ have been trying to live: “We participate in the mission of the Church through the service of education which is our way of continuing the work of Christ. Our starting point is the Gospel with all that it demands from us of love, forgiveness, and justice, and of solidarity with those who are poor and rejected by the world.”

In Uganda, some students and faculty members from Kyamusansala Primary School travelled to Sango Bay Camp in order to learn first-hand about the situation of thousands of Ugandans who have been deported from Tanzania for residing there illegally and who face a harsh and uncertain future. The living conditions were an eye opener for the visitors, who returned home with questions which hopefully they will take time to reflect on and to

An RSCJ from Spain writes about the school where she ministered until recently. She tells us that “the school of Besòs is situated in the north of Barcelona. When it was founded, it welcomed a population made of families who had migrated internally in the peninsula, and a good number of ethnic gypsies. Over the years many immigrant families have come from other countries. Actually, they make up 30% of the student body, which today numbers more than 600 students.

The commitment of this institution is to educate to interreligious, inter-ethnic, inter-cultural coexistence. We live together, Christians, Catholics, Evangelicals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Hindus, Siks, Moslems…So, as far as religion classes go, we have opted to offer “religious culture”, in which different confessions are studied in turn. This coexistence is extraordinary, and the involvement of the tutors, of great importance, above all with regards to dialogue with families and students. With time more students have come from abroad: Pakistan, India, China, Latin America, Morocco, Africa…without breaking the harmony. (Peace education in action!)

Some RSCJ lived **in communities among migrants.** Theydescribe their presence as that of educators, present “in the heart of life”, with the thoughts and attitudes of the Heart of Jesus.

“At a time when the integral development of persons is a task of prime importance, we reaffirm our mission as educators in the service of the Church. Facing the future, we are responsible for living out this mission creatively. … To contemplate his Heart we have no need to turn away from this earth, the home of God made man. Christ is present, hidden in the heart of the world”, from Chapter 1976.

Since then, and for years afterwards, many RSCJ have opted to live in communities inserted in immigrant milieux. These communities bring another thread to the tapestry, a thread of many hues. The witness of these women who have chosen to “pitch their tent” among displaced persons speaks about a strength that goes beyond that of an individual presence and points to community as a core value of human beings. Each community, each situation has its own cachet. Sisters who form, or formed, part of communities inserted in immigrant realtities, describe their experiences:

“I was part of a project of Caritas in an intercongregational community in Madrid. We lived in a building with 60 families of immigrants. The integration of a religious community in the team responsible for social support the residential complex was part of the project from its beginning. …The neighborhood is at the same time gift and a task. It means, simultaneously, to practice the ‘ministry of the Visitation’, to take advantage of situations of being near, to favor the network of relationships, to welcome initiatives which create community, to learn to collaborate and to overcome the temptation to paternalism.”

In the United States, the plight of migrants from Central America working in the fields of Florida did not go unheeded: “Our foundation in Indiantown really began in 1973 when, struck by the phrase, “building communities in the heart of the world,” in the 1970 Chapter documents I felt a strong call to leave our institutions of formal education and to insert myself in “the world.”… By the spring of 1978 we decided we would like to go to Florida to work with the migrant farmworkers. Our reasoning: 1) they and the Native American peoples were the most disadvantaged people in the US and 2) the province wanted to have a ministry in Florida that would “complement” our school in Miami whose population was mostly children from wealthy families, some of them from the same countries as the farmworkers.”

Another community of RSCJ lived among migrants in LaBelle, Fla, from 1979 to 2004. The sisters worked closely with the Parish, serving as DRE, visiting camps and hospitals, preparing children for the sacraments and of adults through RCIA. The scope of activities expanded. Students from Creighton University came to work with the migrants and expand their education of rural life. An RSCJ ”quickly involved herself in the Hispanic community by visiting the jail, migrant parish families, hospitals, the Nursing Home, as wells as offering a Lenten Scripture Study. (The Society of the Sacred Heart in LaBelle 1979 - 2004) The mission eventually closed, not because there was not a viable ministry, but because sisters were aging and no longer able to carry on the work. But a recent visit to the website of the parish church, Our Lady Queen of Heaven, gives evidence that there is a vibrant community engaged, today, in various ministries and services. “Unless the grain die….”

Also in the ‘70s, a community was established in Cologne, Germany, formed by sisters from Spain and Germany. The RSCJ opened a residence for young immigrant women who were being trained for diverse employments. When they found a job, they had to leave the residence so that the place could be given to another young woman. The sisters also welcomed children, both immigrant and German, to an after school program where they could have a meal, study and play, recounts one of the members of the community.

The RSCJ in Canada have a long tradition of welcoming refugees. One RSCJ lived for a number of years in Romero House, Toronto, where she was “house mother” to a truly international family.

A sister from Spain describes her life in a neighborhood of Barcelona: “My service to immigrants is my life of each day. I have lived in this *barrio* for more than 30 years, but it seems that I am the foreigner. It is part of the Old Town, where poverty and marginalization have accumulated. All cultures are mixed here, those with papers and the undocumented, those with work and the unemployed. They come from all corners of the world, thus the task is to form a community that is cohesive. The starting point is respect for each other, welcoming each other in who we are as persons called to a life that is full and with dignity.

I live with persons from 65 nationalities. Many of them have come here because of need or having to flee war or persecution. May have been here for years; it is the second generation that now lives in the neighborhood. Others have arrived recently. Each person comes with a heritage and a dream. What matters is to listen to each person in his/her totality in order to accompany him or her in the search.

mmar and adequate vocabulary. “ Rebecca Loukae) ards foregner.It is in **Centers for Migrants** that the Society a visible face among peoples on the move. In Spain RSCJ are present five*centers for welcome and attention to migrants* spread across the peninsula. Some were started by RSCJ. In others, we collaborate with other congregations or organizations.

Common threads to all the centers: they are

* a place of welcome, a space where persons find a listening heart
* a place where orientation to a new country and skills to live in it are made accessible.
* a place of dialogue, where cultures meet and religions can speak with each other in a climate of respect and tolerance.
* a place of practical learning, of acquiring a language, skills in tailoring, in technology, in other occupations and disciplines.

Language learning and language teaching are activities carried out in all centers. For language is much more than the acquisition of correct grammar and adequate vocabulary. “Language is the key to integration, to living with others, to moving with relative ease in a new culture”, says an RSCJ who spent many years teaching Spanish in one of the centers.

Each Center has its own cachet. In the Center in Balos(Canary Islands) the sisters are often called when a “patera” arrives. They are the first friendly face that some migrants meet. This first contact is kept up through activities offered at the Center. The sisters describe some aspects of their work:

* We offer Spanish classes through “radio Ecca” (Emisora Cultural Canaria). It is important that those who come learn the language. The group is a wonderful mix of nationalities, creating a cultural richness and providing space for communication and friendship. We are attentive to the family spirit which so characterizes our educative centers.
* Those who come to the center can enroll in the programs of Radio Ecca over a number of years. Alongside with the learning of language, there are opportunities that foster personal growth.
* Classes provide an opportunity to go out of the home and relate to others. Some women come with their babies, this adds a touch of tenderness and loving care.

We rejoice to see that, women especially, become self-sufficient and can go by themselves to the doctor, to the children’s school etc.

* Each year we visit different places of the island so that their horizons be expanded and they know the culture of the place. At the end of the year certificates are awarded in a joyful celebration. (from the Power point presentation of the Center)

I seized the opportunity to visit Bantabá last summer. What a learning experience! I found out that the migrants who reach this region of Spainare, for the most part, men who come to work in the greenhouses in the province of Almeria. Many of them have succeed in bringing their wives across the strait. They “settle” with their families, but most go back and forth to Africa.

These migrants have recourse to a variety of offerings, other than language and math classes at the Center. By definition, Bantabá is a space where locals and migrants can get to know each other, tear down prejudices, coexist in a positive manner. The Center also provides opportunities for men and women to relate to each other in a manner that is culturally sensitive and open to the way of life of the host country.

Without papers, very little is possible for migrants, other than the issue of a health card in some locations. So the staff of Bantabá provide sessions that prepare immigrants to sit for the Certificate of Citizenship, and assist them in obtaining the proof of employment and of residence which are necessary in order to regularize their situation.

When I asked the three RSCJ on the team of Bantabá what they though Sophie would say about their project, one of them said: “Oh, what a beautiful project! I am coming to live here!” She would value our desire to be here, and to do it from the heart.” (from the interview)

The project of the “Centro de Integration de Inmigrates Sagrado Corazón de *Torrejón*”*,* starts with a line from our Constitutions: “We want people to grow in dignity, as human beings and as children of God. Our starting point is the Gospel with all that it demands from us of love, forgiveness and justice, and of solidarity with those who are poor and rejected by the world.” (7)

An RSCJ who works in the center (Leticia Thomas ESP) says: “Ours is a response to the cry of the disinherited of the earth. A simple response, limited, but of the best quality that we can offer, since we believe that the Church must be there where the wounds of the world are found. And, when we touch those wounds, we are closer to the wounds of Jesus.”

The migrants come to the center from all corners of the world. Moroccans (men and women in equal numbers), and persons from sub-Saharan Africa form the greatest number. There are many from Latin America, Eastern Europe…even unemployed Spaniards.

The sister continues: “The needs which we meet and which we seek to address are the basic ones of housing, clothes, food. But also as important, the need for legal orientation and juridical counsel, the need to learn the language, the need for work, the need to be recognized as persons, the need to be integrated into unknown surroundings, the need to keep one’s human and religious roots…

We cooperate with la Delegación Diocesana de Migraciones de Madrid, and with the City hall of Torrejón which facilitates meetings for all private and public entities which work on behalf of the marginalized.”

*INYALAPAS* an intercongregational project in Granada. The name is made up of the first letters for **IN**- serción **LA**- boral **Y A**- compañamiento **PAS**- toral. (work insertion and pastoral accompaniment)

“At first, the project was aimed at immigrant women but it was expanded to include men. We offered variety of workshops: Spanish cooking, care of elderly persons, computer, domestic sciences, and, as a base, Spanish language. Currently there are workshops to assist in obtaining citizenship papers, handcrafts, social kills, English. From the beginning, we have collaborated with other organizations, especially those concerned about the feminine aspect of migration, in order to provide legal counseling to immigrants in order to get their papers and obtain health benefits.

What characterizes our project is its educative character and what we call pastoral accompaniment, the personal relationship that we establish with each person, the integration of all those who co me to INYALAPAS as part of a large family, being at their side when they are hospitalized or need to go to a doctor … to be overtly persons of faith who are open to accompanying them in their search for faith… the follow up of each person. This accompaniment begins with the first welcome: make someone feel at home, show genuine interest for their situation, warm relationships, offer resources, invitations to be formed in workshops offered. Later on, during the course of the year, to have an intercultural and interreligious “family gathering”, or a cultural outing. We make the most of national feasts, theirs or ours, in order to exchange information, to celebrate, to dance, to pray together….”

In *Portugalete,* Vizcaya, the “Asociación Intercultural Porturaices” grew in our parish as a response to the call of the Bishops to the arrival of significant numbers of immigrants. One RSCJ has been working there for sixteen years. She describes the objectives as

“To WELCOME, not discriminating among countries, languages, beliefs, cultures

To INTEGRATE, doing and valuing what others offer from different cultures us in order to enrich one another, simply and with humility

To GIVE ROOTS, without losing one’s own.

The association has members from 26 countries. We meet twice a month for different activities of formation (for job searching), recreations, a small cooperative for services. Doctors, lawyers, teachers and other persons come and give talks and workshops”.

**Advocacy and legal work** may not seem, at first glance, to be educational endeavors. And may seem out of place in a presentation about the Society’s educational mission. However, RSCJ across provinces have combined their gift as educators with service to refugees and immigrants through work in the legal field. Some have done this through their formal training as lawyers. This service has been carried out mostly through organizations related to the Church, which advocate for the rights of migrants and refugees and offer tools and advice in order for immigrants to secure their rights and regularize their situations. Although the work of advocacy has taken on the shape of formal legal work, in offices and courtrooms, there were instances when advocacy “happened” on the ground, as was the case when two of us RSCJ lobbied, argued and pleaded with local governments and camp authorities for the right of Congolese refugees in Rwanda to education. And they got it!

Across the globe, in Germany, an RSCJ (Cornelia Bührle CEU) served as Delegate of the Archbishop of Berlin for Refugee and Migrant Issues. She says, “For me, educational work with migrants is less a matter of physical presence than of presence of the heart; the apostolate entrusted to me takes place in the world of politics. Joining in public discussions on the subject of foreigners, especially refugees, is a way of contributing to the education of the press and of forming public opinion. Exerting pressure against bills that make scapegoats of migrants increases the capacity of politicians to discern a situation. By speaking to Christians, especially those call themselves Catholic but whose conversation is full of political prejudice, this is an attempt to help them, grow in faith.” (From RSCJ 2000)

“I have worked as a volunteer with RAMP, the Refugee And Migrant Project in East London. This is a project that helped refugees obtain their papers and settle down in this country. I tried always to give them confidence and to help them with their problems write letters for then and gradually enable them to stand on their own feet. The two go hand in hand”. (M. Barrow ENW)

“I was part of an intercongregational project in a popular quarter of Madrid. My main task was to provide legal advice to immigrants, women, in majority”, says an RSCJ from Spain.

In each personal interview, my first task was to listen to the person’s expressed needs, and then to ask questions in order to clarify the situation further.

An important legal issue is documentation. It was necessary to see how to deal with each undocumented immigrant in order to obtain a residence and work permit, which are key to their economic and social rights and to live with dignity from their own work.

I tried to be very honest. It was very important to me that the interview give hope. I would present a path – short, medium, and long term – towards obtaining residency and work permits. I would include formation, language learning, workshops, and strategies to demonstrate their length of stay in Spain, how to get job offers, how to obtain documentation…. I was very careful not to create false expectations.” (Miren Lumbreras ESP

In 2004, the Society of the Sacred Heart obtained status as an NGO at the UN. The first Representative of the Society reflects on her experience: “As an international lawyer working on such a research paper (UN Draft on Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement) I have never felt that I was not a real RSCJ.  As a team of lawyers we had chosen a needs approach, in contrast to a rights approach, which meant that we looked at real life situations, trying to ascertain what the real needs of the IDPs are, and then looking at how international law protects them in that need (or not).  Needless to say, that that was not the usual approach of international lawyers and we encountered some real opposition.  But for me such a people-centered methodology made very much sense: where else to begin than with the people?  As this was my first 'policy' job, I was constantly aware of Sophie's saying, "For the sake of one child I would have founded the Society."   If my work on that UN project would only benefit one person by improving his/her life as an IDP, it would have proven to be worthwhile, (Cecile Meijer USC)

An RSCJ from Kenya describes her transformation from Head Teacher to tireless advocate for the right of refugee children to education in the country of asylum. “I worked in Kakuma refugee camp. My main ministry was advocating for the cause of refugees. The desire to work with them began when I was head teacher in a parish school for children from very poor families in Kibera informal settlement in Nairobi. I admitted a number of refugee students from Somalia and Sudan. Little did I know that refugee children needed special permission from UNHCR to be within the country and special process to join any school.

One afternoon, two police men in civilian clothes arrived to check if it was true that the school was admitting refugee children illegally. They found only one refugee high school student. Another one was sick so he was not in the school on that day. They arrested the one they found and took him to the police station. This student did not come back to school It was then that I learnt very concretely about the plight of refugees. I applied to Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). I was accepted and posted to Kakuma Refugee Camp where I worked three years, accompanying refugees and advocating for their rights to education.

As Education Coordinator for JRS, my work entailed managing the scholarship programme for primary, secondary, middle college, university and special needs refugee students. This scholarship also extended to vulnerable primary and secondary school girls with high protection risks in the camp. My specific responsibility was to network and advocate together with Lutheran World Federation and UNHCR staff for the above categories of students. I advocated­­­­­­ for the needs of the refugees, finding valid travel documents for the students, recruiting, enrolling and finding access for refugee students to Kenyan schools that would meet the needs of refugee children with different disabilities. I worked for their placement in boarding schools around the country.” (Margaret Mwarili UGK)

In the mid-80s the Society opened the SOFIA (Services Offered For Immigration Advocacy) Immigration Services in San Diego, California. Sofia was founded to assist Central American migrants, who were the first asylum seekers in the area. The organization offered low-cost and *pro bono* services to the immigrant community. The organization, small and flexible, could take the cases that fell between the cracks. The goals of SOFIA included combatting immigration fraud, informing the immigrant community of their rights, and providing quality representation before the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Board of Immigration Appeals.

An RSCJ who spent many years in SOFIA recalls: “Initially all the work was done by home visiting, as having someone undocumented in one’s car could mean confiscation and a fine.  Slowly I began a long process of documenting people with work authorizations.  Then these people could come to office.   Registration for ABC, A protective status for Central Americans helped to keep all safe.”   An example of the extent of the services: the report for August 1997 registers 445 applications files with INS, 79 appearances in court, and 660 consultations/advice.  Statistics for the 1999-2000 fiscal year show a total of 1391 persons assisted, from 81 countries. Later many obtained Legal Residency and the center gradually phased out.”

One RSCJ has been involved in refugee and migrant issues through Catholic Charities in California. I quote from her article, *A refugee would love to have your problems*: “All the while that I was working with refugees I had also become involved in assisting migrants, both documented and not. With training in Immigration Law received by the staff of the USCC/MRS office in San Francisco, I was soon qualified and certified as a Legal Representative before the then Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Immigration Court. Twice a week I joined other such certified representatives and pro-bono attorneys in representing people at what was usually their first hearing before an Immigration judge for a deportation hearing. Most of our “clients” were farm workers from the valleys of Central California and Napa County who had been picked up by the Immigration Service in raids and found to be without proper documents.” This is just a small instance of her work on behalf of migrants. (Margaret Phelan USC)

The Chapter of 1988 had as one of its themes, “The world of migrant peoples”. An RSCJ from Spain who lived in Sweden for many years took to heart words from this Chapter. We are asked to “work together in order to change racist attitudes, structures and unjust laws” with regards to migrants. One of the strategies suggested is “putting the institutional power which is ours at the service of migrant peoples, especially of refugees, in order to influence public opinion, government policies and legislation”. (General Chapter 1988, p 25)

She illustrates putting these strategies into practice though the campaign of “Amnesty 2000”. The purpose of this movement, made up of churches, individuals, associations, and small parties was to seek amnesty for immigrants who were in hiding due to the gradual hardening of national policy towards foreigners. Two peaceful demonstrations took place. As a result, amnesty was granted to families with children who were minors, albeit with restrictions.

Just recently, an RSCJ in the United States has been trained in order to accompany persons at risk when called to interviews by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

RSCJ today, seek for ways to live their call as educators **in peripheries and new frontiers.** The General Chapter of 2016 reminds us that “We are aware of living in a historic time of change and uncertainty. The Spirit continues to transform us as a Society in order to respond to the cries and hopes of our world with the same daring trust and confidence with which Sophie and Philippine responded in their time.” November 18, 2018 marks the 200th anniversary of the arrival in New Orleans of Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne, our first missionary, who was not afraid to cross the

Atlantic, in order to bring the Society of the Sacred Heart to America to serve native peoples who were already marginalized, to a foreign land.

“Like them”, continues the Chapter, “united in our searching and open to the gifts of the Spirit in this new moment, we are called:

To reach new frontiers:

To go out, to ‘set sail’ as a Society and go with others to new geographic and existential peripheries to accompany the life that is emerging there, to defend justice, peace, and the integrity of creation in response to all of those who are searching for meaning in their lives, those who have been wounded, displaced, and excluded because of poverty, violence, and environmental degradation.”

What, then, is the significance of “peripheries” and “new frontiers” to RSCJ who minister to refugees and migrants, two hundred years later??

An RSCJ from Poland writes about the impact of these words on her life: “Through my ministry I built a relationships with people from different nationalities. Going beyond language, cultural and mental barriers means crossing my limits in order to meet another person. *"To go out, to "set sail" as a Society and go with others to new geographic and existential peripheries to accompany the life that is emerging there…”* (B. Olejnik POL)

Some frontiers are tangible, for they are made of razor wire. One of these is the fence that separates the Spanish towns of Ceuta and Melilla from the rest of Morocco. Last year, an RSCJ from Spain together with sisters from two other congregations, moved by the plight of the hundreds who attempt in vain to scale the fence, began to reflect on the situation of these migrants “in these African lands where life and death, repression and freedom, dreams and failures coexist with force”.

She shares her experience in an article in our international website: “What goes on in Nador? What happens on Mount Gurugú? What is it that they are calling hell? And so a group of eight of us headed to Nador. Esteban, a Jesuit who has been living there for three years, very quickly brought us up to date on what was going on there; he told us of the hopelessness of so many, of the persecutions, stealing and burning of the shanty towns by the army.. In June they burned all their belongings, even their tents, so that they would move away... but they are still there. They are not considering going away; the desire for a chance to have a better life is stronger than (fear of) the watching army, the chance to try to climb over the fence and risk their lives crossing in a tiny boat.

We approached the fence, walking along its entire length with our eyes wide open, unable to believe what we were seeing. The European Union forced Spain to remove the razor wire ‘concertina’ fences. When they did this, Morocco used them to construct another one, and even dug a trench as well. So now, at the present time, the border with Melilla has three fences and a trench. Since they changed it, nobody has been able to cross.” (Montse Prats ESP)

On the other side of the ocean, “The Stuart Center in Washington D.C. is a project of the Society of the Sacred Heart which aims to foster a more just society through educational initiatives, technology and leadership development in collaboration with social justice, religious and nonprofits groups whose mission is aligned with that of the Society of the Sacred Heart”, explains the present Director of the Center. ”Many of the educational initiatives of the Center have been around issues of immigration.

Our work with the immigrant community and around immigrant issues takes various forms, but regardless of the group, focus or context certain elements are consistently present in virtually all we do:

* taking an educative approach (all people are capable of learning and all people bring knowledge and expertise of some kind to the educative process).
* building bridges among individuals as well as organizations or institutions;
* fostering the multiplier effect where learners become trainers because the educative experience is not for the benefit of self alone; and
* empowerment as agents of change in the community and wider society.

One such initiative is The Border Witness Program, “another place where we have brought collaboration and education to bear on work with immigration. In this program participants –have the opportunity to explore the challenges and invitations tied to immigration issues, hear personal stories, learn about life itself on the border; and explore avenues for further action and/or collaboration.

The reflection component is absolutely critical for participants to integrate what they are seeing and hearing as well as begin to strategize how they will bring this experience to their work and contact with immigrants at home.“

Another way of tearing down fences has been to use networks and RSCJ connections to make our internationality “good news for the poor”. (Chapter 1994) For instance, an RSCJ from Sweden (Mariasun Escauriaza ESP) connected with an RSCJ in Canada (Mary Power) in order to arrange for resettlement of a family from Iran. A sister from San Diego CA (Irene Cullen USC) enrolled my help to make it possible for a Ugandan father of two be reunited with the children he had to leave behind in Kenya. . Our geographical spread enables us to use our resources as educators to go beyond frontiers in ways that Philippine and Sophie could not begin to envision during the early days of the Society - and we rejoice, and take courage!

We have gathered threads from *places* of presence: schools, camps, centers, neighborhoods, law offices. **WITH WHOM, FOR** **WHOM** are we reweaving the fabric? Among the many persons we serve, there are two groups, women and youth that have a special place in the hearts of Sacred Heart educators.

Like Sophie, RSCJ are present with **a special concern for women.** Sophie pointed out the injustice of the situation of women in her times, and sought ways to be constructive and creative in righting it. She was not afraid to face the consequences of the “revolution” she brought about by taking positive steps to favor the intellectual development of women. For Sophie had experienced in her own person the transformative power of an education of breadth and quality. She was certain that the rigorous training given by her brother Louis and the depth of scholarship gained in those years of hard – an unusual, for women – study, enabled her later on to move with assurance in the world of education and open new doors.

The precarious and often dangerous situation of women, as well as her marginalization and exclusion, are intensified in situations of migration. The concern of the RSCJ for women in camps, centers or cities calls for an understanding and compassionate woman-to-woman response. “In a world which has need of peace, love and hope, women have the capacity to give life and to protect and foster it. With tenderness, courage, inwardness and creativity, they can contribute to the building of a more human world. An indication of this lies in the inter-connectedness between initiatives for the promotion of women, and those which promote peace and the protection of the environment.” (Chapter 1988)“And so, we are called to work with other women so that together we may become aware of our dignity, of our potential and our responsibility”, the Chapter document continues.

“I welcomed the young women with all my love and transmitted to them enormous respect for their dignity as persons. I would establish with them a relationship of unconditional friendship and serious demands. I think that these attitudes respond exactly as to how Sophie envisaged the education of young women”, says an RSCJ who worked with Nigerian prostitutes in Spain. (Elena Guzman ESP)

*Sueños Sin Fronteras/Dreams Without Borders* is a project spearheaded by two RSCJ, one from Mexico and one from the Unites States. They did not know one another before the Immigration Forum sponsored by the Society in Washington D.C. in 2010. They discovered their shared interest in natural and homeopathic remedies. They implemented this project on the US-Mexico border in McAllen, Texas together with ARISE (A Resource in Serving Equity), a non-profit begun by the Mercy sisters to serve the border immigrant community through the empowerment specifically of women. Through this collaboration at the individual level grew an organizational collaboration between ARISE and the Stuart Center of the Society of the Sacred Heart.

The education of girls of all ages is of foremost importance, especially in situations of displacement. The girl child is most vulnerable in camps and settlements, for she bears most of the burdens of household chores and care of siblings. “Help your sister with housework so that she too can go to school”, read a poster that I drew once for UNHCR. A special concern is how to enable girls to attend secondary school – first, how to motivate them while in primary grades so that they will do well enough to go on. Then, once they are in secondary school, it is essential to support them so that they will complete their studies. And it was so difficult to find women teachers who could serve as role models! This was one of the most important challenges in refugee settings: how to accompany young women so that they acquire both skills and self-assurance, so that when they return home they may take their rightful place in society and carry their weight in the rebuilding of their countries.

The RSC J in the staff of Bantabá want to assure that the center is “a space where women can experience friendship, become literate, and grow in self-worth. And, since all activities are for both men and women, little by little the wall of separation of sexes is eroded.” They are concerned for the women who are isolated in a “Moroccan bubble” and find it difficult to integrate into Spanish culture.

Working with **Youth: “those who bear in themselves the future of the world”:** As RSCJ, ours is a ministry that is “*directed towards the young and those who bear in themselves the future of the world.*” (Const. 7) Refugee youth and adolescent migrants are, in a sense, discriminated against when it comes to the provision of education, since most programs are directed to younger children. Funds are earmarked for “basic’ education, a human right, while secondary education is a privilege, not for all. Tertiary education for so many is just a dream, an elusive dream. Aware that the future is very much theirs to shape – or that there may be no future for young people unless they learn skills and values to carry them into adulthood and enable them to live lives that are truly human – it is crucial to address the concerns of youth in secondary schools, while striving to find creative approaches for engaging out of school youngsters.

Education speaks of hope, for it points to the future and offers possibilities to attain it. To provide education for children is not just a pragmatic wish of migrant parents, coming from a desire to offer their sons and daughters an opportunity for a better life than they themselves had. Education is an act of faith in the future. The establishment of a “normal” environment, where there are attainable goals and the prospect of a school-leaving certificate in sight, speak of future. Providing secondary and tertiary education in refugee camps has been a very important way for RSCJ to keep the window of future open for the children and youth we served in the camps.

If education indeed opens a window to the future, the question is, often, *how* to open it. This is critical in a refugee camp, perhaps easier to do in centers for migrants, where we can make our own decisions about what we offer. What have RSCJ attempted to put in place for the education of refugee and migrant youth beyond the time of secondary school? In Kakuma camp two RSCJ worked with JRS in the challenging yet rewarding program of providing tertiary education through the distance program of the University of South Africa (UNISA). “There was a steep learning curve for all of us beginning the program”. In the late ‘90s it was almost a miracle that innumerable hurdles were cleared: a camp located in a remote location in the desert, precarious internet, uncertain logistics to transport the materials, deadlines be met in spite of the odds... “The men gathered mostly in the evenings as we had electricity to power the two computers and lights for the classroom, and it was generally considered unsafe for women and girls to be out at night”. But all was faced with tremendous creativity, and a window to the future was opened in a place which seemed to be the last corner in the world. News in the refugee world travels fast, and soon it became necessary to find ways of opening windows in other places. After this first step towards making tertiary education available, those of us who remember the “pioneer days” rejoice with the new on-line program that JRS is able to offer nowadays, and in the many more refugee students who can look forward to a future.

Even more urgent is to provide educational opportunities to migrant youth, to the young men and women growing up between two cultures, at times are at odds with each other. (Centers- Bantabá). Sisters who work in centers for migrants point out that “they are young people who have bet everything and risked their lives in search of a future which was unobtainable in their countries of origin. And now they fear it may elude them once more, if they do not have the tools – language and skills – to forge a future”.

The situation of young persons at the border of Morocco and Spain, waiting to scale the fence is most poignant: “The feeling of impotence brings such hopelessness; many have moved to other borders, some to another mountain to make contact with unscrupulous Moroccan mafias, paying exorbitant prices for passage on a tiny boat, while still others keep trying to find a way to cross that damned fence. Men, women, and now, infants, (born in the course of the migration journey), living in extreme poverty, in tents made of plastic and cardboard, without light or water, in July temperatures of 45º. Seeing hundreds of people in these conditions is quite something. I was deeply moved by the hopes of these young people, convinced that someday they would get over the border, with a hope and a strength that can only come from the conviction that life has the last word”.

The question **WHY**? must now be asked. Other threads come from **attitudes of the heart,** through relationships that shape the heart discreetly, in silence, in hidden ways, and conforms it to the Heart of Christ. When we speak of religion, worship, prayer, we tread holy ground, and one must take off one’s shoes in order to enter this sacred space- for it is about culture and belief, relationship and transcendence,

RSCJ are educators, **in prayer and in religious activities,** which encourage persons to draw from the depth of their innermost wells.

… “(W)e very soon became aware of the richness around us and have learnt so much from and about the cultures we interact with on a daily basis and the Faith of this Praying People. The majority of my students are Muslim and some, Christian, others Hindus. I was never able to talk about God and prayer previously in my work but here it is a natural part of life. I find it really freeing and this has certainly enhanced my own sense of ministry and prayer life and affirmed me in the RSCJ I always wanted to be. There is no coercion or persuasion on either side, just a comfortable recognition that God is close and part of everything we are and do.”

To "*accompany the life that is emerging*" means for me to take care of whole person, but especially of the faith. During the last year I accompanied a young Muslim woman from Syria in preparation to baptism. It was answer to an injustice in the world, that there are people who do not have a choice to choose their faith.

“For some, I feel I’m the only person they really interact with who isn’t one of their own family or culture so it’s important for them to have a positive experience of this culture and from a Christian perspective.”

“I have accompanied a refugee woman through the final stages of her application for permanent leave to remain, and supported her in applying for jobs, writing references etc. and accompanying her faith journey too”, writes a sister from England. Life is not lived in compartments, and it is gratifying to relate to a person on the practical as well as the spiritual level.”

“In Sweden I interacted with different groups, for instance, on the topic ‘A man called Jesus’. “We have never known a Jesus who is so near, so like us”, they said.

A Colombian sister who ministered to Rwandese refugees in Tanzania tells us that “participation in the Parish Council meetings gave us the opportunities to be and work with the community; to assess the needs of the parishioners, and to respond the best we could. Some of our activities were:

Meetings with teachers and leaders of the community. Workshop for community organizing.

Liturgical feast and celebrations were the opportunity to meet almost every family from the parish. To be able to be together, sing, dance, pray… always observed by authorities.

5 to 7 choirs and their dancers gave us the opportunity to appreciate the richness of their faith and culture for our celebrations.

Catechesis history of salvation… not only in the Bible but in today’s people’s history.

Visits to the sick as Eucharistic ministers. This was always the best way to visit individuals and families in their huts….to be present to so much pain, hunger, illness, loneliness…the situation of women victims of violence, rape… widows, children orphans, youth with so much depression… took us to the pierced Heart of Jesus.”

She describes her experience in Kyabilisa as “more of a presence”:

presence at choir rehearsals, liturgical celebrations. Encouraging, give support, enjoying with the refugees moments of being together.

presence and very special moments at the visits. Sharing and being a witness of their situation, abandonment, hunger, pain, illness, loneliness…

presence in their groups. Activities with youth and women’s groups, meetings, reflection and prayer not only at church but in their huts.

“My role in the “Asociación Intercultural Porturaices” is both social and religious, since I am at their disposal for whatever they need, be it social or religious accompaniment. It is noteworthy to point out the respect that exists for different religions. All participate, are interested in each other, and collaborate.”

**“In mission for life”:**  the heart of an educator beats strong in many of our elders. Some RSCJ have spent long years in classrooms, others have been present in situations where the call to e*-ducare* was very strong. They do not pass these last years “hand over hand”, as we say in Spanish. “Our elderly sisters by their wisdom and their tenderness bear witness to God’s faithfulness and the joy of belonging to Him.” (Const. 35) How do they live it out?

Some sisters who have returned to their country of origin after many years in a mission find a new engagement: teaching language to immigrants. Spanish RSCJ who have returned from Egypt and speak Arabic see that theirs is a privileged position from which to serve as bridges between two cultures.

Before moving to a retirement home, one sister from Australia who had lived in Africa for many years was involved in formal classes in the government TAFE program. She taught many women from Somalia who were illiterate in their own culture, and whose English was almost nom-existent.

One of the older RSCJ in Madrid gave of her time at Karibu Center and Caritas. She taught women, mostly from Africa the basics of dressmaking and confectionery. “But, if there is no heart, there is nothing.” Yes, she shared her skills and facilitated finding provisions and materials for the classes. When asked about her role, she said: “My role? To be good. To drink wine with people, to offer a cup of coffee. To be loving. To make things easier.”

An RSCJ in New York State teaches English as a Second Language to adults.

She values the learning of language in order to become a part of society, yet is attentive that the learners keep their own identity, not fall into the melting pot. She encourages them to work together, with partners, and seeks to favor good race relationships.

A member of a community of retired sisters in Madrid writes: “We are all concerned about immigrants, at international, civil and church levels: we see this in articles, apostolic projects, various discernments…. We could never have imagined what came our way in Chamartín, where all are elderly, with limited mobility: what could *we* do?  Yes, we pray that the different agencies involved find and manage to do something positive and effective, and we are convinced that this prayer is a very real contribution to the efforts of so many who work with immigrants.

We were surprised when we had a visit one morning from a woman who works with the NGO “People Together” to ask these limited, elderly people to teach Spanish to a recently arrived African man. It is practically impossible to find work if you cannot make yourself understood….

Four of us were able to respond to this invitation/request, every one of us already in the decade starting with 8! Three months have passed since Gislain, from Cameroon, began to show up at 11 am, with his homework done – he is a very committed student. We take turns teaching him. The four of us really love seeing how he is progressing, and occasionally when he attempts to express what he carries in his heart we can see how lonely he feels, how much he misses his family, how he suffers because he cannot see light for the future… There are some things he does not want to talk about, for example, how he reached Melilla; he just says it is difficult.”

In The United States there are many opportunities for retired sisters to continue their ministry. As one RSCJ said in an interview, “Everyone has to give back what she has received, I can’t sit back and hang on to my oil.” So she volunteers in the parish Food Pantry, where most of those who come are women who can hardly speak English. She can help by explaining the foods offered: what they are, how to use them, how to make choices. For her, this is an opportunity to understand God in these people who don’t know if they will be sent back, who live in fear of ICE, and pray for the world, for people on the move.”

Some RSCJ have found themselves in the privileged position of being **bridges between cultures**. They add a multicolored thread to the weaving.

A Polish RSCJ works in the Jesuit Social Center in Warsaw, where “we try to create a space of meeting for different cultures and religions, sharing of life’s history and experience and learning of different skills.” She reflects, “Welcoming refugees with warmth and openness is very important first step. But it is not enough for life to become fully rooted. That’s why after these four months, the question arises in my heart: How to really help refugees integrate into our country? The question is, for me, how to ‘accompany the life that is emerging there’ "?, as General Chapter 2016 asks.

An RSCJ from the United States who spent fifty years in Japan saw that she could be a bridge into Japanese culture for the foreigners with whom she worked. “I can speak the language, be their voice and advocate. I too am a foreigner here, so I know some of the dynamics”, she says. After a time of home leave she wrote: “Now, back in Japan, there are times when I feel the loneliness of one separated from her country, language, customs, family and friends. There are frustra­tions when encountering people with a different mentality, and feelings of anger and sadness at not being known and under­stood from the core of my being, and of not being able to fully enter and know the culture of my adopted country. I can explain and understand these feelings cerebrally, but the actual feeling experience is a hard and challenging reality.” With these reflections in her heart and with the conviction that “education in my DNA”, she was able to serve refugees and immigrants in the spirit of a province with a strong commitment to refugees since the arrival of Boat People from Vietnam. (Gwen Hoeffel USC)

A sister from Chile who lived in Taiwan for 17 years now teaches Spanish to Chinese immigrants in her country as a volunteer with Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes. “I know all about the difficulties of communication!”, she says, aware of the asset that she has in her ministry because of her experience and command of the Chinese language. (I.Garcia Huidobro CHI)

Our community of Balos, Fuerteventura, was often called to receive a boatload of immigrants. “We lived that terrible moment with the newly arrived. We went as a community. Some of us knew French, others could help with registration. We carried all of this to prayer. The map of Africa in our chapel spoke of our interest for the continent and of our desire to learn more about the places of origin of “our” immigrants.” (C. Fabiani ESP)

“We have one foot in Moroccan society, the other, in Spanish society. Both feet: this puts us in a privileged position.” (Bantabá) What more can one say?

Our service of education is carried out **in collaboration with others.** “Of its nature, the service of education means creating community among ourselves and with others.”(Const. 14) In the words of the Chapter of 2000, “Collaboration is recognition of the dignity of persons and of peoples; it implies welcoming and sharing what each one is and offers. It requires attitudes of trust and mutual support, vulnerability and openness. It recognizes the need to learn from others and requires flexibility and imagination I n discovering new possibilities together.”

A recent instance of collaboration has been the intercongregational project of UISG in Sicily. In 2015 three RSCJ were missioned to the project. I am delighted that Florence is here – not just because she is a wonderful friend and sister – but because she will speak about her experience and leave me more time for those of other RSCJ.

Perhaps the most visible instance of collaboration with other has been though the Society’s office at the UN. This collaboration is described for us by our current RSCJ representative: “In 2004, the Society of the Sacred Heart became a non-governmental organization (NGO) at the UN. In 2014, the Society was accorded ECOSOC status. This means that since 2014, we have a consultative voice through the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). There are several platforms available for us to use our consultative voice. The purpose is always to bring concerns from the grassroots, based on realities through stories and evidence, in order to educate those at the international policy-making level. I will describe how the UN-NGO office is presently using the Society’s voice for education in the area of migration.

The UN is currently in a process of learning, negotiating, creating, and by the end of 2018, signing the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. In September 2016 the UN General Assembly (GA) agreed that a process was needed towards such a compact, given the growing migration crisis in the world today. The GA agreed that by the end of 2018 they wanted to have a Global Compact on Migration to help their individual and collective efforts to effectively address the crisis.

The Society of the Sacred Heart is participating in this process in the following 4 ways:

As a member of the NGO Committee on Migration

By attending thematic sessions in preparation of the Global Compact

By submitting a written statement for input into the process of the Global Compact on Migration

By presenting an oral statement for input into the process of the Global Compact on Migration. (Sheila Smith USC)

An instance of working together towards resolution of a crisis called for input from the RSCJ in Uganda to the then Representative at the U.N.” in 2006 (I think), when the Security Council was discussing a new Resolution on the crisis in the Great Lakes Region.

The conflict in Northern Uganda with Joseph Kony and the plight of the child soldiers had in the past never been part of the Security Council's Resolution on the Great Lakes Region, and several NGOs were committed to have that change because the crisis desperately needed more international attention.  The moment for us came when Archbishop Odama from Gulu was in New York for a week to advocate with the UN Member States.  We, NGO reps, supported him throughout the week whenever we could, and on the day of the vote in the Security Council all of us sat around Odama as we awaited what the council would do.  You can imagine our happiness and gratitude when the Security Council adopted a new resolution that included northern Uganda - finally the crisis in northern Uganda had moved to a higher level of attention by the international community.  It may sound like a baby step, and in fact it is no more than a baby step, but that's how international politics work.  One step at a time, no matter how small.  It still is progress.  For me it was an experience of deep and committed presence.  I knew very well that I couldn't effect by myself what the people in Uganda needed, but I could join other NGOs in supporting the one person who, highly credible and with high visibility, came all the way from Uganda to advocate on his own people's behalf.  That was my ministry at that moment, and in doing so I was actively advocating in a totally new way for justice and peace in northern Uganda.  It was all about Presence, and in that I carried our charism and mission forward. “(Cecile Meijer USC)

When we came to this *barrio* as a community we decided not to have

“our” own program, but instead to be a discreet presence and to collaborate with different social and pastoral initiatives already in place. So it has been, and I can say that this knowledge of an engagement with this human and humanizing network of committed groups is a gift for which I try to be grateful and which I want to encourage”, writes an RSCJ from Spain. (Llum Delas ESP)

An RSCJ describes her work in Poland: “After making first vows I was sent to work with migrant and refugees in Poland. I was part of the team in Jesuit Refugee Centre "In Action", provided by Jesuits in Warsaw, for two years. The Centre cooperates with the international institution Jesuit Refugee Service. The Centre "In Action" is a day Centre, where social assistance, legal advice service free of charge, Polish language and computer courses are offered to asylum seekers and migrants. The youngest participate in workshops which develop their interests, and in summer and winter camps. Some of them benefit from the help of tutors during school year.” Barbara Olejnik POL

“All of my social work in the district of Ciutat Vella in Barcelona is done in a network. Each institution contribute what it best knows. And we complement each other starting from the different charism and missions of each group”, says an RSCJ from Spain. (Llum Delas ESP)

An Australian RSCJ writes that “I am not presently working with refugees or asylum seekers but did spend a year in a program run by Mercy Sisters called Mercy Connect. The purpose of that program was to work with children of refugee or asylum seeker families to enrich their education by adding an extra teacher into the classroom to allow the time to ensure they received the individual attention they need to encourage their learning. There were definite challenges as some children from different ethnic backgrounds had not come from a family situation where school education was so readily available, and, on top of that, many had gone through a deal of trauma leaving their own countries. The program was certainly much appreciated by the teachers and many of the children.   
 For myself, it was a good experience working alongside others in this program. It had echoes of Sophie's saying she would have founded the Society for the sake of a single child.”

(Diana Hayes ANZ)

Another experience from Spain, this time in the field of Law: “After completing a Masters in Law, I worked with the Diocese of Huelva, together with priests and parishes, and above all, in the sensitization towards immigration.

In Spain, a new regulation was issued for immigrants without papers. Immigrants needed to have spent a certain period of time in the country and to have a job offer. This was a moment of lots of work, of great solidarity with the world of migration and of much personal attention to immigrants, in order to regularize the status of as many as possible during the window of time. During this time I was helped greatly by contact with other lawyers, with associations and with the Delegates for Migration from the other dioceses, in order to network and to make our voices heard as one on behalf of immigrants, and at the same time a voice for the sensitization of the Spanish people toward welcoming immigrants and eliminating prejudices.” (Miren Lumbreras ESP)

In **relationships that transform:** many RSCJ speak about the transformation that has taken place in them, not only in the migrants and refugees that they serve, though the quality of relationships. We are conscious that mutual formation takes place when we give and when we receive. For both have much to gain, when we act in a spirit of mutuality and reciprocity. The key is relationship, as we are reminded by Sophie’s personal approach. As RSCJ we need to be transformed ourselves so that in turn we can be agents of transformation.

“In faith and simplicity we meet the other

as a unique person, having respect and affection for each,

and a humility which enables us to be receptive.

Always, we are filled with hope in our encounters,

sure of God's power at work in us all. (Const. 15)

“Our service of education is carried out in a genuine relationship of mutual interaction, where each person both receives and gives so that all may grow together.” (Const. 14) It could seem that those of us who serve refugees and migrants are the ones with skills and “know how’, who can “give”. “ Open and vulnerable, we want to learn from our sisters and brothers of every age, race, creed and social condition, allowing ourselves to be challenged to live more authentically in the Spirit of the Gospel.” (Chapter 1994)

In the words of the Chapter of 2000, “Collaboration is recognition of the dignity of persons and of peoples; it implies welcoming and sharing what each one is and offers. It requires attitudes of trust and mutual support, vulnerability and openness. It recognizes the need to learn from others and requires flexibility and imagination in discovering new possibilities together.”

“This work with immigrants forged in me strong fraternal ties. A friendship that I still keep today. It taught me about simplicity of life, about welcome of newcomers, about understanding of differences, about love that knows no borders”, writes an RSCJ from Spain. (D.Pujol ESP)

Our Congregation’s understanding of our commitment to education had expanded to include human development. Indiantown gave us an opportunity to experience, together with materially poor and disadvantaged people, the enormous power of the love of the Heart of Jesus to transform us and to bring us together in one body.“ (Joan Gannon USC)

A Ugandan RSCJ who worked in the RAMP program in London tells us that as a volunteer, “I have discovered the love of God and made it known. … At first, I didn’t know what to offer or how to begin the relationship. …I prayed, listened to my sisters in the community, observed and slowly I found a space in the group. I have understood the joy of being present and available for one another with simplicity and love. …I learnt how an educator learns from observing, listening, sharing and the presence. I have learnt from Sophie the virtue of humility, responsibility, availability, generosity, simplicity and loving, and with them build community.” (R. Gichangi UGK)

“On a personal level, how would I describe my experience living and working with the migrant community? First of all, I call it ‘my university of life’ I say this primarily in terms of a deeper understanding of social problems. Issues of injustice take on unforgettable human faces and the complexities constantly unfold. But, not only does one see the suffering or meanness embedded in particular situations, one also discovers that somewhere there is always radiant beauty. This beauty could be in the hope, communal love, courage, determination, spirit of familial sacrifices or sense of joy found in the human spirit”, writes an RSCJ from the United States. (Muriel Cameron USC)

An RSCJ from Uganda writes after an experience in a Center in Lille, France: “And so now, with the migrants, it was no longer a matter of reading about them or watching them on the television struggling to reach their destinations. This time I entered into their reality in the kind of life they were living”. (Mary Grace Nakato UGK)

“For us as a community, contact with the harshness of the lives of immigrants and their capacity to overcome confronts us. It makes us more human, more near, and is a ‘sacred space’ to give and receive the love of God, present in all persons.” (Community of Balos PP)

An RSCJ from the Philippines sent to Barcelona for an international experience prior to final profession reflects on her experience: “Every Sunday I went to the Parish of San Agustin, where the Filipino community in Barcelona had organized themselves into a parish. It is a big and vibrant community. After the Sunday Mass, there were many activities for the different groups of the faithful. Being in that parish allowed me to interact with the Filipino migrants and listen to their stories – sometimes of joys and successes, but more often of struggles, pain and sadness. This experience brought me deeper understanding of the challenging situation of migrants and the consequences it brings to their families back home. Through them, I touched the sufferings and hopes of humanity, and I was filled with admiration for the strength of their faith and resiliency. It is in their joy, hope and determination amidst life’s challenges that I experienced God’s mercy and faithfulness for his people. (Bethanie Sulleza PHI)

A Moroccan woman told the three RSCJ in the staff of Bantabá: “When I am with you, I feel like a person and not like an immigrant.”

“With the radicality of the style of Jesus of Nazareth we want to become more human, simpler, nearer, to show the joyful and compassionate face of God and to serve life wherever we are sent”, from a community in service in a Center for immigrants. (Balos)

An RSCJ from Spain hastily sent a follow-up e mail to the previous one which contained her article. In it she said, “I want it to make it very clear that I have received more than I have given”. (Pilar de la Herran ESP)

By **an education that transforms.** If relationships transform, how much more an education that is based on relationships? *“*In order that education be transformative, it is necessary that … the person…is at the center of the educational process. (Chapter 2000,) RSCJ are called to *An* Education That Transforms, to move From Collaboration to Reciprocity, and From Meeting to Dialogue of Cultures: “We contemplate the Heart of Jesus in the joys, hopes and sufferings of humanity. Looking at the world from the perspective of the reign of God leads us to recognize how Jesus reveals himself in the poor and marginalized. The experience of an incarnated spirituality impels us to live education as a process of transformation.”

RSCJ strive for a person-centered education as the hallmark of our educational endeavors. In order that education truly be transformative, serious studies and a commitment on the part of teachers to forming the whole person, not just instructing, needs to be attended to.

Education reaches all aspects of the life of a person: religious, moral, ethical, intellectual, physical - the whole person, the person who is fully alive. This holistic approach, modeled by Sophie, woman of relationships and dialogue, is a guiding principle in each educational situation.

This education is situated in the context of today – social, cultural, political, and religious – so that it can be relevant to each person and to the larger society. It is the re-creation, together, of the fabric of society. It is the centering of the person in his/her relationship to God so that the/she can live in a holistic manner, and thus “let God’s glory shine forth”.

“I had some groups for mental health. They could not remain with painful memories of their past lives, but open themselves positively and with hope towards a life that is so different and full of promise”… (Dolores Pujol ESP)

Two sisters, one of them an RSCJ (Eliane Auffray BFN), trained at the IFHIM Institute of Montreal, Canada, were present among the Rwandese refugees in Bukavu, DRC. They conducted workshops and offered personal support to individuals and groups in order to help them deal with the trauma they had undergone.

How did I live these years in my service at the Center for Migrants? When asked this question, an RSCJ from Spain answered: “As something that responded fully to all our priorities as RSCJ. Educating, drawing out the best of each person, valuing them, enabling them to grow and feel secure in a new reality. Learning lots from them, their courage, their strength, their values, their faith….” (MT Fernández Figares ESP)

A sister who lived in an inserted community in Madrid has this to say: “The nearness of persons in extreme situations has made grow in me and unconditional admiration for the capacity of human beings, especially of women, to face life with courage”. (D. Aleixandre ESP)

“Just like St. Madeleine Sophie I believe in the power of transformative education given to refugees. Often, students who succeeded were extremely empowered and participated in the development of their communities. They were employed as teachers, social workers in communication to serve their fellow refugees. St Madeleine Sophie was determined to found the society even for the sake of one child. (Margaret Mwarili UGK)

**Conclusion:**

**Present with the heart of an educator, at all times, wherever we are sent**

Have I answered the request of the invitation of the organizers of this Symposium?

Has this presentation explained how the charism has been embodied in educational theory and/or practice and how this has informed educating migrants, using examples from your congregation’s history? I have tried….in a few strokes. There is so much more - here, and in real life!

My starting point has been that ”We (RSCJ) participate in the mission of the Church through the service of education which is our way of continuing the work of Christ.” As RSCJ we cannot separate what we do from who we are….women who live our commitment to Jesus Christ and God’s people in diverse ways of being to refugees and migrants, with the heart of an educator, both transforming and being transformed.

I used the image of a weaving, both to follow Sophie’s thoughts on reparation, mending the rent fabric of society, and calling the different elements of my presentation “threads”. This is the image of the tapestry that I have attempted to weave, from the many strands in my hands.

More threads that have been added to the weaving since I started preparing this presentation:

* The intercongregational community in the north of Africa is becoming a reality. After discernment, the three sisters will live in the town of Matril, near “the fence” in the Diocese of Tangiers.
* In a public statement “the United States – Canada Province of the Society of the Sacred Heart adds its voice to that of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and many other people of faith who have described the decision on the part of the United States government to rescind Temporary Protective Status for more than 200,000 Salvadorans as “heartbreaking,” “cruel” and “deeply disappointing.” (rscj.org)
* In a practical hands-on way, a forthcoming workshop, “Crossing Frontiers – Connecting Humanity” has been organized by the Continental Network of Popular Education of the Society of the Sacred Heart in collaboration with other organizations. It will take place next month. (flyer)

“We are convinced that our lives, given in love, are the strongest expression of our spiritualty”. (Chapter 2000) The lives of so many sisters who have “spoken” in this presentation bear witness to this. What they are doing is far reaching…because of who they are: women, deeply committed to Jesus Christ who live this engagement through the service of education. This is our life, our mission, our passion. As RSCJ involved in education with and for peoples on the move, we live our charism to the fullest when we are present with the heart of an educator….the heart of Sophie, the Heart of Christ…open, wounded, seeking life to the fullest for each person.

A paragraph written by one of our sisters in Ireland sums up how this process has been lived in one concrete situation, but can serve as a blueprint for the overall process: “Over many years we have had Irish rscj engaging and collaborating with other religious who were assisting refugees from Vietnam to settle and familiarize themselves with Irish culture and customs. Others have taught refugees having been awakened by our General Chapter directives to reach out to others in justice and the promotion of peace. Sometimes this was done in the context of the Primary School curriculum where help with Maths and English was given, knitting and crafts were also taught. At other times it may have been assisting someone for whom English was not their Primary language to do a Driving Theory test. One must mention to the rscj educators involvement with members of the travelling community who have been on the margins of society for many, many years. Through the efforts of rscj these people received an education that built their confidence and empowered them to a voice for their people with the civil authorities. All of this flowing from rscj spirituality and the heart of an educator concerned with the whole person, their situation, family and integration to Irish society.”(Carmel Flynn IRS)

When all is said and done, and we feel our inadequateness and smallness in front of the daunting task that confronts us, we are drawn back into center, into the Heart. I echo the words of one of my sisters from Poland: “The stories of people which I heard made me powerless from time to time. I didn't have an idea how can I help. In such a moments the sentence from the Constitutions strengthens me: "In prayer we come to Him with everything that touches our life, with the suffering and hopes of humanity. We learn to remain in silence and poverty of heart before Him”. (Const. 20) (B.Olejnik POL)

Threads have crossed and intertwined. I hope that you have understood why it has been so difficult for me to keep inspiration and practice separate from presence. This is the nature and the beauty of a weaving. The warp is the threads of our spirituality and our charism, the woof, multifaceted presence.

A pattern has emerged – is emerging, For the weaving of the presence of the Society of the Sacred Heart in the education of refugees and migrants is in process, unfinished, open to the future.

Let me close with wise advice from Madeline Sophie:

“Let us leave acts, not words.

Nobody will have time to read us.”