

### The Benedictine Brazilian Schools

When I was asked to talk about the Brazilian Benedictine schools, I realized that although I had always been in contact with some of them, I was not fully aware of their real situation. Besides that, I had no sort of information on many of the Brazilian schools. I could not help feeling guilty for knowing more about some foreign Benedictine schools than about the Brazilian ones.

Therefore, I decided to elaborate a questionnaire in order to form a clear and transparent view of our current situation. This questionnaire was sent to 18 Benedictine schools, including Colégio Santo Américo, and 12 of them answered it. Fortunately, the completed questionnaires that we received represent the biggest Benedictine schools in Brazil and exemplify the complex historical, geographical and cultural reality of our country. The statements that I am going to make are totally based on the collected data.

#### 1) Date of foundation

- The dates of foundation reveal some interesting facts:
- 1858: Colégio de São Bento - Rio de Janeiro
- 1903: Colégio de São Bento - São Paulo
- 1905: Instituto de Educação Santa Escolástica - Sorocaba Colégio de São Bento – Salvador
- 1912: Academia Santa Gertrudes - Olinda
- 1919: Colégio Nossa Senhora do Carmo - Recife
- 1923: Colégio Santo Amaro - Rio de Janeiro
- 1951: Colégio Santo Américo - São Paulo
- 1952: Colégio Vita et Pax - Ribeirão Preto
- 1955: Colégio Imaculado Coração de Maria - Olinda
- 1966: Colégio São João Gualberto - São Paulo
- 1998: Colégio de São Bento - Vinhedo

#### Comments:

According to the Brazilian historic patterns, the Benedictine schools are long-lived. We have one almost 150 years old; three that will be 100 years old soon; two that are 90 years old; one 80 years old; three 50 years old; one almost 40 years old and the youngest is 4 years old.

During the 20th century, there are two very distinct waves of foundations:

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From 1903 to 1923: coincides with the restoration of the Brazilian Benedictine Congregation by the Congregation of Beuron and with the arrival and growth of the Benedictine Missionary Sisters of Tutzing in the Pories of Olinda and Sorocaba.

From 1951 to 1966: After the 2nd World War, during the great migratory trends, the Church in Brazil encouraged the foundation of new congregations and religious institutions.

We should bear in mind that during the Vatican II Post-Council only one Benedictine school was founded in Brazil.

## 2) Type of institution

Ten out of the twelve institutions analysed are co-ed, one is all boys and the other all girls.

## 3) Number of students

Ten out of the twelve institutions analysed offer Pre-School (4 to 6 years old), all offer elementary and middle school (grades 1 to 8) and 10 offer Upper School.

Currently there are:

1257 students in the Pre-School

7055 students in Elementary and Middle School

1528 students in Upper School

9840 Total number of students

Comments:

The implementation of Pre-School has been very helpful for gathering students. It is obvious that the largest number of students is in Elementary and Middle School. The opening, consolidation and maintenance of Upper School is probably the biggest difficulty in many of our institutions. Since six institutions have not answered our questionnaire, the total number of students is larger than the one stated above.

## 4) Number of teachers and number of monks and sisters that work in the schools:

Lay teachers: 801

Monks: 24

Sisters: 23

Comments:

The disproportion is evident and reflects the problem of the diminishment of vocations and the challenge of forming lay teachers. This will be addressed later on.

## 5) Schedule

Four of the institutions are full-time and the others part-time, mornings and/or afternoons.

Comments: Although part-time period is more profitable economically speaking, the full-time period suits the approach of a holistic and integrated education, maybe more adequate to the rhythm of life in a Brazilian big city.

We have also requested information on fees, facilities, extra-activities and special projects. However, such data has not been tabulated due to the variety presented among the institutions.

Let's focus on the difficulties appointed and challenges to be faced, according to the twelve institutions.

A) Current difficulties:

To administrate an institution with meager means. To maintain the buildings with the reduced staff available.

Lack of appropriate technological and sports facilities.

Schools located in unattractive neighbourhoods (downtown or too far from residential areas)

To go deep in the Benedictine spirituality so that our work will be multiplying and our charisma experienced.

Search for our school more for its academic excellence than by its religious and holistic character, resulting in conflicts between Family and Institution.

Small number of sisters and monks engaged in the school life weakens the transmission of our spirituality and evangelisation.

Economic problems and unemployment affect both family and school life.

Families that do not honour the economical commitments towards the school and the lack of legal procedures to face this.

Decreasing number of students.

High number of scholarships due to economic problems.

High percentage of children with separated or divorced parents.

Lack of religious formation and experience among the families.

Low birth rate; families nowadays have only one or two children.

Lack of participation of families in the educational process.

Children's educational life is no longer number one priority.

Growing indiscipline and level of aggressiveness among an inversion of values, leading to materialism and use of alcohol and drugs.

Students' lack of base, of motivation and of interest in studying.

Competition of large educational groups and organizations that reduce tuition fees, offer scholarships, "steal" students and end up buying schools in difficulties through the so-called "partnerships".

B) Challenges to be faced in the next years:

The formation of our staff and teachers, the continuation of the institution with a reduced number of monks and sisters. In the near future, will we be only the supporters of our schools?

A lower number of families not honouring the economical commitments towards the school.

The increase in the number of students or the update of our facilities to the new demographical reality of the country.

More sisters and monks formed to work in the schools.

Excellence in academic work with reduced economic support.

Conflict with the pseudo-values presented by the world and the media.

Implementation of an Upper School program

Creation of pedagogical and didactical mechanisms and tools based on the Benedictine spirituality.

How can we offer a Benedictine and Christian education if the majority of our educators is composed of lay people? How can we form them?

How should we face the familiar crisis and contribute to the formation of a Christian family circuit?

How can we transform our educators into "prophets of hope" that witness a "communion of spirituality"?

Based on this data and comments, we can make some conclusions, one suggestion and reaffirm our Hope.

C) Conclusions:

Basically, there are two conclusions:

For the first time in Brazil, 2/3 of the existing Benedictine schools are reunited to share their experiences, discuss their needs and search for a deepening in the Benedictine education. For the first time this is being done at the international level.

Our difficulties are common: aging of our communities; falling of vocations; few sisters and monks working in the schools; challenge of forming lay teachers; continuation of low birth rate; dropping of students; families that do not honour the economical commitments towards the school; lack of investments in infra-structure and technology and finally the competition of large educational groups and organizations.

D) Suggestion:

With the love to the characteristic decentralization of our Order and with the Christian richness of the fraternal help, I propose that we seriously take into consideration the formation of an organism or structure

that provides us with a continuous exchange, effective and sympathetic to all our educational needs here in Brazil. Let us think about this, and pray for it!

And finally hope! "Believing in hope, against all hope" (Rm4, 18). Among our difficulties and probations, we should be reminded that it is Easter because we have the joy of meeting each other in the 2nd International Conference on Benedictine Education. Easter is Life and Resurrection! The Resurrection of ourselves, of our Communities, of our schools, searching for Christ in the Spirit, guided by the Gospel and never forgetting God's mercy.

That God may be glorified in all!

U.I.O.G.D.

Thank you!

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